

PROPOSAL 125

5 AAC 47.065. Demersal shelf rockfish delegation of authority and provisions for management.

Repeal mandatory retention requirements for nonpelagic rockfish, as follows:

The regulation should be changed to eliminate the wording: "All non-pelagic rockfish caught must be retained until the bag limit is reached." No other changes to the regulation would be required.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Currently guided fishers are required to retain all non-pelagic rockfish until the limit is reached, after which, if additional non-pelagics are caught they must be released at depth.

a. Often very small non-pelagic rockfish are caught, retained and are wasted because they are too small to salvage any practical amount of meat after being fileted. They are considered simply not worth the effort.

b. In addition to smaller rockfish, it is common for larger non-pelagic rockfish to be caught while targeting other species. The fact the angler is targeting other species often indicates that rockfish are an unintended and unwanted catch. Rockfish are not allowed to be retained by crew. Under current regulations non-pelagic rockfish must be retained until a limit is achieved, whether they are wanted or not, often resulting in undesired retention and unnecessary mortalities.

The harvest and waste of non-pelagic rockfish can be prevented if the regulations allowed discretion in the release at depth of such fish prior to achieving a limit. Release at depth is estimated to result in 80% survivability, but a rockfish retained results in 100% mortality. The resulting waste causes frustration to clients and guides alike, and calls into question the practicality of the regulation as written.

PROPOSED BY: Don Westlund and Larry McQuarrie (HQ-F17-089)

PROPOSAL 126

5 AAC 47.030. Methods, means, and general provisions – Finfish.

Require all anglers to release nonpelagic rockfish at depth with a deepwater release mechanism, as follows:

The regulation to release non-pelagic rockfish at depth as written for guided anglers should be extended to apply to all sport fishers, including the requirement to have on board at least one operable at-depth release mechanism.

All sport caught non-pelagic rockfish that are intended to be released must be released at the depth they were caught or at least 100', whichever is shallower.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Currently only guided fishers are required to release non-pelagic rockfish at depth. Statistically it is estimated that there is as

much as an 80% survival rate for non-pelagic rockfish that are released at depth. While it is not practical for the commercial fishery to release at depth, there is no reason why all other sport harvesters should not also be required to release non-pelagics at depth in order to conserve the resource.

PROPOSED BY: Don Westlund and Larry McQuarrie (HQ-F17-090)

PROPOSAL 127

5 AAC 47.021. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and methods and means for the salt waters of the Southeast Alaska Area.

Establish provisions for reducing the resident pelagic rockfish bag limit in Central Southeast Outside waters, as follows:

(8)(A)

I propose that the Board of Fisheries direct the Department to refrain from reducing the CSEO resident sport bag limit for pelagic rockfish below the 5 per day established in 5 AAC 47.020 (8) (A), unless the resident share of the sport pelagic rockfish harvest in CSEO has exceeded 50% for two consecutive years.

Note: In Southeast Alaska, very few residents fish from a charter boat, whereas the great majority of non-residents do so. Hence, a distinction based on residency is in practice very similar to a charter/non-charter distinction. This proposal adopts the former convention solely because it has been the most common past practice of the Board of Fisheries.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? From 2007 to 2015 the harvest of pelagic rockfish by charter fishermen in the Sitka area (Central Southeast Outside-CSEO) more than doubled. Concern over this increased catch led the Department to use Emergency Order authority in 2016 and 2017 to reduce the bag limit for all sport anglers from 5 per day to 3 per day. The non-charter anglers' catch of pelagic rockfish had actually decreased between 2007-2015, yet they too were required to make further reductions due to concerns stemming from the increased charter harvest.

PROPOSED BY: Tad Fujioka (HQ-F17-074)

PROPOSAL 128

5 AAC 47.021. Special provisions for seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits and methods and means for the salt waters of Southeast Alaska Area.

Reduce the pelagic rockfish limits in the Sitka Area, as follows:

5 AAC 47.021(g) is amended by adding a new subparagraph to read:

(g) In the Sitka vicinity:

(8) in waters west of Baranof and Chichagof Islands, south of 57° 30' N. lat. and north of the latitude of Cape Ommaney (56 ° 09.60' N.) the bag limit for pelagic rockfish is three fish and possession limit of six fish, no size limit.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? In 2016 and 2017 the department reduced the bag limit of pelagic rockfish to three fish through emergency order authority to reduce harvest. Pelagic rockfish harvest in the Sitka Area, as estimated by the statewide harvest and marine creel surveys, has gradually increased from 20,000 fish in 2009 to over 60,000 fish in 2014 and 2015 representing a 3-fold increase in sport harvest in recent years. Although there is limited stock information, analysis of the length-weight composition of the sport harvest shows a slight, but gradual decline in average weight since 2006 indicating a possible change in the population structure. This may be a result of increased harvest. A reduction in bag limit from five to three pelagic rockfish is predicted to reduce harvest to a level similar to that seen in 2011 through 2013. This proposal is designed to protect pelagic rockfish in the interest of conservative management until additional stock information is available.

PROPOSED BY: Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(HQ-F17-127)
