

DRAFT

INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

CONFERENCE BOARD MINUTES

OF THE

SEVENTY-THIRD ANNUAL MEETING
The Empress Hotel, Victoria, British Columbia
January 27-30, 1997

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AGENDA

CHOOSE CHAIRPERSONS - Canada and United States

REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER AND APPROVE ANY NEW REPRESENTATIVES

PRESENTATION ON SEABIRDS

REVIEW AREAS

SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATION FOR ALL AREAS

Commercial

A. Sports

STAFF REGULATORY PROPOSALS

Stock Assessment Improvement

B. Catch Limit Recommendations - Review of Quotas

Area 2A

1. Area 2B
2. Area 2C
3. Area 3A
4. Area 3B

Area 4

Fishing Periods

C. Area 4 Management

D. Proposed Changes to the IPHC Regulations

Log Book

1. Licensing
2. Fish multiple areas
3. Receipt and possession of halibut
4. Bycatch review, Canadian IBQ on trawlers, What can be done in Alaska?

INDUSTRY PROPOSALS

Oregon Coast Charterboat Association: Area 2A Recommendation: quota and division of area.

E. Deep Creek Charterboat Association: Close part of Cook Inlet to large boat commercial fishing.

F. Valdez Charterboat Association: Increase sport fishing bag limit.

G. Five letters of concern from individual fishermen: Area 3B quota increase.

H. Jerry Larson, individual fisherman concern: Quotas in all areas.

I. NMFS/NPFMC: Seabird bycatch (For information purposes only.)

OTHER BUSINESS

Review of 1996 recommendation for 2 fish limit, but allow 3 fish per trip

a. How this affects Canadian regulations

Discussion of international longline organization of dues for Conference Board

Is there still a need for this?

a. Should it be tabled until a need arises?

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Canadian Chair, John Secord
United States Chair, Robert Alverson

ORGANIZATIONS PRESENT

CANADA

Annieville Halibut Association
BC Halibut Longliner's Association
Fishing Vessel Owners of BC
Native Brotherhood of BC
North Pacific Halibut Fisherman's Association
Northern Trollers Association
Pacific Black Cod Association
Pacific Coast Fishing Vessels Owners Guild
Pacific Longline Fisherman's Association
Pacific Trollers Association
Prince Rupert Vessel Owners Association
Southern West Coast Vancouver Island Tribes
Sport Fishing Advisory Board
Sport Fishing Advisory Board - Charter Section
United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union

UNITED STATES

Alaska Draggers Association
Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association
Alaska Trollers Association
Aleutians East Borough
Aleut Corporation
Atka Fishermen's Association
Bering Sea Fishermen's Association
Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation
Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association
Coastal Villages Fishing Cooperative
Deep Creek Charter Boat Association
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific
Homer Charter Association
Kachemak Bay Fisheries Association
Kake Tribal Corporation *Kachemak Charters*
Kodiak Longliner's Association
Kodiak Vessel Owners Association
North Pacific Fishing Association
Norton Sound Economic Development Corp
Oregon Coast Charter Boat Association
Pacific Fixed Gear Association
Petersburg Charter Boat Association
Recreational Fishing Coalition
St. George Fishermen's Association
St. Paul Fishermen's Association
Seattle Fishing Vessel Owners Association
Seafood Producers Coop
Sitka Charter Boat Association
United Fishermen's Marketing Association
Valdez Charter Boat Association
Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association
Washington Recreational Fishing Industry
Association
Washington State Charter Boat Association
Westport Charterboat Association

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**REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER
AND APPROVE ANY NEW REPRESENTATIVES**

The Conference Board added the following Canadian organizations, Southern West Coast Vancouver Island Tribes and B.C. Halibut Longliners Association. The United States section added, Aleut Corporation Fisheries Committee, Westport Charterboat Association, Oregon Coast Charterboat Association, and Ketchikan Marine Charters. There were 15 Canadian representatives to the Conference Board and 33 United States representatives.

IPHC PRESENTATION ON CHARTERS FOR 1997, by Steve Kaimmer

Steve Kaimmer gave a short presentation with regard to the 1997 charters that would be available to the industry. He indicated that there would be 20 charters available for Canadian and United States vessels covering the area from Area 2A to Area 4.

SEABIRD PRESENTATION, by Mark Lundsten

In brief, Mark gave a presentation on his personal experiences in towing bird bags and other devices designed to keep birds away from gear that is being set. The Conference Board unanimously adopted a recommendation to support the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) regulations that require devices to be towed behind longline vessels to apply to the United States halibut fleet in addition to the groundfish fleet off Alaska. The Conference Board requests the commissioners to convey this support to the NPFMC.

REVIEW OF AREAS

The Conference Board recommends no changes in any areas.

There was discussion with regards to Area 4B that in 1995 there were only two trips landed west of Amchitka Island amounting to approximately 50,000 pounds. There area approximately 500 miles of fishable ground to the west of Amchitka and there was expressed concern that this area was not being adequately harvested. There was a suggestion that an open area might be appropriate here if fishing participation remains at this low level. The Conference Board chose to take no action but wished to monitor this area during 1997 and requests that the Commission provide fishing participation statistics in this area for next year's meeting.

AREA 2A

Those who proposed an Area 2A change requested that this be handled under INDUSTRY PROPOSALS.

SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATION FOR ALL AREAS

The Conference Board received a motion from Kodiak to move the opening date for halibut in all IVQ areas to April 1st. The concern expressed for this change was that spawning halibut had been observed on March 15th in the Kodiak area during 1996. There was another concern that the fish had not recovered from spawning and were underweight. The Conference Board heard a presentation from Bill Clark with regards to this debate supporting the staff recommendation of March 15 to November 15. The Conference Board voted with one objection to support the staff recommendations for opening and closing dates.

The rationale given for supporting the staff recommendations was that the Black Cod fishery in Alaska starts March 15 and without a corresponding opening there would be a halibut bycatch problem in that fishery. It was also pointed out that under an IFQ system the vessels that fished in March could take their quota at any time in the open season and they could tailor their fishing operations to avoid spawning halibut.

With regard to Area 2A, the Conference Board supports the current National Marine Fisheries Service framework mechanism that permits the sports season to be established. No changes were requested in Area 2A.

With regards to the commercial season, there was a request to begin the season in mid July with openings approximately every two weeks and for these dates to be worked out with the Commission staff.

STAFF REGULATORY PROPOSALS

STOCK ASSESSMENT IMPROVEMENT

There was discussion about the new stock assessment model and the proposed IPHC staff catch limits for 1997. The Conference Board endorses an annual scientific peer review of the assessment model.

CATCH LIMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference Board supports the staff recommendations in all areas for the 1997 season. The Conference Board voted as follows: 26 United States organizations in favor with 4 opposed, and 12 Canadian organizations in favor with 1 abstaining.

In Area 4B there was some concern expressed about the 3,478,800 pound catch limit that would result from the allocation formula approved by the NPFMC. There is concern within the harvesters that fish in this area that this harvest level will result in localized depletion. The Conference Board requests the commissioners advise the NPFMC that their catch sharing formula needs to be amended as soon as possible so that the catch limits in Areas 4A and 4B would be set by the IPHC. It is important that catch

limits for these areas be determined by biological rather than political considerations. Fixed percentage allocations are not adequately flexible when resource abundance changes within the Area 4 management areas. The upcoming stock surveys will likely show that the catch sharing plan needs adjustment.

Within Area 3B there was expressed concern that the quota proposed by the staff represented too great an increase in a single year. There was a suggestion of a quota of 7 million pounds for which there was very little support. It was pointed out that the catch limit set for Area 3B in 1997 did not represent a large departure from past history. The relationship between the Area 3A and Area 3B proposed harvest level for 1997 is similar to past catch limits for those areas. The IPHC Blue Book on page 29 indicates a CPUE comparable to Area 3A and an increase in stock biomass.

Minority opinion:

The North Pacific Fisheries Association has concerns with the recommended quota in Area 3B. While we concede that the IPHC staff has done a good job in explaining their stock assessment, we feel it prudent that the Commission be suspect of any large spike, up or down, of quota change in one year.

Our concerns may be unwarranted, however, if we are to err, we would rather err on the side of conservation and give it a year to flesh out the discrepancies between past and current assessments.

There were no comments expressed for Areas 3A, 2C, and 2B.

There was a proposal to establish a harvest level of 930,000 pounds in Area 2A. This proposed action failed with a vote of 9 to 9 with 12 abstentions in the United States section and the Canadian section 9 in opposition and 2 abstentions. The staff indicated that Area 2A was the area in which they had the least confidence in their stock assessment work. It was suggested that any increase might come from reductions in the trawl bycatch of adult halibut.

A minority report is as follows:

We believe that the estimated setline CEY of 0.93 million is a safe number scientifically and presents no threat to the long-term health of the resource.

Area 2A is large both geographically and in numbers of fishery participants. A TAC of 0.93 million would go a long way toward meeting social and economic needs without putting the resource in jeopardy.

Recreational representatives from the Washington Recreational Fishing Industry Association, Oregon Coast Charterboat Association, Washington State Charterboat Association, and Westport Charterboat Association support a higher TAC in Area 2A than the staff proposal of 0.7 million.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE IPHC REGULATIONS

Logbooks

The Conference Board voted unanimously to endorse IPHC and National Marine Fishery Service staff to work toward a single logbook for IFQ species for longline gear off Alaska. Currently, there is a duplication of effort with the IPHC and National Marine Fishery Service logbooks. Additionally, the NMFS logbook is designed significantly for trawl information which is not applicable to the longline fishery.

Licensing

The Conference Board unanimously supported the staff's recommendation to discontinue IPHC commercial licenses for the state of Alaska.

Fishing multiple regulatory areas

The Conference Board supported with one in opposition, the staff proposal to allow fishing in multiple areas when an observer is aboard the vessel when required by NMFS. This proposal addresses specifically the needs of those vessels that have quota in Area 4 and Area 3. It does not eliminate the requirement to CLEAR in the appropriate ports.

Receipt and Possession of halibut

The Conference Board supported unanimously the staff request regarding this regulatory change.

BYCATCH REVIEW, CANADIAN IBQ ON TRAWLERS, WHAT CAN BE DONE IN ALSAKA?

The Conference Board strongly requests that the commissioners endorse to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council adoption of a trawl bycatch reduction program similar to the one being used in Canada. It is urged that this action be developed during 1997. There was one in opposition.

The Conference Board requests that the Commission sponsor Erik Wickham as their representative to speak to this issue at the February meeting of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council in Anchorage. It was also suggested that the DFO send a representative to this meeting to explain the Canadian trawl bycatch reduction plan.

There was concern expressed about the 14 million pounds of halibut bycatch mortality in the Alaska trawl fishery and the lack of action taken in the last three years since the Bycatch Reduction Agreement between Canada and the United States. The yield loss from the sublegal bycatch has a significant impact in terms of potential sport and commercial catch in the affected regulatory areas.

INDUSTRY PROPOSALS

OREGON COAST CHARTERBOAT ASSOCIATION

This organization made a request to table their proposal to divide Area 2A until the 1998 IPHC meeting.

DEEP CREEK CHARTERBOAT ASSOCIATION

This organization proposed closure of part of Cook Inlet to the large boat commercial longline fleet. During the discussion it became apparent that a similar problem had developed in Sitka which is being resolved by cooperation of local user groups. It was requested that a similar approach be used to solve the problem in Cook Inlet. They agreed to get together with other local user groups in the Homer area to try and resolve this problem. They withdrew their proposal and will submit the results of their discussions to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

VALDEZ CHARTERBOAT ASSOCIATION

This organization had a similar proposal for Prince William Sound to the Deep Creek recommendation. They agreed to withdraw this proposal.

They then submitted a proposal to increase the sports daily bag limit to 3 halibut and the possession limit to 6. This represents an increase from the current daily bag limit of 2 and the possession of 4. There was considerable discussion on this proposal. It was suggested by the Valdez Charterboat Association representative that to deny this proposal would be an allocative decision by the Conference Board in light of the commercial increase in catch limits. Conversely, it was pointed out that in 1992 when the harvest level was at 65 million pounds the bag limits were at 2 and possession limits at 4, and remained at this level even when the commercial harvest was reduced. The current proposed increase to 66 million pounds did not represent a reallocation between sports and commercial.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is going to make recommendations on the recreational fishery in Alaska this upcoming year. In light of this, some members felt that this was not the proper venue to ask for these changes, as they would probably be resolved by the pending Council decision. It was suggested that this issue has a highly allocative nature and the proposal properly belongs before the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

One of the charterboat operators in Alaska questioned the need to have such a high bag and possession limit. He questioned just how much fish an individual would need to take home from a fishing trip. He related the problems that he had experienced in Area 2A charter operations. In 1996 under current bag and possession limits he was able to sell out all his trips in Washington State.

The Valdez Charterboat Association moved that the Conference Board forward their recommendation to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. Subsequently, the motion was amended that the proposal be submitted with a recommendation that the Conference Board did not endorse it at this time. The resulting vote on the amendment was 12 in favor and 6 in opposition, with 5 abstentions on the United States side and 9 in favor and 2 opposed on the Canadian side. When the amended main motion was voted on it passed 19 to 15 with 1 abstention. The United States voting was 9 in favor and 13 opposed with 1 abstention, and the Canadians voted 10 in favor and 2 opposed.

FIVE LETTERS OF CONCERN FROM INDIVIDUAL FISHERMEN RE 3B QUOTA INCREASE

These submissions were addressed under our debate and presentation for Area 3B harvest levels.

JERRY LARSON, INDIVIDUAL FISHERMAN CONCERN RE OVERALL QUOTA INCREASES

The Conference Board debated this issue under Stock Assessment Improvement.

INCREASE AREA 2B RECREATIONAL CATCH LIMIT

The following motion was proposed by the Sport Fish Advisory Board Representative:

In light of the recommended 35% increase in the allocation of halibut catch in B.C. for 1997, the SFAB recommends to the DFO that the sport fish limits for halibut be changed to 2 per day, 4 possession.

There was an amendment proposed that the possession limit of 4 be changed to a possession limit of 2. The resulting vote was 22 in favor and 6 in opposition with 7 abstentions. The United States vote was 12 in favor, 4 opposed, and 7 abstentions. The Canadian vote was 10 in favor with 2 in opposition.

Justification for the motion was that the recreational sector should get an increase in its possession limit in light of the increase in the commercial catch limits.

Justification for the amendment that the possession limit be dropped to 2 is as follows. An agreement was entered into at the 1996 IPHC annual meeting that the recreational sector would work with DFO and IPHC staff to design a system to provide accurate sports catch statistics to the IPHC coupled with an increase in the 1996 sports possession limit to 3 halibut. By this agreement it was considered that the recreational sector was given a 50% increase in its possession limit, while the commercial sector took no increase in its catch limit. It was felt by the proponents of the amendment to the motion that very little progress had been made on the issue of providing accurate sports catch numbers during the course of 1996. Furthermore, an additional increase in the recreational possession limit would provide little incentive to complete the commitment to obtain accurate data.

The sports sector felt that in good faith they had proceeded with this initiative but due to circumstances beyond their control they had not been able to move fast enough to provide evidence of their progress by the end of 1996.

OTHER BUSINESS

DISCUSSION ON DUES

The Conference Board tabled this until such time as a need should arise to use the funds that would be raised.

The meeting was adjourned.

John Secord, Canadian Chair

Robert Alverson, United States Chair