



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

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William Tweit, Interim Chairman
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Unguided halibut rental boats - Discussion paper

STAFF CONTACT: Steve MacLean

ACTION REQUIRED:

- a) Review the discussion paper
- b) Decide whether to initiate additional action

BACKGROUND:

In December 2017, the Council requested an expansion of a discussion paper, originally requested in June 2017, exploring mechanisms to create a registration for motorized rental boats that are used by unguided anglers to harvest halibut in IPHC regulatory areas 2C and 3A. The Council's request included a purpose and need statement that proposed that differences in harvest regulations between guided and unguided anglers, and the presumed growth of the rental boat segment of the unguided sector, may negatively impact other halibut fishing sectors. This paper provides an overview of existing vessel registration programs, examines patterns in halibut harvest in the unguided, guided, and commercial sectors in recent years, and addresses questions posed by the Council concerning opportunities and challenges to designing and implementing a registration for rental boats in areas 2C and 3A.

Both the State of Alaska and Federal government have vessel registration programs in place. The U.S. Coast Guard documents vessels greater than five net tons. The State of Alaska Division of Motor Vehicles registers all motorized boats used on freshwater or saltwater within three miles of shore. ADF&G also registers all vessels used to provide sport fishing guide services. NMFS requires businesses that offer halibut charter fishing in areas 2C and 3A to obtain and keep a valid Charter Halibut Permit (CHP). There may be incremental changes made to the State of Alaska or NMFS CHP registration programs that may serve the Council's purpose, although any resulting registration would be incomplete.

Total recreational halibut harvest declined in areas 2C and 3A from 2003 to 2016. In area 2C, the guided harvest declined while the unguided harvest, although variable, remained near 1 million pounds from 2003-2016. In 2011, the proportion of halibut caught by unguided anglers in area 2C exceeded the proportion caught by guided anglers for the first time. This may explain the perception that unguided catch is increasing despite the overall stability shown in catch data. Both guided and unguided halibut catch declined in area 3A from 2003-2016. The proportion of halibut caught by unguided anglers has remained at approximately 40% of the total sport catch in area 3A from 2003-2016.

The State of Alaska DMV database, in May 2018, contained 249 rental vessels registered by 47 businesses in areas 2C and 3A. Other rental boats exist in other parts of Alaska and on freshwater. Although other methods have been attempted to estimate the number of rental boats available, staff feel that the DMV registry represents a reasonable approximation of the number of boats available for rent.

Any new registration would require new regulation and attendant analyses. Changes to State of Alaska registrations would require cooperation by the State and may require commensurate regulations approved by the State Board of Fisheries. Any new registration would also impose some level of burden on NMFS or the State of Alaska.