



ALASKA CHARTER ASSOCIATION

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North Pacific Fishery Management Council
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May 2020 Emergency North Council Meeting
Agenda Item B2: Request regarding halibut charter measures in 2C and 3A

Dear members of the Council,

The ACA supports relaxing 2020 regulations for the recreational guided halibut sector.

Rationale: The near total loss of the charter fishing season in 2020 requires revisiting guided halibut effort and expected catch as a result of the Coronavirus-19 pandemic. The ACA supports emergency rules to relax restrictions on the recreational guided sector of the halibut fishery. Restore lost fishing opportunity to this vital part of the Alaskan economy. It is the first step to restart the tourism industry and help charter boats make it through to 2021.

We sent out a survey to 600+ charter operators on our mailing list last week. The results are in: the impact of the pandemic, the travel mandates and public concern about air and cruise ship travel have all but zeroed out our industry's 2020 season.

No one is booking new halibut charter fishing trips at this time, and 68% of our respondents report "up to 50% cancellations" so far.

Alaska's first Health Mandates required anglers to quarantine 14 days before fishing. Many of our members are hopeful they will be lifted soon but we have no clear endpoint. Full-service lodges will have a hard time re-opening this year.

Now anglers are allowed to travel in state without quarantine. Six-pack charters want to scratch out a few trips with locals. Even a few trips will make a big difference. Existing regulations prohibit guided anglers from taking more than 4 halibut a year. Rules like this have turned resident anglers away from charter fishing as an option.

Guided angler effort has collapsed in light of cancelled bookings. It would be a pleasant shock if 2020 effort reaches 50% of any five-year average. It would be helpful to rebuild

some of the lost local trade and give an incentive to Alaskans to support their local charter captain.

We do not support rescinding proposed emergency regulations even “when travel mandates are lifted” because the chance of exceeding our catch limit will still be very low. The regulatory process takes time, and we’re crossing out days on the water from the calendar until then. Even if some or all of the mandated travel and quarantine measures are lifted, it will be a long time before many visitors feel comfortable with air travel and have discretionary travel dollars like they had prior to the pandemic.

Charter operators and lodge owners are aware that the pandemic creates challenges for safe operations and public health. No one wants to get a “black eye” from the public by getting identified as the source of a local outbreak. Getting some charter trips going again can help restore public confidence and give operators a chance to adapt to a very different landscape than when 2020 regulations were enacted.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jim Martin".

Jim Martin
Executive Director
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