

INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

CONFERENCE BOARD MINUTES

OF THE

SEVENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL MEETING

The Hotel Captain Cook, Anchorage, Alaska

January 26-29, 1998

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AGENDA

- I. CHOOSE CHAIRPERSONS - Canada and United States
- II. REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD ROSTER AND APPROVE ANY NEW REPRESENTATIVES
- III. REVIEW AREAS
- IV. REVIEW QUOTAS
- V. STAFF REGULATORY PROPOSALS

1. Catch Limit Recommendations

- a. Area 2A
- b. Area 2B
- c. Area 2C
- d. Area 3A
- e. Area 3B
- f. Area 4A
- g. Area 4B
- h. Areas 4C-D-E

2. Fishing Periods

- a. Area 2A
- b. Areas 2B through 4

3. Miscellaneous Recommendations

- a. Sport charter licenses in British Columbia and Alaska
- b. Need for the present closed area in the Bering Sea
- c. Official logbooks

- VI. INDUSTRY PROPOSALS

1. Central Council, Juneau, AK; Edward K. Thomas
2. Magic Fish Company, False Pass, AK; Buck Laukitis
3. Powder River Tackle Co., Baker City, OR; Phil Simonski
4. F/V Pelican, Alaska; Kathy Frost
5. Dept. of Fisheries & Oceans, Ottawa, ON; Beart Foulds
6. Norton Sound Economic Dev. Corp., Anchorage, AK; Eugene Asicksik
7. Letter from Jonathan Pollard
8. Oregon Coast Charterboat Association Representative
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- VIII. OTHER BUSINESS

1. Lip-damaged Halibut
2. Ten Percent Proposal
3. Trawl Bycatch Mortality

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John Secord, Canadian Chair
Robert Alverson, United States Chair

ORGANIZATIONS PRESENT

CANADA

Annieville Halibut Association
Halibut Advisory Board
North Pacific Halibut Fishermen's Association
Northern Halibut Producer's Association
Pacific Black Cod Association
Pacific Coast Fishing Vessels Owners Guild
Pacific Longline Fisherman's Association
Pacific Trollers Association
Southern West Coast Vancouver Island Tribes
Sport Fishing Advisory Board
Steveston Halibut Association

UNITED STATES

Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association
Alaska Sportfish Council
Alaska Sportfishing Association
Aleutians East Borough
All States Halibut Fishermen
Alutiiq Islands Fisherman's Association
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
False Pass Fisheries Development
Fishing Vessel Owners Association
Homer Charter Association
Independent Halibut Fishermen
Kachemak Bay Fisheries Association
Kake Tribal Corporation
Kenai River Professional Guide Association
Kodiak Longliner's Association
Kodiak Vessel Owners Association
Makah Fisheries Management
North Pacific Fisheries Association
Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation
Pacific Fixed Gear Association
Petersburg Vessel Owners Association
St. George Fishermen's Association
St. Paul Fishermen's Association
Seafood Producers Coop
Sitka Charter Boat Association
Tribal Government of St. Paul
United Fishermen's Marketing Association
Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association
Washington Recreational Fishing Industry Assoc.

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

The Conference Board approved thirty-five United States fishing organizations and eleven Canadian fishing organizations to make up the 1998 Conference Board. The membership is as listed above.

REVIEW OF AREAS

The Conference Board had no proposed changes of areas. The discussion with regards to an area north of Area 4D is taken up under industry proposals.

CATCH LIMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference Board entertained a motion proposed by a United States delegate to keep the harvest levels for 1998 in all regulatory areas the same as they were in 1997. The United States industry position voted 11 in favor of this and 19 opposed with 1 abstention. The Canadian industry delegation voted 11 to 0 in favor of the motion. Due to a significant split in the recommendations between the US industry and Canadian industry, the Chairman chose to entertain further action from the U.S. industry for a consensus on their part. It should be pointed out that the U.S. and Canadian vote for status quo would have been twenty-two in favor, and nineteen opposed, with one abstention. Bob Ward, Doag Ogden, Mike Bethers, Keith Greba, Mel Ericksoin, and Tim Evers requested that this be brought to the attention of the Commission.

Ultimately, it was proposed that the following harvest levels be recommended in their respective regulatory areas: 2A 820,000 lbs.; 2B 13,000,000 lbs.; 2C 10,500,000 lbs.; 3A 26,000,000 lbs.; 3B 12,000,000 lbs.; 4A 3,500,000 lbs.; 4B 3,500,000 lbs.; and 4D, C, and E 4,000,000 lbs. This represents a total of 73,320,000 lbs. This was approved by a vote of twenty-two to twelve from the U.S. section, and ten to one on the Canadian section.

The Canadian section of the Conference Board supported this proposal because it was felt that this was the best possible compromise that could be reached.

This compromise came about after considerable lively discussion. The rationale in Areas 2B, 2C, and 3A, for the proposed harvest levels, is that the representatives from these specific areas felt that the stocks continued to improve, but a more cautious increase should be granted than proposed by the staff. There is concern that the model being used for these areas is still relatively new, and that the International Review Panel with regard to the model, recommended a cautionary approach. The Conference Board endorsed the staff recommendation for Area 2A.

The Area 3B recommendation represents a 33% increase over the 1997 harvest which is considerably less than the staff recommendation. It is recognized both by the staff and the industry that this area has been under harvested for the past several years. The Conference Board recommends that cautionary incremental increases in the harvest levels should be considered for this area. It should be remembered that this area's catch limit was increased by over 100% in 1997.

The Area 4A harvest level has been proposed to be increased from 2,940,000 lbs. to 3,500,000 lbs. This raise is considerably less than the 90% increase proposed by the staff. The industry representatives that fish in this area believe that there has been some increase in harvestable levels but not to the degree suggested by the staff's proposal. There is a concern that the use of CPUE relative to square nautical miles of habitat has not had enough research to determine if the fish density per square nautical mile is accurate. The additional survey work that is anticipated should reveal a more complete answer to this for future staff recommendations. In Area 4B, it was felt that we should leave the harvest levels virtually unchanged at 3,500,000 lbs. The Conference Board had similar concerns with the development of the proposed staff recommended harvest level in Area 4B as they did with Area 4A.

Areas 4D, C, and E reflect a million pound increase over the staff recommendation. The staff analysis for age and length suggest a potential harvest range between 13,200,000 and 18,600,000 lbs. in this area. It is felt that this area can withstand a modest increase to 4,000,000 lbs.

There was some discussion that the Conference Board should recommend a total increase in harvest levels and have that amount proportionately assigned based on the staff recommendations. This option created a problem with increases in Areas 4A and 4B and was not pursued.

FISHING PERIODS

Area 2A

Conference Board members have recommended a later starting date. The reason for this is that the first opening is closer to the coastal sablefish season. The dates are as follows: July 22, August 12, August 26, September 9, September 23.

Areas 2B through 4

The Conference Board discussed the possibility of having an earlier opening for halibut, however, the Conference Board took no direction. In brief, the discussion included the positive aspects of moving more fish on the fresh fish market, but there were problems on the U.S. side with sequential openings for sablefish. There was also a concern about halibut further to the west being still in the spawning stage.

MISCELLANEOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Sport charter licenses in British Columbia and Alaska

The Conference Board recommends to the Commissioners that the requirement for British Columbia sport charter licenses be dropped beginning in 1998. However, the Alaska sport charter industry has requested that these licenses be required for one additional year in Alaska. It was felt that keeping the license requirement for 1998 may assist the charter industry in determining some minimum qualification standards for participation off of Alaska. Currently, there is no license that designates between salmon and/or halibut charter operations and keeping the license requirement for one additional year could assist in determining eligibility for participation off of Alaska.

Need for the present closed area in the Bering Sea

The Conference Board recommends that there be no change nor elimination of this juvenile, closed area. It is understood that other fishing operations are conducted in this area with accompanying juvenile bycatch. This should not be a rationale to increase juvenile mortality in this area by the hook and line industry. Further study should be presented and include the degree of mortalities by all gear types.

Official logbooks

The Conference Board recommends that all commercial halibut vessels, regardless of size, be required to keep a mandatory log book. The reason for including vessels less than 25 foot in length to be required to fill out log books, is that there is a concern by the sport charter fleet over near shore depletion of halibut stock. It is felt that the smaller halibut vessels have a greater impact on the near shore area. This recommendation includes the incidental halibut caught in the salmon troll fishery in area 2A.

INDUSTRY PROPOSALS

Central Council, Juneau, AK; Edward K. Thomas

The Conference Board took no action with regard to the Central Council resolution because it dealt with subsistence issues and it was felt that this should be referred to the State of Alaska legislature which is currently addressing this issue.

Magic Fish Company, False Pass, AK; Buck Laukitis

The Conference Board's preferred action is that the IPHC staff develop language that accommodates the landing of fish in False Pass. If need be, the boundary could be moved to accommodate this. It is not the intention of the proposal to increase the commercial fishing area.

Powder River Tackle Co., Baker City, OR; Phil Simonski

The Conference Board took up this proposal under harvest guidelines in area 2A.

F/V Pelican, Alaska; Kathy Frost

The Conference Board has discussed this issue at length in previous meetings, and tried to come up with some accommodation for shark bitten halibut. It was pointed out that the IFQ program in the United States does have a prohibition on processing for most of its halibut, which could further complicate this issue. The Conference Board has no favorable recommendation at this time.

Dept. of Fisheries & Oceans, Ottawa, ON; Bert Foulds

The Conference Board deferred this issue to discussion between DFO and IPHC staffs.

Norton Sound Economic Dev. Corp., Anchorage, AK; Eugene Asicksik

The Conference Board recommends that the IPHC develop a charter for the area north of 4D in the Chukchi Sea to determine if any concentration of halibut exists to warrant the establishment of a new regulatory area.

Letter from Jonathan Pollard

The Conference Board recommended that the IPHC regulation be changed to accommodate the proposal by Tuck Donnelly. This would be limited to 50,000 lbs. of halibut per year at the two specified Dutch Harbor plants and would be in effect for a term of three years.

The Conference Board took no action on the subsistence issue in area 4E.

Oregon Coast Charterboat Association Representative

The Conference Board addressed this proposal in harvest guidelines for area 2A.

Bering Sea Fishermen's Association

The Conference Board has addressed this issue under the Norton Sound Economic Development request.

Toksook Bay Traditional Council

The Conference Board took this issue up under harvest guidelines for areas 4D, C, and E.

OTHER BUSINESS

Lip-damaged Halibut

There was a request for information from IPHC staff on halibut with prior hook injuries in the area around Kodiak Island. There is a concern that the directed codfish fishery may be causing some damage to incidentally caught halibut.

Ten Percent Proposal

A proposal was put forward to limit any future commercial harvest level increases to no more than ten percent per year for a period of three years. This was rejected on the U.S. side by a vote of twenty-five to six and endorsed on the Canadian side by a vote of eight to one with two abstentions. The United States concerns were that if significant bycatch reductions could be created in the Bering Sea, the savings could not be passed on to the commercial fleet operating there. It was also felt that if the projected staff increases were found to be valid, then the affected areas would be deprived economically by this rule.

The Canadian section of the Conference Board felt that the new model for stock analysis was not proven yet, and that a three-year period of low harvest level increases was needed to allow survey data to corroborate the model.

Trawl Bycatch Mortality

The Conference Board is frustrated with the inaction of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council in developing a vessel incentive plan to reduce trawl bycatch of halibut and its associated mortality. The Conference Board requests an explanation of why the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council has not acted on this serious matter.

Robert Alverson, United States Chair

/ John Secord / Canadian Chair