

PROPOSAL 1

5 AAC 55.022. General provisions for seasons, bag, possession, and size limits and methods and means for the Prince William Sound area.

Reduce the bag and possession limits for lingcod in the Prince William Sound Area, as follows:

Reduce the daily bag and possession limit for lingcod in Prince William Sound (PWS).

(a)(8) lingcod: may be taken only from July 1 – December 31; bag limit of **one** [TWO] fish; possession limit of **two** [FOUR] fish; must be 35 inches or greater in length including the head, or 28 inches or greater in length with the head removed.

What is the issue you would like the board to address and why? Increased harvest trends in the PWS sport/charter lingcod fishery in recent years, as well as the complexity in regulation enforcement between the North Gulf Coast and PWS.

As charter boat operators, we have witnessed the decline in lingcod numbers over the past several years, most precipitously in the very recent past. This is a very slow maturing species that is susceptible to overfishing, as the current regulations reflect. Unfortunately, there is no formal stock assessment of lingcod in PWS to provide concrete data on population health. However, data provided in Fishery Management Report No. 14-44 on Recreational Fisheries in the PWS Management Area, 2011- 2013 by Mike Thalhauser published November 2014, provides evidence to support our observations and concerns about declining lingcod numbers since 2010. Although the management of lingcod by ADFG is described as using “conservative” regulations by limiting daily limits to two fish, possession limits to four fish, and restricting the length of the fish and the season, these regulations are failing to prevent overfishing and population decline. More conservative regulations are needed to protect the resource, especially with the increased targeting of lingcod by charter operators as restrictions on halibut fishing are expanded. If nothing is changed, our concern is that lingcod numbers will continue to decline to the point that the population may not recover.

Bringing the bag and possession limits in alignment between the North Gulf Coast and PWS would reduce the complexity in regulation enforcement as many vessels from Seward fish in PWS, but land their fish in Seward.

Other options considered were re-defining the season opening date, reducing possession limits to one lingcod, and increasing the size of the fish retained. Each of these options was disregarded as they did not fit with the spirit of the portion of the proposal which seeks to align the bag and possession limits of the North Gulf Coast with Prince William Sound.

PROPOSED BY: Denise M. Hawks (HQ-F17-019)
