



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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NMFS' PLAN FOR ALASKA MEANS GUIDED ANGLERS PAY RFA Says NMFS Catch Sharing Plan Shows Gross Inequity in Coastal Fisheries

Imagine catching the halibut of a lifetime on a charter trip in Alaska, only to be told by the captain that you'll have to pay an extra service charge to keep it!

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is proposing a new "Catch Sharing Plan" (CSP) to manage allocations in Alaska's Pacific halibut fishery. The plan will give guided recreational anglers their first hard allocation. Up to now, they have been managed under a recommended guideline harvest level.

The "Catch Sharing Plan" is anything but catch sharing, and for many fishing guides in Alaska it is feeling more like robbery. Bycatch and wastage in the commercial fleet surpasses all the fish taken by recreational anglers in Alaska. The CSP takes 30% of guided angler allocation and assigns it to commercial halibut fishermen.

According to Jim Martin, West Coast Regional Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA), the CSP would mean a 50% reduction in bag limits for guided anglers in Southcentral Alaska, requiring recreational fishermen to have to buy fish from charter operators who lease this privilege from the commercial sector.

"If they drop it to one fish per angler in Homer, you would be able to keep a second halibut but only if you were willing to pay for it, but that's up to the commercial fisherman to decide if he's willing to lease it to the charter operator you fish with," Martin said. "A lot of these commercial guys pushed the individual fishing quota concept as beneficial to the fish, when in many ways it really only benefitted a [few lucky fishermen](#)."

Public comments on NMFS' official Catch Sharing Plan are due by September 6, 2011. According to the Alaska Charter Association (ACA), if the CSP is implemented in 2012, it will mean a 50% reduction in bag limits for Southcentral guided anglers; from two fish per day to one fish per day. Southeast Alaska guided anglers have been under a one fish rule for the past three years. This year they are under a one fish rule with a maximum size of 37 inches. This will mean a potential reduction to a 32-inch fish for them. Southcentral is heading down the same road.

ACA has formulated different plans for the different areas. As over 40% of the guided anglers in Southcentral are resident Alaskans, these anglers must be informed about how the CSP will affect their angling opportunities for halibut and how they can prevent this from happening. To this end, ACA has retained the services of RFA's Jim Martin who will be assisting ACA with a public information campaign aimed at Southcentral anglers.

"Most of these anglers in Southeast Alaska are out-of-state visitors visiting the halibut capital of the world, so it's going to be hard to get them involved," Martin said. "This is the worst thing that could happen to our recreational fishing community here, it's unfair treatment and it could prove devastating for our guides, lodges and outfitters."

For this reason, ACA's focus in Southeast will be on the charter operators. They will need to realize that their involvement is important in fighting the implementation of the CSP and critical in insuring the livelihood of their businesses. The message needs to go out to NMFS on just how damaging the CSP will be, not only for charter businesses, but for all the local Southeast economies that depend on tourism dollars.

Download a copy of the Alaska Charter Association letter to sign and send to NMFS before September 6 at www.joinrfa.org/press/AlaskaCharterLetter.pdf

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA's Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation's saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.