OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH SHARING PLAN FOR THE 2009 FISHERY

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) held two public meetings to discuss proposed changes to the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for fisheries off Oregon in 2009. The first meeting occurred on August 27, 2008, in Astoria and the second on August 28, 2008, in Newport. Based on the meeting comments, and other public input, the ODFW recommends the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) approve the following proposals for additional public review.

Columbia River Subarea

Change the structuring of the spring fishery from 7 days per week to every Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The purpose of the change is to extend the duration of the spring season. Open days on Thursday, Friday and Saturday were suggested by the public as salmon seasons are often closed on Fridays and Saturdays.

Central Coast Subarea

1. In the spring all-depth fishery allow fishing on every Thursday, Friday and Saturday if pounds remain after the “fixed days.” Presently the CSP allows fishing only on every other Thursday, Friday and Saturday after the “fixed days.” The spring quota has not been taken in the last two years and poundage was rolled into the summer fishery. Opening the fishery every weekend allows more opportunity to harvest the spring quota and would also simplify the regulations.

2. Extend the open area of the inside 40-fathom fishery north from Cape Falcon to the Columbia River. Under existing regulations halibut caught incidentally in the nearshore groundfish fishery north of Cape Falcon must be released. This change would allow retention of those fish on days when the central coast all-depth fishery is not open.

North of Humbug Mt (Columbia River Subarea and Central Coast Subarea)

Allow the retention of lingcod and Pacific cod with a halibut on the vessel during all-depth openings. Current language specifies that all groundfish, except sablefish (and Pacific cod north of Cape Falcon), cannot be retained with a halibut on the vessel during all-depth openings. This regulation has resulted in anglers discarding lingcod, which are often caught incidentally while targeting halibut. Allowing the retention of lingcod would not be a lingcod conservation issue as their status is considered healthy. Although Pacific cod are rarely encountered south of Cape Falcon allowing retention in the central coast fishery helps to simplify regulations as the groundfish species allowed in the halibut fishery north and south of Cape Falcon would be the same.
Other Suggestions Received

There were several other suggestions received that ODFW is not proposing for further public comment at this time. Below is a summary of these recommendations:

1. Combine the Oregon portion of Columbia River subarea with the central coast subarea.
2. Combine Columbia River quota into 1 season, 3 days per week starting in May until quota is attained. Thus there would be no separate summer season.
3. Open central coast all-depth fishery 7 days per week.
4. Reduce the inside 40-fm fishery allocation.
5. Increase central coast bag limit to 2 fish per day. Another option was: 1 fish if over certain size, 2 fish if both under that length.
6. Increase allocation to the Columbia River subarea.
7. Combine the spring and summer central coast subarea quotas into one fishery starting in May.
8. Allow retention of incidentally caught arrowtooth flounder, skates and other groundfish.
9. Eliminate the provision in the central coast subarea allowing days of adverse tide conditions to be skipped.
10. Change the open days during the central coast spring fishery from Thursday, Friday, and Saturday to Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.