

## California Department of Fish & Wildlife

### Exploring Management for the California Halibut Fishery Webinar Series Focused Discussions with the Commercial & Recreational Sectors

#### Key Themes Summary

August 12 & September 16, 2021

#### Overview

In late summer, 2021, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) invited stakeholders of the California halibut fishery to a two-part webinar series to learn about and discuss California halibut, which CDFW identified as a high-priority fishery for management attention through a prioritization process (see [California Marine Life Management Act Master Plan](#); Master Plan). The first webinar on August 12 was focused on the recreational sector, and the second webinar on September 16 was focused on the commercial sector. The goal of these webinars was to engage in a discussion with the fishing industry and other interested stakeholders to explore CDFW and stakeholder's shared priorities and concerns for the long-term sustainability of the species, ecosystem, and fishing community. These webinars also provided the opportunity to share information about how stakeholders can stay informed and engaged in CDFW's management process for California halibut, and understand next steps in designing a science-based, stakeholder-involved management process.

Both webinars featured a presentation by CDFW, followed by one-hour of small group discussions via breakout rooms in Zoom. The small group discussions were facilitated by CDFW staff, and organized by stakeholder affiliation (e.g. fishermen, environmental non-governmental organizations, etc.). The four discussion questions participants answered as part of these small group discussions are reflected by the four key themes below. Participants were invited to submit written questions and comments. An anonymous optional poll and survey were available to participants to help CDFW and participants better understand the region and affiliation of those present. Approximately 40 people attended each webinar including commercial and recreational fishermen, government and agency officials, environmental groups, researchers, and other interested members of the public.

This summary provides a high-level overview of the webinar, including the context, presentation highlights, small group discussions, and key themes as informed by participant questions and perspectives, as well as next steps. The key themes of the small group discussions were informed by CDFW's presentation on the status of the fishery, the California Halibut scaled management process, and CDFW's current priorities for management. The webinar recording, agenda, and presentations are available at the CDFW [California Halibut Fishery Management](#) website. There are several other informational resources on the fishery available as well, including a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) document.

#### Context

In 2019, CDFW assessed the state's fisheries under the Master Plan. A prioritization process identified California halibut as a species in need of management attention due to the potential risks from the fishery to the species, bycatch species, including sub-legal-sized halibut, and habitat. The complexity of a fishery, available information and resources, CDFW capacity and stakeholder interests — together with the identified priority level — all

contribute to determining the scale (or degree) of management needed to benefit the species, fishery, and ecosystem. CDFW is committed to working in partnership with stakeholders to make an informed decision on the best way to manage the fishery.

### Presentation Highlights

Craig Shuman, CDFW Marine Region Manager, welcomed participants and spoke to the value of meaningful engagement with the stakeholder community and closer look at the California halibut fishery.

Kirsten Ramey, CDFW Environmental Program Manager, provided an overview of management considerations and shared CDFW's current priorities to assess and manage the fishery. Ms. Ramey summarized the history of the fishery, highlighting what information is currently known by CDFW and where there is room for continued learning.

Presentations are available at the CDFW [California Halibut Fishery Management](#) website.

### Small Groups Discussions

Following the presentations by CDFW, Zoom breakout rooms were utilized to promote free-flowing conversations between stakeholders and CDFW. Each small group represented a separate affiliation, to provide stakeholders the space to speak amongst peers. The small group titles were chosen by CDFW, and stakeholders joined the group with which they were affiliated.

- Recreational webinar small groups:
  - Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel (CPFV) Owners and Operators
  - Environmental Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations, and Native Nations
  - Recreational Anglers (Including Spear, Shore, Pier, CPFV and Private Boat Customers)
- Commercial webinar small groups:
  - Commercial Gill Net Fishery
  - Commercial Hook and Line Fishery
  - Commercial Trawl Fishery
  - Non-commercial Fishery Stakeholders (Including Governmental Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, Research/Academia Representatives, Recreational Fishery Anglers, and Native Nations)

### Key Themes and Community Insights

**Stakeholders broadly defined sustainability as access to a consistent and viable fishery, and they expressed that from their experience, California halibut is sustainable.**

- Commercial sector participants also defined sustainability as the ability to earn income and support livelihoods into the future, and generally agreed the benchmark for sustainability in the California halibut fishery must take into account historical catches.
  - One commercial stakeholder recommended sustainability should consider the long-term trend in the abundance of other species caught in California halibut fishery gear.
  - Another suggested that with the current number of boats, California halibut is sustainable, but effort can shift causing an increase of pressure on California halibut.

- Recreational sector participants generally agreed that California halibut is sustainable and an important fishery that consistently supplies fresh and healthy protein to the community.
  - California halibut was seen as a ‘reliable’ fishery with its importance perhaps emphasized when other fisheries experience hardship, when weather is bad, or when the local community places a higher demand on locally-caught seafood such as during the recent COVID-19 pandemic.
    - Stakeholders from the northern stock fishery have seen improvement over the last decade and catch of California halibut has been very successful in recent years.
  - Humboldt Bay was highlighted by one stakeholder as an inconsistent fishery over the last decade due to changes in ocean conditions and abundance of California halibut.

**Stakeholders generally disagreed with CDFW’s sentiments that bycatch is a concern, and agreed that the MLMA definition of bycatch is not nuanced enough to reflect their experiences.**

- Stakeholders agree that the MLMA definition of bycatch does not reflect their experience, and that the term has a negative connotation.
  - Commercial sector participants agreed that generally bycatch is not a concern because unmarketable fish are returned live, and marketable fish are kept and sold.
    - However, some individuals felt that sublegal catch is a concern in the hook and line fishery, that bycatch levels in gillnet and trawl is unacceptable for non-target species, and that netting and handling of sub-legal-sized California halibut in the recreational hook and line fishery is a concern.
  - Recreational sector participants agreed that the catch of sub-legal-sized California halibut is the primary type of bycatch in the recreational sector; however, it is of low concern.

**Stakeholders had differing perspectives on how changing ocean conditions have impacted the California halibut fishery.**

- Some stakeholders have observed a population shift northward, and an improvement in California halibut landings and catch in recent years while other fisheries may have declined.
- Participants acknowledged that the ocean is dynamic, with seasonal changes, and that California halibut is cyclical.
- Overall, stakeholders’ experience is that California halibut fishing is as good now as 20 years ago.

**Stakeholders shared management recommendations for the fishery, and expressed interest in receiving more updates about the CDFW’s management plans.**

- Some stakeholders expressed concern about management decisions not specific to California halibut, including the 30x30 initiative, that they feel may lead to more closures and regulations.
- Some commercial sector participants want to see the trawl grounds off Monterey Bay and Port San Luis opened as designated by Senate Bill 1309, and request that CDFW advance this agenda.
- Management recommendations from individual stakeholders included:
  - Address bycatch impacts to other species and sub-legal-sized California halibut, circulate materials about handling of sub-legal-sized California halibut, support bag limit reduction to two fish, and establish a special California halibut closure in San Francisco Bay.

- No change in regulations, with the sentiment that the fishery is sustainable and changes are not necessary at this time.

## Next Steps

During the webinars, the following next steps were identified. Please visit the CDFW [California Halibut Fishery Management](#) website for more information.

- Post webinar presentations and recordings -- *Complete*.
- Develop and post a "[Frequently Asked Questions](#)" document -- *Complete*.
- Develop and post a summary highlighting the key themes of the webinar -- *Complete via this summary*.

CDFW had envisioned a third and final webinar that would provide an update on CDFW's management priorities and next steps after reflecting on stakeholder knowledge. Upon reflection of stakeholder input, CDFW became aware of the need for additional internal visioning and planning sessions to talk through ideas related to the evaluation of bycatch, current and future trawl grounds, Management Strategy Evaluation, and specific action items to prioritize in the next iteration of the stock assessment. CDFW's goal is to convene subsequent webinar(s) with the stakeholder community when CDFW has results from these evaluations and management measures to propose for discussion.

## Contact Information

For information about the California halibut fishery and engagement opportunities, please visit the CDFW [California Halibut Scaled Management](#) webpage. To receive email updates about California halibut, email [MLMAFisheriesMgmt@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:MLMAFisheriesMgmt@wildlife.ca.gov) or subscribe via the website. Please contact Kirsten Ramey, Marine Region Environmental Program Manager, at [Kirsten.Ramey@wildlife.ca.gov](mailto:Kirsten.Ramey@wildlife.ca.gov) with questions and concerns related to California halibut.

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