

## 2018 Recreational Abalone Regulations: TBD

On October 11-12, 2017, in Atascadero, there was a meeting and discussions of proposed changes to recreational abalone regulations for 2018 by the Fish & Game Commission (FGC), the Department of Fish & Wildlife (DFW), and interested public members. An Adoption Hearing on the proposed changes will be held December 6-7, 2017 in San Diego.

### Background

On August 16, 2017, FGC readopted the emergency action reducing the annual recreational limit from 18 to 12 abalone (except for Sonoma County, for which the annual limit remains at 9 abalone) and reduced the recreational fishing season from 7 months to 5 by closing April and November, the first and last months of the regular season. The emergency regulations are set to expire on December 5, 2017. In addition, FGC authorized publishing a notice of its intent to amend regulations for the recreational abalone fishery with proposed management measures more restrictive than the 2017 emergency regulations, due to the lack of significant improvement to the environmental conditions and continued declines in abalone densities and abalone health observed by DFW in 2017. The authorization includes the regulatory option presented by DFW (Option 1) and additional options discussed and requested by FGC at the Aug meeting (Option 2), options that are more restrictive than the 2017 emergency regulations.

### Proposed Changes

DFW submitted the ISOR with the two proposed regulatory options for the recreational red abalone fishery in 2018 as follows:

- **Option 1– Full Fishery Closure**, based on abalone densities below the density trigger for fishery closure specified in the Abalone Recovery and Management Plan (ARMP) (below 0.30 abalone per square meter).

- **Option 2 – Limited Fishery Option**, with four suboptions for limiting the fishery per the request of FGC. The four sub-options can be selected individually or in any combination. Two of the sub-options have ranges from which specific numbers must be selected at the adoption hearing.

Sub-Option A: Re-open Fort Ross for Abalone Fishing

Sub-Option B: Reduce Daily Bag/Possession and Annual Limits

Sub-Option C: Increase Minimum Size Limit to 8 Inches

Sub-Option D: Limit the Number of Report Cards to between 5,000 – 25,000

A draft notice of exemption (NOE) gives FGC notice of DFW's recommendation to rely on a California Environmental Quality Act categorical exemption for this regulation change.

### Significant Public Comments

1. Statement from a fisherman's perspective that the emergency regulations adopted at the Aug 2017 meeting have had little impact on the quality of his take and recommends two suggestions for consideration: (1) increase the minimum size to eight inches since three abalone at seven inches can be taken with little effort and increasing the size will force other fishermen to be more selective; and (2) reduce the daily bag limit to two abalone per day.
2. Suggestion from a fisherman that FGC consider: (1) keeping the abalone fishery open, (2) allowing two abalone per day, (3) limiting to eight abalone per year, and (4) leaving the size at seven inches.
3. Recommendation from a fisherman for no changes to the regulations.
4. Recommendation from a group of scientists and two fishermen that FGC include a proposed harvest control rule in the new red abalone fishery management plan.
5. Recommendation from a fisherman that the 2018 abalone season remain open pending adoption of a new fishery management plan.

### **Recommendation**

**FGC Staff:** Adopt DFW's recommendation to close the recreational abalone fishery, consistent with the ARMP and DFW's findings.

**DFW Staff:** DFW recommends Option 1, to close the recreational abalone fishery. This recommendation is consistent with the ARMP and reflects evidence that the fishery is unsustainable and in rapid decline.