

Ocean Science Trust and California Department of Fish & Wildlife
California Halibut 2020 Stock Assessment & Peer Review Public Sharing
Webinar
Key Themes Summary

Wednesday, October 28, 2020

Overview

On October 28, 2020, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and California Ocean Science Trust (OST) invited interested members of the public, Tribes and Tribal communities, and stakeholders to an informational webinar about the California halibut stock assessment. The goal of the webinar was to introduce the key findings of the 2020 California halibut (*Paralichthys californicus*) stock assessment, provide an overview of the process and key findings of the technical peer review of the stock assessment, and to provide CDFW with an opportunity to place this work within the context of scaled management according to the 2018 Marine Life Management Act Master Plan for Fisheries (referred to as the '2018 Master Plan'). This public webinar provided the community with an initial orientation to the stock assessment and peer review reports in advance of those reports being finalized and shared publicly. Importantly, this webinar served to engage those who are interested in learning about and becoming involved in the California halibut fishery management process and discuss next steps towards a science-based, stakeholder-involved management process for the California halibut fishery.

The webinar featured presentations by CDFW (and relevant former CDFW staff), OST, and the Chair of the peer review panel, and Q&A sessions to learn of additional insights and answer questions. Participants were invited to submit written questions and comments. An optional poll and survey were available to participants to help CDFW and OST better understand community engagement.

Approximately 40 people attended the webinar, including commercial and recreational fishermen, government and agency officials, environmental groups, researchers, and other interested members of the public, with equal representation across the state (southern, central, and northern California) based on the optional poll. The majority of participants who responded to the poll self-identified as a member of the fishing community (commercial - 23%, recreational - 16%), and government and agency representatives made up the next largest group (29%) of participants.

This summary provides a high-level overview of the webinar, including presentation highlights, key themes as informed by participant questions and perspectives, and next steps. The key themes of the discussion were informed by presentations on the stock assessment, peer review process, and scaled management process. The webinar recording (with the option to enable closed captions), agenda, and presentations are available at the CDFW [California Halibut Fishery Management](#) and OST [California Halibut Stock Assessment Scientific Peer Review](#) web pages.

Presentation Highlights

Craig Shuman, CDFW Marine Region Manager, welcomed participants and spoke to the value of meaningful engagement and collaboration among CDFW, the Fish and Game Commission, stakeholders, and the broader ocean community to ensure the diversity of knowledge and priorities in the scaled management of the California halibut fishery. Kirsten Ramey, CDFW State-Managed Marine Finfish Program Manager, set the foundation for the webinar by summarizing the fisheries management framework (2018 Master Plan) guiding CDFW's research to better understand and responsibly manage the California halibut resource. Kirsten shared the key finding that California halibut was identified as a high priority species for scaled management based on the results of information-gathering projects conducted by CDFW and collaborators.

Kathryn Meyer, former CDFW Environmental Scientist and current Fish and Wildlife Supervisor at Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, presented an overview of the history of the California halibut fishery, and the data collection, model development, and results of the 2020 stock assessment. The fishery is treated as two regional stocks (a northern and southern stock) in the stock assessment due to differences in the biology of the species, fleet dynamics, and management history. Results were shared for the southern stock assessment model and indicated that the resource was relatively depleted throughout the modeling timeframe. It was shared that the northern stock assessment model was found to have significant limitations and would require additional data to produce a reliable trend for regional stock status.

Together, Anthony Rogers, Strategy Director for OST, and E.J. Dick, Program Lead for the Fisheries Ecology Division of the Southwest Fisheries Science Center, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, provided participants with an overview of the scientific peer review process and major conclusions. OST developed a Terms of Reference to guide the review, looking to the Pacific Fisheries Management Council STAR panel as a general guide, and coordinated with the peer review panel and CDFW to ensure a smooth, independent, and rigorous review process. E.J. provided the results and major conclusions of the peer review. The panel outlined appropriateness for use in management decisions for each of the final stock assessment models, and recommended further data collection, analyses, and model improvements to inform management decisions.

Issues of concern to the panel included data conflicts, the inability of the northern stock assessment model to estimate initial conditions, high sensitivity to recruitment assumptions, and errors found in the weighting of age and length data.

Building upon the information shared earlier in the webinar, Kirsten Ramey presented a high-level vision and stepped approach to building a roadmap for the California halibut scaled management process. Kirsten highlighted the status of the information-gathering projects and goals of the exploration phase, which includes a "scoping phase" to facilitate relationship-building and an exchange of information about priorities and concerns for the management of California halibut. Scaled management development and implementation will reflect shared priorities and vision among CDFW, stakeholders, and the broader community.

Key Themes

There were three key themes that arose from the webinar through Q&A sessions with participants, and the results of the optional survey:

- *The community is interested in engaging with CDFW throughout the scaled management process for the California halibut fishery and has important background knowledge and insights to offer.*
 - Participants expressed a need for clear and transparent communication regarding the scaled management and decision-making processes.
 - There is desire to better understand the vision and process for community outreach and engagement, including during the “scoping phase.”
 - Based on the results of the optional survey, participants expressed a range of perspectives on the prospects for responsible management of the California halibut fishery following the webinar.
 - Some participants felt more optimistic while others felt less optimistic.
- *There is interest in understanding the details of the stock assessment models and how the findings will influence the broader management approach. Specific areas of interest include:*
 - Rationale for splitting the population into northern and southern stocks.
 - Suggestions were made by at least two webinar participants to consider managing the fishery as a single California stock, or as three stocks, with San Pedro Point, Santa Cruz Island as the additional boundary.
 - Consideration of the Mexican California halibut population.
 - Treatment of bycatch and estimates of discard mortality.
 - It was suggested by one webinar participant to explore and consider the impact of different gear types.
 - General biology and ecology of California halibut.
 - Spawning, recruitment, migration, food abundance, growth, and total mortality were highlighted aloud, and through the survey.
- *Understanding the California halibut scaled management process and how it fits into the broader state and federal fisheries management context is important to the community. Specific areas of interest include:*
 - Interaction between the California halibut scaled management process and existing fisheries management measures, including marine protected areas.
 - Synergies and differences between the California halibut scaled management process and other similar processes, such as the federal STAR panel, especially related to transparency and public involvement.
 - Details and process of the management strategy evaluation, including timeline and process for including California halibut fishery data (including social science data).

Next Steps

During the webinar, the following next steps were identified. Please visit the CDFW [California Halibut Fishery Management](#) and OST [California Halibut Stock Assessment Scientific Peer Review](#) web pages for more information.

- Post webinar presentations, a recording (with the option to enable closed captions), and a record of questions/comments submitted by participants (including those that were not addressed during the webinar due to time constraints)- *Complete. Please note that the webinar recording is only available at the OST website.*
- Develop, post, and share with webinar participants, a summary highlighting the key themes of the webinar- *Complete via this summary.*
- Post and share with the broader community the final 2020 stock assessment and peer review panel reports- *Coming early 2021.*

Additionally, as CDFW advances the scaled management process for California halibut, they have identified the following next steps:

- Continue to develop a comprehensive community and stakeholder contact list for California halibut scaled management process updates and invitations to engagement opportunities.
 - Please email Kirsten Ramey, CDFW State-Managed Marine Finfish Program Manager, at Kirsten.Ramey@wildlife.ca.gov to join this contact list.
- Continue to share updates at the California Fish and Game Commission and Marine Resources Committee public meetings and receive guidance from Commissioners and stakeholders.
 - Visit <https://fgc.ca.gov/> for meeting schedule.

Contact Information

Please contact Kirsten Ramey, CDFW State-Managed Marine Finfish Program Manager, at Kirsten.Ramey@wildlife.ca.gov with questions or concerns related to the scaled management process for California halibut, including upcoming community engagement opportunities. Questions or concerns related to the peer review process of the stock assessment or the webinar may be directed to Anthony Rogers, OST Strategy Director, at anthony.rogers@oceansciencetrust.org.

Funding

The California Ocean Science Trust received funding from the Resources Legacy Fund to coordinate the scientific peer review of the 2020 California halibut stock assessment and convene a community webinar to share the results of the stock assessment and peer review process. Strategic Earth Consulting received funding from the California Ocean Science Trust to provide third-party, neutral facilitation of the webinar and support webinar summary development.