

**TITLE 14. Fish and Game Commission
Notice of Proposed Changes in Regulations**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Fish and Game Commission (Commission), pursuant to the authority vested by Sections 200, 202, 205, 219, 220, 240, and 316 of the Fish and Game Code and to implement, interpret or make specific Sections 200, 201, 202, 203.1, 205, 207, 215, 219, 220, and 316 of said Code, proposes to amend Sections 28.20 and 28.95, Title 14, California Code of Regulations, relating to Pacific halibut sport fishing regulations for consistency with federal rules.

Informative Digest/Policy Statement Overview

Pacific halibut is internationally managed through the Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982 between the United States and Canada. Pacific halibut along the United States west coast is jointly managed through authorities of the International Pacific Halibut Commission, Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC), and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), in conjunction with west coast state agencies. The PFMC coordinates west coast management of all recreational and commercial Pacific halibut fisheries in U.S. waters through the Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP), which constitutes a framework for recommending annual management measures. NMFS is responsible for specifying the final CSP language and management measures in federal regulation (50 CFR Part 300, Subpart E and the Federal Register) and noticing them on their halibut telephone hotline. Federal regulations for Pacific halibut are applicable in State waters (zero to three miles off shore) and federal waters (three to 200 miles offshore) off Washington, Oregon and California.

For consistency, the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) routinely adopts regulations to bring State law into conformance with federal and international law for Pacific halibut.

The November PFMC regulatory recommendation will be considered by the Commission when it takes its own regulatory action to establish the State's recreational Pacific halibut fishery regulations for 2015.

Summary of Proposed Amendments

The Department is proposing the following regulatory changes to be consistent with PFMC recommendations and the CSP for Pacific halibut regulations in 2015. This approach will allow the Commission to adopt State recreational Pacific halibut regulations to conform in a timely manner to those taking effect in federal ocean waters on or before May 1, 2015.

The proposed regulatory changes modify regulations to allow Pacific halibut to be managed under a quota management system to allow for timely conformance of federal fisheries regulations and inseason changes. A range of Pacific halibut quotas between 0 and 50,000 pounds would be considered for public notice purposes. Quota status updates and in-season changes will be disseminated and communicated to the general public through the Department's website, the Recreational Groundfish Fishing Regulations Hotline, the NMFS Area 2A halibut hotline, and made available by contacting a Department office.

The proposed regulatory changes modify the seasons to include a range from May 1 to October 31 which may include periodic closures. The final regulation will conform to the season established by federal regulations in May 2015.

Gear restrictions are proposed to be added for consistency with existing federal regulations.

The proposed regulations modify the authorized methods of take to allow for the use of harpoons to assist in the recreational take of Pacific halibut.

A cross reference is proposed to be included to clarify those ocean areas where harpoons may be used to assist in the recreational take of Pacific halibut caught using legal gear.

The benefits of the proposed regulations are consistency with federal regulations, the sustainable management of California's Pacific halibut resources, and health and welfare of anglers.

The proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with existing State regulations. The Legislature has delegated authority to the Commission to adopt sport fishing regulations (Fish and Game Code, Sections 200, 202 and 205) and Pacific halibut fishing regulations specifically (Fish and Game Code, Section 316). The proposed regulations are consistent with regulations for sport fishing in marine protected areas (Section 632, Title 14, CCR) and with general sport fishing regulations in Chapters 1 and 4 of Subdivision 1 of Division 1, Title 14, CCR. Commission staff has searched the California Code of Regulations and has found no other State regulations related to the recreational take of Pacific halibut.

The proposed regulations are neither inconsistent nor incompatible with commercial fishing regulations (Chapter 6, Title 14 CCR), State Coastal Conservancy regulations for experimental fishing gear loan program (Section 13862, Title 14, CCR), and State Board of Equalization tax regulations (Section 1602, Title 18, CCR).

NOTICE IS GIVEN that any person interested may present statements, orally or in writing, relevant to this action at a hearing to be held in the Resources Building Auditorium, 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento, California, on Wednesday, February 11, 2015, at 8:00 a.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard.

NOTICE IS ALSO GIVEN that any person interested may present statements, orally or in writing, relevant to this action at a hearing to be held in the Flamingo Conference Resort & Spa, 2777 Fourth Street, Santa Rosa, California, on Wednesday, April 8, 2015, at 8:00 a.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard. Written comments may be submitted at the address given below, or by fax at (916) 653-5040, or by e-mail to FGC@fgc.ca.gov. **Written comments mailed, faxed or e-mailed to the Commission office, must be received before 12:00 noon on April 3, 2015.** All comments must be received no later than April 8, 2015, at the hearing in Santa Rosa, California. If you would like copies of any modifications to this proposal, please include your name and mailing address.

The regulations as proposed in strikeout-underline format, as well as an initial statement of reasons, including environmental considerations and all information upon which the proposal is based (rulemaking file), are on file and available for public review from the agency representative, Sonke Mastrup, Executive Director, Fish and Game Commission, 1416 Ninth Street, Box 944209, Sacramento, California 94244-2090, phone (916) 653-4899. Please direct requests for the above mentioned documents and inquiries concerning the regulatory process to Sonke Mastrup or Sherrie Fonbuena at the preceding address or phone number.

Dr. Craig Shuman, Regional Manager, Marine Region, (805) 568-1231 or Craig.Shuman@wildlife.ca.gov, has been designated to respond to questions on the

substance of the proposed regulations. Copies of the Initial Statement of Reasons, including the regulatory language, may be obtained from the address above. Notice of the proposed action shall be posted on the Fish and Game Commission website at <http://www.fgc.ca.gov>.

Availability of Modified Text

If the regulations adopted by the Commission differ from but are sufficiently related to the action proposed, they will be available to the public for at least 15 days prior to the date of adoption. Circumstances beyond the control of the Commission (e.g., timing of Federal regulation adoption, timing of resource data collection, timelines do not allow, etc.) or changes made to be responsive to public recommendation and comments during the regulatory process may preclude full compliance with the 15-day comment period, and the Commission will exercise its powers under Section 202 of the Fish and Game Code. Regulations adopted pursuant to this section are not subject to the time periods for adoption, amendment or repeal of regulations prescribed in Sections 11343.4, 11346.4 and 11346.8 of the Government Code. Any person interested may obtain a copy of said regulations prior to the date of adoption by contacting the agency representative named herein.

If the regulatory proposal is adopted, the final statement of reasons may be obtained from the address above when it has been received from the agency program staff.

Impact of Regulatory Action/Results of the Economic Impact Analysis

The potential for significant statewide adverse economic impacts that might result from the proposed regulatory action has been assessed, and the following initial determinations relative to the required statutory categories have been made:

- (a) Significant Statewide Adverse Economic Impact Directly Affecting Businesses, Including the Ability of California Businesses to Compete with Businesses in Other States:

The proposed action will not have a significant adverse economic impact directly affecting business, including the ability of California businesses to compete with businesses in other states because the regulatory action does not substantially alter existing conditions.

- (b) Impact on the Creation or Elimination of Jobs Within the State, the Creation of New Businesses or the Elimination of Existing Businesses, or the Expansion of Businesses in California; Benefits of the Regulation to the Health and Welfare of California Residents, Worker Safety, and the State's Environment:

The Commission does not anticipate any impacts on the creation or elimination of jobs in California.

The Commission does not anticipate any impacts on the creation of new businesses, the elimination of existing businesses, or the expansion of businesses in California.

The Commission anticipates benefits to the health and welfare of California residents. Providing opportunities to participate in sport fisheries fosters conservation through education and appreciation of fish and wildlife.

The Commission anticipates benefits to the environment by the sustainable management of California's Pacific halibut resources.

The Commission does not anticipate any benefits to worker safety.

Additional benefits of the proposed regulations are consistency with federal regulations and promotion of businesses that rely on recreational Pacific halibut fishing.

(c) Cost Impacts on a Representative Private Person or Business:

The agency is not aware of any cost impacts that a representative private person or business would necessarily incur in reasonable compliance with the proposed action.

(d) Costs or Savings to State Agencies or Costs/Savings in Federal Funding to the State: None.

(e) Nondiscretionary Costs/Savings to Local Agencies: None.

(f) Programs Mandated on Local Agencies or School Districts: None.

(g) Costs Imposed on Any Local Agency or School District that is Required to be Reimbursed Under Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4, Government Code: None.

(h) Effect on Housing Costs: None.

Effect on Small Business

It has been determined that the adoption of these regulations may affect small business. The Commission has drafted the regulations in Plain English pursuant to Government Code Sections 11342.580 and 11346.2(a)(1).

Consideration of Alternatives

The Commission must determine that no reasonable alternative considered by the Commission, or that has otherwise been identified and brought to the attention of the Commission, would be more effective in carrying out the purpose for which the action is proposed, would be as effective and less burdensome to affected private persons than the proposed action, or would be more cost effective to affected private persons and equally effective in implementing the statutory policy or other provision of law.

FISH AND GAME COMMISSION

Sonke Mastrup
Executive Director

Dated: January 13, 2015