NOAA FISHERIES
Alaska Region

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Regulations Summary and Frequently Asked Questions for Unguided Pacific Halibut Fishing in Alaska

Regulations Summary

This summary applies to unguided sport halibut fishing; that is, anglers who fish for Pacific halibut in Alaska without the services of a charter vessel guide. (Please note that regulations for halibut fishing with a charter vessel guide on a charter vessel may be different than the unguided fishing regulations summarized below.)

Unguided sport halibut fishing regulations include:

- *Sport fishing season*: February 1 to December 31.
- *Daily bag limit*: Two halibut of any size, per day, per person.
- *Possession limit*: Two daily bag limits per person, except an unguided sport halibut angler may exceed the possession limit on a vessel that does not contain sport fishing gear, fishing rods, hand lines, or gaffs.
- *Possession on a commercial fishing vessel*: No sport-caught halibut may be possessed on board a vessel when other fish or shellfish are aboard that are destined for commercial use, sale, trade, or barter.
- *Allowable gear*: A single line with no more than 2 hooks attached or a spear. No other gear is allowed.
- *Filleting halibut*: No person shall possess on board a vessel halibut that have been filleted, mutilated, or otherwise disfigured in any manner, except that each halibut may be cut into no more than 2 ventral pieces, 2 dorsal pieces, and 2 cheek pieces, with a patch of skin on each piece, naturally attached.
- *Sale of sport-caught halibut prohibited*: No sport-caught halibut may be offered for sale, sold, traded, or bartered.
- *Tagged halibut exemption*: Halibut with an external International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) tag are not included in the daily bag limit or possession limit, and can be retained outside of the sport fishing season.
- *Careful release of halibut*: Halibut brought onboard a vessel that are not immediately returned to the sea with a minimum of injury are included in the daily bag limit.

Frequently Asked Questions by Unguided Sport Halibut Anglers

1. **Do I need a fishing license to sport fish for halibut in Alaska?**
   Yes. As an unguided sport halibut angler, you need a sport fishing license issued by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. For more information and to purchase a license online, see: http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=license.main.

2. **What is a daily bag limit?**
   A daily bag limit is the maximum number of halibut a person may take in a calendar day. In 2026, the daily bag limit for unguided sport halibut anglers is two halibut of any size.

This guide summarizes regulations for charter halibut fisheries in Alaska. If you are required to comply with the regulations, you should consult and rely on the actual regulatory text. Please refer to the regulations under 50 CFR 300.61, et seq. and the IPHC regulations at iphc.int/the-commission/fishery-regulations, or contact NMFS at 907-586-7228 or 907-586-7225. Other information is available on the NMFS Alaska Region website at http://fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/resources-fishing/sport-fishing-alaska.

3. **What is a possession limit?**
   A possession limit refers to the maximum number of halibut you can have with you (i.e., posses) on a boat. No person may possess more than two daily bag limits. For example, if you are on a two-day, overnight trip, you may possess up to two daily bag limits on the boat. That means that you may catch and keep up to the daily bag limit on the first day (i.e., two halibut), and catch and keep another daily bag limit on the second day (i.e., two halibut), for a total of four halibut. If the trip were extended to a third day, you would be prohibited from taking or possessing any additional halibut on the third day.

4. **Is there an annual limit on the number of halibut that I can retain from unguided fishing?**
   No. The regulations determine the number of halibut that you can retain daily, and the number of halibut you can have in your possession on board a vessel, but there is no limit on the number of halibut you can retain during the sport fishing season.

5. **Can I unhook a halibut and keep it alive in the water (on a stringer, for example) while I continue fishing and then, if I catch a bigger halibut, release the smaller halibut and keep the bigger one?**
   No. Halibut that are released must be immediately returned to the sea with a minimum of injury to the fish. Halibut not released immediately with a minimum of injury are included in the daily bag limit of the angler who caught the halibut.

6. **If I catch halibut and freeze the fillets onboard my boat, does that halibut count toward my daily bag limit and possession limit?**
   Generally, yes. As noted in the regulations summary above, halibut on a vessel may be filleted into 2 ventral pieces, 2 dorsal pieces, and 2 cheek pieces, with a patch of skin left on each piece. Each piece may be frozen intact on a vessel, but they are included in the daily bag limit and possession limit. The regulations for halibut do not make any exception for frozen fish or fish preserved in any other manner.

   However, as also noted in the regulations summary above, halibut may be possessed on a vessel in excess of the daily bag limit and possession limit if there is no sport fishing gear, fishing rods, hand lines, or gaffs onboard. Among other things, this exception helps persons who wish to transport halibut from one location to another using a vessel.

7. **Can I eat any sport-caught halibut while I'm on my boat?**
   Yes. As noted above, halibut on a vessel may be filleted into no more than 2 ventral pieces, 2 dorsal pieces, and 2 cheek pieces. Under a new regulation adopted in 2023, one dorsal fillet or one ventral fillet from one halibut may be consumed on the vessel. The remaining pieces from that halibut and all other halibut on board must remain on the vessel until they are permanently offloaded.

8. **I'm planning to enter Alaska waters from Canada and/or vice-versa. Can I have halibut on my boat when I enter or leave the United States?**
   Questions regarding international border crossings should be directed to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (https://www.cbp.gov/) and/or the Canada Border Services Agency (https://www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca/menu-eng.html). While you are in Alaska waters, remember that all regulations applicable to fishing for halibut in Alaska apply, irrespective of where any halibut onboard your vessel may have been caught, including the daily bag limit and possession limit.

Do you have other questions?
Please feel free to call for more information:
907-586-7228 or 907-586-7225