

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON CHANGES TO HALIBUT ALLOCATION FOR BYCATCH AND CATCH SHARING

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) would like to recount the history of the incidental halibut retention allowance in the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis, Washington, as the Council considers whether to allow retention of incidentally caught halibut in other fisheries.

In 1988, the Pacific Fishery Management Council operated under its first annual Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan. Allocations through this plan were to four fishery groups—tribal fishery, non-tribal commercial fishery, Washington sport fishery, and Oregon/California sport fishery. At this time, WDFW recommended and the Council chose to allocate the non-tribal halibut quota for Washington for the primary benefit of the recreational fishery. Therefore, the directed commercial fishery was restricted to the area south of Point Chehalis.

In 1995, the non-tribal commercial fishery allocation was divided into two components—the directed fishery south of Point Chehalis and the incidental landing allowance in the salmon troll fishery. During this same time period, the Council considered a limited entry program for the sablefish fishery, which was ultimately never adopted. In the late 1990s, the Council developed alternatives for establishing the primary sablefish fishery using a tiered limit system. The final plan for the tiered limit system and permit stacking provisions was adopted by the Council in November 2000.

There were some fishers who believed that the initial halibut allocation was “unfair” to those who had traditionally commercially fished for halibut off northern Washington, either as a targeted fishery or as retention of incidental catch when targeting sablefish, which tend to intermingle with halibut. However, at the time the Catch Sharing Plan was first adopted, the Area 2A TAC had been about 500,000 lbs and it was acknowledged that, with a growing recreational fishery, it would be difficult to accommodate both sport and commercial fisheries. The 2A TAC remained fairly steady (i.e., 450,000-650,000 lbs) for ten years until 1998, when it increased to 820,000 lbs. With this higher TAC, some fishers thought that a Washington sport and incidental commercial fishery could both be accommodated.

This was addressed at the same Council meeting in November 2000 when WDFW recommended that, in years of higher halibut abundance, the Washington recreational allocation would be reduced to accommodate landings of incidental catches in the directed sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis. Specifically, in years when the Area 2A TAC is greater than 900,000 lbs, the primary directed sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis was to be allocated the Washington sport allocation that is in excess of 214,110 lbs, provided a minimum of 10,000 lbs is available (i.e., at least 224,110 lbs is allocated to the Washington sport fishery). This change to the Catch Sharing Plan was adopted by the Council and became effective in 2001.

In 2002, the Area 2A TAC increased to 1.31 million lbs and there was almost 90,000 lbs available for the incidental sablefish fishery. WDFW met with representatives from the primary

sablefish fishery and the recreational fishery and developed a compromise whereby the allocation would still occur in years of higher halibut abundance, but the amount of the allocation would be capped at 70,000 lbs. The amount above 70,000 lbs would be transferred back to the Washington sport fishery. This was agreeable to all and the primary sablefish fishermen indicated that, given the trend in the sablefish stock and the landing ratio applied, 70,000 lbs would likely accommodate most of their incidental catch.

From 2001 through 2009, participants in the primary sablefish fishery were allowed to retain incidental catches of halibut because the TAC in Area 2A was above 900,000 lbs in those years. However, in 2010, the 2A TAC decreased to 810,000 lbs, so there was no allocation made to accommodate incidental catches in the sablefish fishery. The number of vessels and landings, and the amount of quota and catch for the incidental sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis is described in the table below.

Year	# Vessels	# Landings	Quota	Catch	% of Quota
2010	0	0	0	0	---
2009	17	79	11,895	6,154	51.7%
2008	36	58	70,000	39,729	56.8%
2007	24	84	70,000	45,780	65.4%
2006	27	130	70,000	64,624	92.3%
2005	27	124	70,000	68,013	97.2%
2004	30	148	70,000	67,837	96.9%
2003	---	---	70,000	60,356	86.2%
2002	---	---	88,389	88,389	---
2001	---	---	47,946	47,946	---

(Note: Catches in 2001 and 2002 were included as part of the total non-tribal commercial landings.)

The sablefish fishery extends from April 1 through October 31 with associated halibut landings allowed beginning in May. Fishers are subject to a landing ratio of halibut (lbs) to sablefish (lbs) with up to two additional halibut per fishing trip to provide some flexibility in complying with the regulation. These annual ratios are adopted through the Council process in March.

Since 1995, three types of annual licenses from the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) have been issued for Area 2A fisheries: 1) a directed commercial/incidental license for the primary sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis; 2) an incidental commercial salmon troll license; and 3) a charter license. Vessels participating in the directed commercial fishery cannot retain incidental halibut in the salmon troll fishery nor participate in the recreational halibut fishery; however, vessels may participate in both the incidental sablefish fishery and the directed commercial fishery, but not on the same trip.