



DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 300

[RTID 0648-XF466; Docket No. 260611-0141]

Pacific Halibut Fisheries of the West Coast; Annual Management Measures for the 2026 Area 2A Pacific Halibut Directed Commercial Fishery

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: NMFS is implementing annual management measures for the 2026 non-Tribal directed commercial Pacific halibut fishery that operates south of Point Chehalis, WA, (lat. 46°53.30' N) in the International Pacific Halibut Commission's (IPHC) Regulatory Area 2A off Washington, Oregon, and California. Annual management measures include fishing periods and fishing period limits. This action is intended to conserve Pacific halibut, while providing fishing opportunity to achieve the Regulatory Area 2A allocation set by the IPHC.

DATES: Effective June 15, 2026.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Louis Forristall, West Coast Region, NMFS, (503) 230-5410, louis.forristall@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982 (16 U.S.C. 773–773k; Halibut Act) gives the Secretary of Commerce responsibility for implementing the provisions of the Convention between Canada and the United States for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea (Halibut Convention), signed in

Ottawa, ON, on March 2, 1953, as amended by a Protocol Amending the Convention, signed in Washington, DC, on March 29, 1979. This responsibility includes the responsibility to adopt regulations to carry out the Halibut Act (16 U.S.C. 773c).

The Halibut Act provides that the regional fishery management council with authority for the geographic area concerned may develop regulations governing Pacific halibut fishing in U.S. waters that are in addition to, and not in conflict with, approved IPHC regulations (16 U.S.C. 773c(c)). Such regulations “shall only be implemented with the approval of the Secretary of Commerce” (16 U.S.C. 773c(c)). The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) developed a catch sharing plan (CSP) guiding the allocation of halibut across the various sectors for the IPHC’s Regulatory Area 2A. While the full CSP is not published in the **Federal Register**, it is made available on the Council’s website at https://www.pcouncil.org/managed_fishery/pacific-halibut/.

Under the Halibut Act, the Secretary of State, with the concurrence of the Secretary of Commerce, may accept or reject, on behalf of the United States, regulations recommended by the IPHC in accordance with the Halibut Convention (16 U.S.C. 773b). Following acceptance by the Secretary of State, the annual management measures recommended by the IPHC are published in the **Federal Register** through a NMFS rulemaking to provide notice of their immediate regulatory effectiveness and to inform persons subject to the regulations of their restrictions and requirements (50 CFR 300.62).

This final rule implements management measures for the 2026 non-Tribal directed commercial Pacific halibut fishery in Area 2A that are not part of the annual IPHC regulations. The rule finalizes management measures that were developed through the Council’s public process over multiple meetings. Additionally, the final rule adopts, without changes, the management measures from the proposed rule published on March 25, 2026 (91 FR 14516) (Proposed Rule).

Fishery Allocation

At its annual meeting held January 19-22, 2026, the IPHC adopted a Regulatory Area 2A catch limit, referred to as the fishery constant exploitation yield (FCEY), of 1.54 million pounds (lb) or 698.5 metric tons (mt), net weight (*i.e.*, the weight of Pacific halibut that is without gills and entrails, head-off, washed, and without ice and slime), of Pacific halibut. The FCEY is derived from the 2026 total constant exploitation yield (TCEY) of 1.65 million lb (748 mt), net weight, for Regulatory Area 2A, which includes commercial discards and bycatch projections calculated using a formula developed by the IPHC. On March 23, 2026, the Secretary of State accepted, with concurrence from the Secretary of Commerce, the annual management measures, Regulatory Area 2A TCEY, Regulatory Area 2A FCEY, and commercial and recreational fishery allocations (in net weight) that were adopted by the IPHC. These management measures, catch limits, and allocations were subsequently published in the **Federal Register** in the Proposed Rule. Based on the FCEY for Regulatory Area 2A and the allocation framework in the Council's CSP, NMFS proposed a non-Tribal directed commercial fishing allocation for the 2026 fishing season of 261,211 lb (118.5 mt) net weight. The directed commercial fishing allocation for the 2026 fishing season in this final rule is unchanged from that in the Proposed Rule.

Fishing Periods

Fishing periods, often referred to as fishery openers, are the time during the IPHC's annual commercial halibut season when non-Tribal directed commercial fishing for Pacific halibut in Regulatory Area 2A is allowed. This action implements two 58-hour fishing periods. The first fishing period will begin on June 23, 2026 at 8 a.m. (0800) Pacific Daylight Time (PDT) and close on June 25, 2026 at 6 p.m. (1800) PDT. The second fishing period will occur 2 weeks later, beginning on July 7, 2026, at 8:00 a.m. (0800) PDT and closing on July 9, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. (1800) PDT. If another fishing

period is necessary to attain the allocation, NMFS intends to open a third 58-hour fishing period on July 21, 2026 at 8 a.m. (0800) PDT that would close on July 23, 2026 at 6 p.m. (1800) PDT, through inseason action. If subsequent fishing periods are necessary to reach the allocation, NMFS intends to have them follow the same pattern, occurring 2 weeks after the previous fishing period (beginning on August 4, beginning on August 18, *etc.*), as announced by inseason action. If NMFS determines that additional fishing periods are warranted, and if for any reason a fishing period cannot be scheduled on this 2-week schedule, NMFS intends to skip a fishing period to follow the outlined every 2-week schedule. NMFS will use email addresses obtained from 2026 Pacific halibut directed commercial fishery permit applications for email notice of inseason actions. Fishing periods may be added inseason consistent with 50 CFR 300.63(e)(1)(iii).

Fishing Period Limits

A fishing period limit, also called a vessel catch limit, is the maximum amount of Pacific halibut that may be retained and landed by a vessel during one fishing period. Each vessel may retain no more than the applicable fishing period limit of Pacific halibut for its vessel size class, which is determined by vessel length. NMFS is implementing the directed commercial fishing period limits, shown in table 1 below, for the first two fishing periods.

Fishing period limits are intended to ensure that the Area 2A directed commercial fishery does not exceed its allocation, while also providing fair and equitable access across participants to an attainable amount of harvest.

Table 1 -- Fishing Period Limits for the Initial Fishing Periods in 2026 of the Regulatory Area 2A Pacific Halibut Non-Tribal Directed Commercial Fishery

Vessel class	Length range in feet (meters)	Fishing period limit in lb (mt)
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A – C	1 – 35 (0.3 – 10.9)	2,000 (0.907)
D – E	36 – 45 (11.0 – 13.9)	3,400 (1.542)
F – G	46 – 55 (14.0 – 16.9)	4,300 (1.950)
H	56+ (17.0+)	5,000 (2.268)

Note: Fishing period limits are in dressed weight (head-on, with ice and slime). If a vessel’s size is between lengths, its length will be rounded up for the purpose of fishing period limits.

If NMFS determines that more than two fishing periods are warranted, NMFS will set the fishing period limits for subsequent fishing periods equal across all vessel classes through inseason action consistent with 50 CFR 300.63(e)(1)(iii). Fishing period limits for the second 2026 fishing period may also be adjusted through inseason action consistent with 50 CFR 300.63, if necessary to avoid exceeding the allocation. Inseason actions will be noticed via email to the affected public, published in the **Federal Register**, and appear on the NMFS website. Inseason actions will be effective upon the date and time of either the receipt of notice of the direct email or publication in the **Federal Register**, whichever occurs first.

Comments and Responses

NMFS published the Proposed Rule on March 25, 2026 and accepted public comment on the 2026 Area 2A non-Tribal Pacific halibut directed commercial fishery annual management measures through April 24, 2026. NMFS received one public comment. The comment spoke generally in opposition to fish consumption; however, the comment was not directly responsive to this rulemaking. The comment did not warrant any changes to the Proposed Rule.

Classification

This final rule is consistent with section 5 of the Halibut Act, which gives relevant regional fishery management councils the authority to develop regulations governing Pacific halibut fishing in U.S. waters that are in addition to, and not in conflict with,

approved IPHC regulations, and that “shall only be implemented with the approval of the Secretary” (16 U.S.C. 773c(c)).

This action is exempt from review under Executive Order (E.O.) 12866. This final rule is also exempt from the requirements of E.O. 14192 because it is a routine fishing action. A Treaty Tribal summary impact statement under section (5)(b)(2)(B) and (c)(2) of E.O. 13175 was not required for this final rule because this action does not impose substantial direct compliance costs on Treaty Tribal Governments and this action does not preempt Treaty Tribal law. A Treaty Tribal summary impact statement is not required and has not been prepared.

NMFS determined that the 30-day delay in the date of effectiveness requirement does not apply pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(1) and (3), and the annual management measures for the 2026 directed commercial fishery will take effect upon the filing of this rule with the Office of Federal Register. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(1), this rule relieves a restriction on fishing. The fishery participants will be restricted from fishing if this rule does not take effect by June 23, 2026. Therefore, having this rule take effect upon filing with the Office of the Federal Register will relieve a restriction on fishery participants pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(1).

Additionally, there is good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3) for this rule to take effect upon filing with the Office of the Federal Register. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3), delaying the effective date of the annual management measures contained in this rule would be contrary to the public interest as it would prevent the directed commercial fishery in Area 2A from beginning on time. Accordingly, waiving the 30-day delay in effectiveness will benefit the public because it will provide additional opportunity for commercial Pacific halibut fishermen in 2026 and thus increase the likelihood of full utilization of the 2026 allocations in Area 2A.

This rule implements Area 2A non-Tribal directed commercial fishery management measures as published in the Proposed Rule and is based on Council recommendations that followed a multi-meeting public Council process. The non-Tribal directed commercial fishery has an average of 76 vessels participate annually, and similar participation is expected in 2026. This seasonal fishery is typically open for approximately 7 days per year, spread over 2 months, and concludes in late August. The fishery is important to many commercial fishermen on the U.S. West Coast. In 2025, the ex-vessel revenue from the fishery was \$2.37 million. A 30-day delay in the effectiveness of the measures in this rule would result in the directed commercial fishery not being opened on its intended timeline and, thus, the fishery not being open on the dates that the affected public is expecting. Business decisions have likely been made surrounding the fishery's anticipated opening date. Further, due to the short nature of this summer fishery, pushing the start date is not considered a viable option because such a delay would disrupt normal fishing operations. Thus, a delayed effective date for this rule would be contrary to the public interest as it could have a substantial adverse economic impact on fishery participants and fishing communities.

A delayed effective date is also not necessary to provide sufficient notice to the fishing community. This rule does not establish any new or unique regulations, nor otherwise make changes that would require fishery participants to purchase new gear or make other time-consuming adjustments. By contrast, this rule implements routine fishery management measures that are similar year-to-year. Further, the rule contains management measures for the fishery that were recommended by the Council following a multi-meeting public process, which included industry participation, and the final rule is unchanged from the Proposed Rule. Therefore, a 30-day delay in effectiveness is not needed to give the regulated community time to adjust to the rule.

In conclusion, NMFS finds that the 30-day delay in effective date does not apply to this final rule pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(1) and (3).

The Chief Counsel for Regulation of the Department of Commerce certified to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration during the proposed rule stage that this action would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities for purposes of the Regulatory Flexibility Act. The factual basis for the certification was published in the Proposed Rule and is not repeated here. No comments were received regarding this certification. As a result, a final regulatory flexibility analysis was not required for this action and none was prepared.

This final rule does not create any information collection requests nor necessitate revision of existing approved information collection requests under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*).

Dated: June 12, 2026.

Samuel D. Rauch, III,

Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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