

**PROPOSAL 238**

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

Require all anglers to use deep water release mechanisms when releasing rockfish in Prince William Sound, as follows:

5 AAC 55.022 is amended to read:

**(x) Beginning January 1, 2019, a person sport fishing from a vessel when releasing a species of rockfish shall immediately use a deep water release mechanism to return the fish to the depth it was hooked or to a depth of at least 100 feet. In this subsection, “deep water release mechanism” means a device designed to return a rockfish to the depth of capture, or to a specified depth.**

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** Rockfish are caught in the marine sport fishery throughout Prince William Sound (PWS). Rockfish morphology and physiology makes effective release of rockfish difficult, since survival after release is often reduced by barotrauma (caused by decompression and expansion of gases in the swim bladder) which occurs in rockfish caught in water depths greater than 60 feet. When released at the surface, rockfish often do not have the ability to submerge unassisted. A deep water release mechanism (DWR) is a tool that allows rockfish to be released at depth versus at the surface and significantly increases the likelihood of survival. Under current PWS sport fishing regulations, anglers can use a DWR to reduce mortality of released rockfish, but it is not required.

Recent Board of Fisheries actions in December 2017 reduced the bag limit of nonpelagic rockfish to one fish and repealed the mandatory retention requirement of anglers to retain the first rockfish caught as part of the bag limit of the person originally hooking the fish. These two changes may result in an increase in the number of rockfish released in PWS.

**PROPOSED BY:** Alaska Board of Fisheries

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