

# PROCESSOR ADVISORY GROUP

January 27-29, 199~~6~~<sup>7</sup>

## Second Annual Meeting Report

CHAIR: BLAKE TIPTON; S.M. PRODUCTS

VICE-CHAIR: BRIAN BIGLER; WARDS COVE PACKING COMPANY

### HARVEST ALLOCATIONS

The PAG finds that the staff recommendations for harvest levels can be absorbed by existing markets. Harvest limits in all areas are prudent, with the following exceptions:

#### **Area 2A**

As we recommended last year, we again propose a 30-day season for area 2A: March 15-April 15.

For many years, PAG members buying halibut in area 2A have not bought after the month of April due to the increased incidence of chalky halibut. PAG companies with long histories of purchasing in area 2A, no longer do so due to chalky conditions.

#### **Area 4A and 4B**

An additional 1.0 million pounds, each, should be allocated to areas 4A and 4B. These increases are sought because of the processing capacity existing in those areas, and in view of the very conservative quota recommended by staff relative to other areas. Staff proposed quotas ranging from 75% to 88% of CEY in Areas 2 and 3, but recommended only 35% of CEY in areas 4A and 4B. The PAG recommendations would establish quotas at 48% of CEY.

#### **All Remaining Areas**

The phenomenon of chalky flesh has been examined through an industry survey by the Halibut Association of North America. The incidence of chalky flesh appears during all months of the season, though indications are that more chalky fish appear during September through November. The PAG is unanimous in supporting the statement made at the 1996 Annual Meeting, that is resubmitted here with appropriate editorial changes:

We recommend that the 1997 season be opened on March 15, but closed two weeks earlier than the 1996 season; on November 1. The incidence of chalky halibut is an increasing problem after November 1 for many American and Canadian buyers. There is some evidence that worsening weather during this portion of the season may cause changes in handling patterns that exacerbate the inherent chalkiness. The losses due to chalkiness were substantial in 1996,

primarily during the last two weeks of the season. This phenomenon is pervasive in some areas and leaves a bad impression for wholesalers and the consuming public when faced with this unacceptable quality. These fish are not acceptable to the fresh fish market and some are questionable for the frozen market. American and Canadian processors and fishermen lose marketability of fresh product during this period, and an earlier season closure would alleviate these problems.

## INDUSTRY PROPOSALS

### CHALKY HALIBUT

The PAG brought the issue of chalky halibut flesh to the attention of the IPHC Commissioners during 1996. This flesh condition has caused the rejection of halibut shipments on an increasing frequency by wholesale and retail buyers. We are unaware of any action on our 1996 recommendations. Several PAG member companies responded to requests for assistance by IPHC staff during our present (1997) deliberations. We request that the Commissioners support this effort and direct IPHC staff to review the existing information on chalky flesh, and initiate efforts in 1997 to address a technique for rapid detection of this condition.

### WEIGHMASTERS

There is an urgent need for the adoption of a system in the U.S. for verifying weights as IFQ Halibut is delivered. A similar system is in place in Canada and has been effective in accounting for an IVQ Halibut being brought to the dock by IVQ fishermen. Developing a Weighmaster program is not within the IPHC authority. Nevertheless, we urge that the IPHC strongly recommend the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council develop a Weighmaster program as soon as possible. The PAG suggests the following components of such a program:

1. Employing a person independent of the IFQ seller to observe all fish being off-loaded and weighed, including verifying the tally and entering the IFQ accounting system.
2. This certified Weighmaster would be employed by the buyer and would be present at any IFQ Halibut landing.
3. The Weighmaster certification process should be simple and require only that the person be registered with NMFS or similar agency.
4. The Weighmaster would be strictly an observer and have no authority to enforce regulations.

5. A funding mechanism needs to be developed so that Weighmasters can be certified.

This program guarantees that all poundage is accounted for, and an independent observer will witness any problems.

## **SPORT HARVEST**

### Harvest Survey:

The PAG is unified in the deep concern that the sport harvest in all areas is under-reported and unmonitored. Decreases in salmon available to sport charter organizations in areas 2A and 2B has focused more attention on halibut. Analysis by IPHC staff has indicated that sport harvest in all areas is increasing rapidly; 7.7 million pounds in 1996. Experience, a close proximity with the sport fishing industry, and anecdotal information, challenges the past estimates of halibut harvest by sportfishermen.

We request that the Commissioners direct IPHC staff to engage a qualified statistician to review the analysis of sport harvest (random surveys), and present an assessment of the technique used by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at the 1998 annual meeting.

### Harvest Limits:

Area 3A: There is a proposal before the Commissioners to increase the daily limits and possession limits on sport harvest of halibut in Prince William Sound. The PAG is not supportive of this action on the grounds that such an increase will worsen the developing problems with localized depletion.

The PAG will offer no comments on other sport industry proposals.

Area 2A-B: These stocks should be managed as one population given the indiscernible overlap and free migratory exchange. The IPHC should take steps to combine harvest data from NMFS, DFO, and WDF, to establish daily and possession harvest limits. We suggest a daily limitation of two halibut, with a possession limitation of one daily bag limit. We also recommend a size limitation equal to the commercial harvest: 32 inches in overall length.

## **HALIBUT AQUACULTURE**

The PAG requests that the Commissioners direct IPHC staff to incorporate a report on world halibut production data at future annual meetings.

Production and marketing personnel within PAG companies have direct experience with aquaculture and marketing trends. The full impact created by farmed salmon was not anticipated and is having well-publicized effects on North Pacific processors. Technological advancement in the propagation of halibut by European and South American countries is strikingly similar to salmon efforts only ten years ago.

The financial support of halibut aquaculture in the North Pacific should not be a function of the IPHC. Any considerations for providing scientific funding should not include support of projects that would effectively work to replace the present IPHC constituents.

The PAG has the following reservations concerning the development of halibut aquaculture in North America:

1. The results of these efforts may be used to over-stock natural stocks, and
2. The production of halibut through aquaculture will erode existing markets and grounds prices for wild production.

#### **VESSEL BYCATCH ACCOUNTS**

We recommend the IPHC oppose any bycatch quota program (VBA, IBQ, etc.) until NMFS can conclusively demonstrate:

1. Ability to collect real time bycatch data;
2. A bycatch database that is statistically reliable and acceptable both to NMFS enforcement and NOAA General Council;
3. Additional observer coverage and catch weighing on factory trawlers;
4. A reliable funding source that will sustain a stringent program adequate to maintain system integrity.

#### **TELEPHONE INFORMATION LINE**

A telephone information line similar to that of Canada should be established in the United States to provide processors and fishermen with timely information on fishing effort. This service would necessarily require 24-hour hailing in and hailing out by fishermen. This service would enhance marketing efforts and maximize catch value.

#### **SEABIRD BYCATCH**

The PAG is supportive of any effort to reduce the incidental and unintentional taking of seabirds. PAG members have expressed a willingness to provide their fishermen any device that can be proven effective to reduce this incidental harvest.

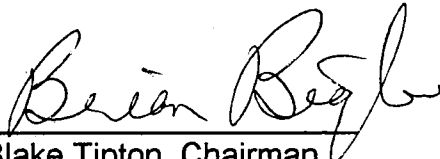
These minutes of the second annual meeting of the Processors Advisory Group are respectfully submitted to the Commissioners and Staff of the International Pacific Halibut Commission.

**Members In Attendance**

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Aero Trading Co. Ltd.	Pacific Seafood Processors Assoc.
Atka Pride Seafoods	Resurrection Bay Seafoods
Halibut Association of North America	Seward Fisheries
Icicle Seafoods	Stamar Fishing Co. Ltd.
Kelliher Fish Co.	S.M. Products Ltd.
Norquest Seafoods	Wards Cove Packing Co.
Norton Sound Seafood Products	YKI Fisheries Inc.
Pelican Seafoods	

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Blake Tipton, Chairman FOR.

