

**PROPOSAL 166**

**5 AAC 75.020. Sport fishing gear.**

Require rockfish to be released at depth, as follows:

**[x] Beginning January 1, 2020, a person sport fishing from a vessel when releasing a species of rockfish shall immediately use a deep water release mechanism to return the fish to the depth it was hooked or to a depth of at least 100 feet. In this subsection, “deep water release mechanism” means a device designed to return a rockfish to the depth of capture, or to a specified depth.**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The Seward Fish and Game Advisory Committee has always been proactive in response to protection of our valuable fish and game resources.

Catch data shows an increase in sport harvest of rockfish between 1996 and 2016. The catch varies by port and some areas catch more of pelagic than nonpelagic and vice versa. Valdez & Whittier catch more yellow eye while Homer, Kodiak and Seward catch more black and dusky. We anticipate the harvest of rockfish to increase with the corresponding decline in harvest from the sport halibut fishery.

Rockfish morphology and physiology make effective release of rockfish difficult. Catch data shows the preferred method of release for pelagic rockfish is the surf method. The DRM is more widely used in the non-pelagic fishery. The DRM is already being utilized by the charter and private fleets as a preferred release method for yelloweye.

Two day cage studies in PWS found that >84% of dark, dusky, silvergray, copper, quillback, and yelloweye can survive after recompression back down to depth. Making the DRM mandatory statewide would reduce rockfish mortality during an era of increased harvest pressure.

**PROPOSED BY:** Seward Fish and Game Advisory Committee

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