

## *Sport Fisheries (groundfish) (7 proposals)*

### **PROPOSAL 18**

#### **5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet – Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.**

Modify rockfish bag and possession limits as follows:

5 AAC 58.022(a)(6) is amended to read:

(6) rockfish: may be taken from January 1 – December 31; [BAG LIMIT OF FIVE FISH AND 10 IN POSSESSION, OF WHICH ONLY ONE PER DAY AND TWO IN POSSESSION MAY BE NONPELAGIC ROCKFISH] as defined in 5 AAC 75.995;[ NO SIZE LIMIT;]

**(A) pelagic rockfish: bag and possession limit of three fish; no annual limit, no size limit;**

**(B) nonpelagic rockfish: bag and possession limit of one fish; no annual limit, no size limit;**

Repeal 5 AAC 58.022(b)(3)(C):

[(C) ROCKFISH: IN THE WATERS BETWEEN GORE POINT AND CAPE FAIRFIELD, THE BAG LIMIT IS FOUR FISH AND EIGHT IN POSSESSION, OF WHICH ONLY ONE PER DAY AND TWO IN POSSESSION MAY BE A NONPELAGIC ROCKFISH OF WHICH ONLY ONE PER DAY AND TWO IN POSSESSION MAY BE A NONPELAGIC ROCKFISH AS DEFINED IN 5 AAC 75.995; NO SIZE LIMIT] **Repealed;**

#### **What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?**

Currently, sport fish rockfish bag and possession limits are not aligned between North Gulf Coast (NGC), Lower Cook Inlet (LCI), and Prince William Sound (PWS) management areas. The department is currently developing black and yelloweye rockfish stock assessments for these management areas to identify sustainable harvest levels through the Statewide Rockfish Initiative. Currently, the harvest of rockfish in these management areas is increasing and is assumed to be associated with a shifting of effort from Pacific halibut to other species by charter (guided) anglers due to reduced sport fishing opportunities associated with the federal Pacific Halibut Catch Sharing Plan. The anticipated continued shifting of effort and the late-maturing life history strategy of rockfish requires a precautionary management approach.

Although rockfish harvest is increasing in all of these sport fish management areas, the trends are not consistent between the areas and species or assemblages of rockfish. In LCI, on average from 2019 through 2022, the total rockfish harvest was over 50,000 fish, which is more than a 300% increase from the historical (2006–2013) average. Most of the recent rockfish harvest (approximately 70%) has been black rockfish; there have also been simultaneous declines in the age and size compositions of black rockfish, which are a result of a strong cohort of juvenile rockfish that were first detected in the fishery in 2017. In recent years, juvenile black rockfish have comprised 67% to 90% of the total black rockfish harvest. Given the current high harvest levels, the harvest rate of juvenile rockfish may influence the future productivity of the stock. Similarly, the NGC management area has also observed increased rockfish harvest, specifically black rockfish, however the harvest has not been primarily comprised of juvenile rockfish.

To maintain continuity between areas, the department has determined that a bag and possession limit of three pelagic and one nonpelagic rockfish would still provide harvest opportunities and would better align regulations. Historically, in both NGC and Cook Inlet areas, bag and possession limits provided the option to retain a full bag limit of pelagic rockfish, or to keep one nonpelagic rockfish towards the total bag limit. Regulation complexity will be reduced by specifying an actual number of fish, specific to each assemblage. In addition, many anglers fishing in NGC waters also fish in PWS but return to port in Seward (in NGC). The change in the possession limit for nonpelagic from 2 to 1 in NGC would align with PWS nonpelagic regulations.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Department of Fish and Game (HQ-F23-020)

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**PROPOSAL 19**

**5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.**

Reduce rockfish limits in Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay as follows:

5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.

(a) Except as provided in (b) and (c) of this section, and unless otherwise specified in this chapter, the following are the seasons, bag, possession, annual, and size limits, and special provisions for finfish and shellfish in the Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area:

...

(6) rockfish: may be taken from January 1 - December 31; bag limit of **three** [FIVE] fish and **six** [10] in possession, of which only one per day and two in possession may be nonpelagic rockfish as defined in 5 AAC 75.995; no size limit;

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Due to federal changes in rules for halibut sport fishing, rockfish have been increasingly targeted as an opportunity for sport fishing harvest. This harvest has increased from an average of 16,654 total of pelagic/non Pelagic in 2006-13 to a unsustainable average of 50,484 in years 2019-2021. Sampling harvest by ADFG has shown data that nearly 75% of harvested rockfish in LCI are juvenile fish. This indicates current harvest levels may not be unsustainable for the resource.

This would bring regulations in line with other areas in the state and is consistent with the ADF&G Statewide Rockfish Initiative’s Conservation Tools.

Estimates from ADFG from charter logbooks and port sampling suggest the reduction could decrease the harvest by 29%.

**PROPOSED BY:** Homer Fish and Game Advisory Committee (HQ-F23-109)

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**PROPOSAL 20**

**5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.**

Reduce Lower Cook Inlet rockfish sport limits as follows:

Current Lower Cook Inlet Saltwater Regulations for sport fishing:

5 per day, 10 in possession, only 1 per day, 2 in possession may be no pelagic

Proposed Change:

4 per day, 8 in possession, only 1 per day, 2 in possession may be non pelagic.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? RE: Lower Cook Inlet Saltwater Rockfish Regulations**

Current ADFG data for Lower Cook Inlet Saltwater Rockfish show that harvest has increased in the recreational and guided-recreational fisheries. Data also has shown declining average age in retained catch. Average age of retained catch is now below average spawning age and indicates current harvest rate may be unsustainable. Lower daily bag and possession limits may reduce harvest rate and result in more sustainable harvest. Long term fishery access should be prioritized given current data.

**PROPOSED BY:** Homer Charter Association

(EF-F23-075)

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**PROPOSAL 21**

**5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.**

Reduce Lower Cook Inlet rockfish sport limits as follows:

Proposed Change:

5 AAC 58.022 -Lower Cook Inlet Saltwater Rockfish Regulations and bag limits

4 per day, 8 in possession, only 1 per day, 2 in possession may be non pelagic.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Lower Cook Inlet Saltwater Rockfish Regulations**

**Alaska Charter Association is asking for a Consideration to change and slightly lower rockfish bag limits within the Lower Cook inlet saltwater sport fishery to address an increase on rockfish harvest as a conservative approach after ACA members discussion as well as analysis of area biologist data sampling and fishery management report.**

Current Regulation:

5 per day, 10 in possession, only 1 per day, 2 in possession may be non pelagic

While fishery management data is still quite low for sampling data vs total harvest numbers, we are seeing growing trends of increased efforts towards rockfish harvest as halibut regulations continue to grow more restrictive. Although we may also be seeing a massive cohort of juvenile rockfish entering the fishery and this may speak to the large increase of juvenile harvest in the short term, the other side of reasoning may be due to over fishing within a relatively small area due to the recent recruitment numbers and short term fuel costs limiting operators want to travel per day. Regardless, the large increase in immature harvest of black rockfish had made us want to be preventative from hitting a cliff for future harvest opportunity by requesting a 4 rockfish limit from the currently adopted 5 rockfish bag limit.

This will save more fish for the future and allow further data sampling of both locally harvested as well as long range specific trips targeting rockfish to continue to build data on such a large area that we do not have the full scope of yet given we are only able to sample 200-500 rockfish per year out of 60,000+.

Theoretically, Not taking these steps may have little to no impact, but with the long term in mind and the indicators pointed out by our area biologist, we must first make sure our rockfish biomass can take the increased pressures, and all the while be able to also grow for the future, that is paramount.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Charter Association (EF-F23-093)  
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**PROPOSAL 22**

**5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.**

Establish a sport fishing closure for rockfish in Cook Inlet from June 1 - July 31 as follows:

5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.

Lower Cook Inlet Saltwater Rockfish Regulations and Bag Limits

5 per day, 10 in possession, only 1 per day, 2 in possession may be non pelagic

**June 1st - July 31st All rockfish species both pelagic and non pelagic may not be retained North of Latitude Line 59.18.513' N (Magnet Rock).**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Rockfish harvest North of Magnet rock Latitude line 59.18.513' N and north within Kachemack Bay Saltwaters to be closed June 1st-July 31st

As Regulatory actions continue to pressure our fisheries, we see operators turn to target rockfish in Kachemak bay more and more to create in bay multi species trips end up productive during poor

salmon fishing or unfavorable weather to align with the value given of the trip, the recent uptick in harvest among rockfish has left myself wanting to find a path that protects in bay rockfish populations from over harvest during a very short summer session when fishing intensity is highest. Without placing a safeguard on rockfish in Kachemak bay i strongly feel we will see a localized decimation within the next 10 years while having coastal biomass populations staying consistently healthy and without such a firmly established population we may not see returning winter populations of black rockfish in the years to come. This proposal protects in bay rockfish populations from in bay harvest around the two heaviest months of fishing intensity and will help the overall harvest for Cook Inlet saltwater that may be overall helpful in the long term goal of sustainability for years to come.

One concern with this proposal is charter fisherman returning with rockfish from south of the proposed area often continue to fish for halibut under 28" before returning home, the targeted areas are not at all areas with rockfish populations but my language states that retention is not allowed and i hope the language for continued fishing of other species.

The Charter sector being of the smallest user group within the directed fishery for all species alike continues to take the fall for the conservation burden, we are the most documented user group as well as the cleanest fishery for bycatch mortality and released methods used, especially for rockfish species both pelagic and non pelagic, our businesses are entering a new era of catch allocations that has left many long time clients among many businesses call for cancelations after years and years of enjoyment into this sector and this great state.

My only aim is to keep our harvest rates within the scope of sustainability for the future of the industry and the biomass we rely on. I do not want to see Cook Inlet go down the road Sitka did with their in bay rockfish numbers being overfished while coastal populations are thriving yet a 2 rockfish limit and non pelagic closures are being endured while longline vessels are hauling yelloweye after yelloweye in front of charter clients and they do not understand where the conservation concern is. These are the stories I get from charter members of the ACA from Southeastern Alaska, one large blanket regulation treating local waters the same as coastal or longer ranged waters. Thank You.

**PROPOSED BY:** Garrett Lambert (EF-F23-102)

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**PROPOSAL 23**

**5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual, and size limits; and special provisions for Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.**

Reduce Lower Cook Inlet lingcod sport limits as follows:

Current Lower Cook Inlet Saltwater Regulations for sport fishing:

2 per day, 2 in possession, must be at least 35 inches long with head attached or 28 inches from tip of tail to front of dorsal fin with head removed.

Proposed Change:

1 per day, 2 in possession, must be at least 35 inches long with head attached or 28 inches from tip of tail to front of dorsal fin with head removed.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Current ADFG data for Lower Cook Inlet lingcod show that harvest is stable and relatively low. Many stakeholders have self implemented a 1-fish daily bag limit. Current area restrictions on Chinook salmon and on Pacific halibut may increase pressure on Lingcod and this is a concern for continued access. A reduction in daily bag limit to “1” also brings the area into alignment with North Gulf Coast and Prince William Sound.

**PROPOSED BY:** Homer Charter Association

(EF-F23-076)

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**PROPOSAL 24**

**5 AAC 58.022. Waters; seasons; bag, possession, annual and size limits; special provisions for Cook Inlet- Resurrection Bay Saltwater Area.**

Remove limits for spiny dogfish in Cook Inlet waters as follows:

Southcentral Alaska 2022 Sport Fishing Reg. Booklet Pg. 73

Spiny Dogfish

**No limit**

**\*Retention or release not mandatory**

[5 PER DAY, 5 IN POSSESSION.]

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** The purpose of this proposal is to address the rapid increase in the numbers and expanded territory of Spiny Dogfish we have witnessed over the past decade in Cook Inlet and Kachemak Bay waters. Simultaneously, we have seen declines in other food fish such as Halibut, Pacific Cod, herring, and Rock fish. The Spiny Dogfish predation also extends to other smaller feeder fish, young Octopus, young squid, sand lances, etc. that our food fish rely on for nourishment, growth and production. I would submit to you that the increase in Spiny Dogfish predation in these waters have become an important factor in the declines we are witnessing in other species and should be dealt with as such. Much in the way that we deal with Pike in our salmon streams and lakes in Southcentral Alaska. Now days, when surf fishing from Cook Inlet beaches anytime after June 10 through the end of October, you will catch these dogfish one after another and the same can be said for boat fishermen out of Deep Creek or Anchor Point in many areas. There has to be thousands of them in the inlet for this to occur in this fashion. Many boat fishermen complain that they are catching more dogfish now than Halibut and catching Pacific Cod is virtually a thing of the past.

What would happen if nothing is changed: Their numbers will continue to increase and this will continue to contribute to declines in other important food fish that fishermen, both sport and commercial, rely on.

What are other solutions you considered: Designing a commercial fishery for Spiny Dogfish to help keep their numbers in check and get some value from them. Several board cycles back, the board received a proposal such as this but rejected it for some reason.

**PROPOSED BY:** Dwight Kramer

(HQ-F23-056)

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