

Dear Commissioners,

I was able to attend the WDFW meeting in Port Townsend on March 19 reviewing the proposal to open a portion of Marine Management Area 12 to specific bottom fish angling. Attendance was limited with 7 residents from Brinnon and Quilcene. The meeting was well organized with ample opportunity to discuss and present opinions. I appreciate the consideration of expanded angling considerations for this area. Based on attendance at this meeting it appears that interest is localized as there was an absence of participation by representatives of any other community. Several folks in attendance suggested that there would have been greater participation if the meeting had been held in the communities of Brinnon or Quilcene; of course this is only conjecture.

Rational for the existing closure was to provide protection to fishes susceptible to Low-dissolved oxygen (DO) levels events in reaches affected and to protect unaffected reaches as nursery areas to provide recruitment to areas adversely impacted. During the discussion it was suggested that fish die-offs attributed to low DO have occurred since the closure. Material presented was not sufficient to determine the following issues;

- Locations (reaches) in Marine Unit 12 that had fish kills related to low Do occurred
 - Years and seasons had events been observed
 - Prior and post 2004 closure
- Had effected populations in these areas recovered.
- Is there any evidence that fish populations in the area petitioned to be opened had contributed through migration to effected areas. Would these areas be closed again when localized fish die offs occur?
 - The meeting notice suggested that populations of flat fish have increased significantly in the bays (Dabob and Quilcene) although there was no evidence presented that these bays ever experienced a low DO related fish kill.
- All DO related fish kills were from reaches further south in the Management area. Specific locations were not illustrated during the meeting.

A statement in the meeting notice indicates that” ...populations of flatfish have significantly increased in these bays over the last decade “. However in the meeting it was obvious that specific data for proposed area was lacking or absent for the preceding decades. Population status had determined using extrapolated data from other areas and fisheries. Recent sampling (February) has been completed and it was discussed qualitatively with subjective statements of fish were seen to be of “good size” and “pretty good bio-mass”. Quantitative (metrics) were not available at the meeting and may be available by the April meeting.

- Quantitative data is essential if best management practices are to be employed

- The Stevens Treaties and more importantly subsequent court rulings provide for local native communities to have access to 50% of the harvestable surplus. There has been commercial harvest of the Sound flat fish fisheries and this may occur with opening of a sport fishery specifically in these bays by native communities.
- There were no plans revealed indicating that harvest data would be collected on participation or exploitation rates in this limited area. The contrary was indicated, resources (staff and funds) were not available and that data would be collect with existing processes (possible expansion of existing riving creel and angler questionnaires).
- It was stated that the proposed rule change was not to be limited in duration (evaluation period).

During the discussion period some interesting statements were offered by members of the Brinnon contingent.

- Fishing for flounder currently occurs at the Boy Scout camp and that enforcement currently looks the other way. This comment placed folks in an uncomfortable position at the meeting and certainly posed jeopardy for those the innuendo may address. Apparently the Scouts offer a merit badge for participants that catch, clean, cook, and eat a fish.
- The Brinnon Recreation Committee that initiated the fishery petition (reported to have proxies from over 1000 individuals) do not support the Commission modified fishery as it does not include all the areas requested. A letter from this group was read and delivered to WDFW staff stating nonsupport for the proposed action because of the Commission directed changes to original petition. A peculiar position of all or nothing. Some rational offered included
 - Of particular interest was the area to include all of Dabob Bay and extend up the east side of Toandos Peninsula point to the Hood Canal Bridge. It was difficult to understand why fishing was occurring on one bridge side (area 9) and not the other (area 12).
 - There certainly was insufficient biological data and insufficient area fish die off location data to rationalize an answer.
 - There was a consistent concern that access to the proposed area could prove to be unsafe for some boaters. Launching (2 small inadequate ramps) within the area is restrictive and most anglers would be launching from available sites south in currently closed area. These anglers could be subject to unanticipated winds and associated wave action.

- A recommended a solution would extended the open area to a location on the west bank of the Bay area to include the Scout camp and additional launch ramps.
- One of the participants thought that a 15 fish limit was too generous. There was no harvestable or participation data offered indicating what exploitation rates might be expected.

During the meeting WFSW staff stated that consideration of a flatfish fishery in this area would not have occurred if the Commission had received one. It is also apparent that a reasonable expectation of additional petitions to include expanded harvest areas, fish species, and squid will be submitted at a future time. This will subject management into a position of potentially redundant meetings for differing fisheries and at best, a piece meal approach to fisheries management.

Below are 2 suggested management paths to address the current petition and expected future ones. Both of the options would include enhanced data review, analysis, and collection. There are a myriad of restrictive management tools (season, method, possession limits, catch and release) to be employed supporting angling without adversely impacting target and non-target fisheries in the absence of sufficient data.

- Option A; Accept the current proposal with an extension of southern western edge boundary to include Scouting area (poaching and enforcement allegations), additional launching facilities (safety concerns). This could be coupled with a recommendation to include evaluation of opportunities for expanded harvest areas, fish species, and squid during normal Marine fish Management rule cycle.
- Option B; Reject current proposal for multiple reasons listed below and make commitment to address all fisheries in Area 12 during normal marine rule making process. This will allow more complete analysis of historic, current, and future data on multiple fisheries.
 - Original petitioner has withdrawn support for Commission option
 - Avoid piece meal approach with data supported comprehensive recommendation for harvest area, fish species, and squid for Marine area 12.
 - Include human safety component with related access ingress/egress points.

My personal desire is to have angling opportunities close to home that can be shared with family and friends. I would like these opportunities to be structured based on data and sustainability. By the same token I do not want to have potential opportunities restricted due to decisions made in absence of data, by lack of effort, or available resources.

There is an understandable frustration within the community of anglers that closures initiated in 2004 require constant reevaluation and restrictions should be lifted when conditions support managed harvest.

Good Luck with the decision process,

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