

**Conference Board Report
90th Annual Meeting
January 13th – 17th 2014
Seattle, Washington**

United States	United States Continued
Alaska Charter Association	United Fishermen's Marketing Association
Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association	United Cook Inlet Drift Association
Alaska Trollers Association	West Brothers Group
Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association	Westport Charter Association
Aleut Corp	
APICDA Vessel Inc.	
Area 4 Harvesters Alliance	Canada
Adak Commercial Development Corp	Annieville Halibut Association
Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association	Area F Troll Association
Coastal Villages Regional Fund	A'Tlegay Fisheries Society
Coastal Trollers Assn.	BC Halibut Longline Fisherman's Assoc.
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific	BC Longline Fisherman's Association
Edmonds Veteran Independent Longliners	BC Wildlife Federation
Fishing Vessel Owners Assoc	BC Tuna Fisherman's Association
Freezer Longliner Coalition	Canadian Sablefish Association
Halibut Coalition	Council of Haida Nation
Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe	Ditidaht First Nation
Juneau Charter Boat Operator Assoc.	F.A.S.
Homer Charter Association*	Gulf Trollers Assn.
K Bay Fishermen Association	Halibut Advisory Board
Ketchikan Guided Sport Fish Assn.	Hook and Line Groundfish Association
Kodiak Vessel Owners Association	North Pacific Halibut Fisherman's Assn
Lower Elwa	Northern Halibut Producer's Assoc.
Lummi Indian Nation	Northern Trollers Association
Makah Fisheries Management	Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council
North Pacific Fisheries Association	Pacific Coast Fishing Vessel Owners Guild
Petersburg Vessel Owners Association	Pacific Trollers Association
	PHMA
Prince William Sound Charter Boat Assoc	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - Main
Quiliute Tribe	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - South
Quinault Indian Nation	Steveston Halibut Association
Seafood Producers Coop	Sport Fishing Institute of BC
SE Alaska Fishermen's Alliance	South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition Society
SE Alaska Guides Association	UFAWU
Sitka Halibut & Blackcod Marketing Assoc	Vancouver Island Longline Assoc
St. Paul Fishermen's Association	
Tribal Government of St. Paul	

*Present but voting as representative for Alaska Charter Association

REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER

The United States section accredited 40 organizations for participation in the 2014 Conference Board proceedings.

The Canadian section accredited 28 organizations for participation for the 2014 Conference Board proceedings. (3 of these were new member organizations)

SELECT CHAIRPERSONS FROM CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

United States selected Linda Behnken as Chair.

Canada selected Chuck Ashcroft as Co-Chair.

CONFERENCE BOARD SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS TO IPHC

A. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALASKAN, CANADIAN WATERS, and Washington Treaty Nations:

The Conference Board recommends through two **unanimous votes** an opening date of March 08, 2014 and a closing date of November 15, 2014.

The following are comments from the Canadian and U.S. delegates regarding season dates:

U.S. (Alaska) indicated a strong recommendation for as long as season as possible, with the season opening **NO LATER THAN** March 08; however, many preferred an earlier opening of March 1 to maximize fresh market opportunities, distribute effort, reduce delivery conflicts with the herring fishery, and minimize interactions with Sperm whales. Season end date of Nov 15 would extend the season to maximize fishing opportunity and fresh market prices.

The Nov 15 closing date will maximize opportunity for fishermen in remote Bering Sea areas to fully prosecute the fishery.

Washington Treaty tribes also indicated their support for the March 8 opening.

Canada: prefers an opening date of March 22 which falls on a Saturday. This opening date enhances sales for the beginning of the season and is also a date that coincides with good tides, while allowing spawning migrations to complete. Canada is willing to accept a March 8 opening as a compromise, but strongly stated opposition to a March 15 opening, due to tidal issues. The big tides render some areas unfishable.

B. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATION 2A

The Conference Board supports the seven staff recommendations for the Area 2A commercial openings which begin on June 25 as per:

“For the Area 2A directed commercial fishery, the Staff recommends an opening pattern similar to 2013, and to the results of the survey IPHC conducted in 2009 of the directed fishery licenses holders with the first fishing period occurring the last week of June. Therefore the recommendation is for a series of 10-hour periods, with fishing period limits including: June 25, July 9, July 23, August 6, August 20, September 3, and September 17. The size of the fishing period limits will be determined when more information is available on fleet participation and the fishery will close when the catch limit is taken.” Blue book P. 167

CATCH SHARING PLANS: Areas 2A, 2B, 2C/3A and 4CDE

Area 2A Catch Sharing Plan

The Conference Board adopted the IPHC recommendation to endorse the CSP developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) as described on page 167 of the 2014 Blue Book.

Note: The CB considers the 2B and 4CDE CSP to be domestic allocation issues that are the purview of their respective countries and should not be addressed by the IPHC

Area 2C/3A Catch Sharing Plan

Conference board **unanimously adopted** the halibut catch sharing plan for Areas 2C and 3A. CB members noted that the allocations have been established by the NPFMC and management measures identified by a guided sport stakeholder group to ensure allocations are not exceeded while minimizing disruption to the guided sport industry. The recommendations include clear direction for adjusting guided sport management measures if the Commission establishes Area 2C or 3A catch limits above or below the blue line.

The guided sport allocations are:

- Area 2C: 18.3% of the combined commercial and charter catch limit.
- Area 3A: 18.9 % of the combined commercial and charter catch limit.

Management measures, including bag and slot limits, adopted by the CB can be found on page 177 of the 2014 Bluebook.

One guided sport representative voiced some concern about the existing process, which requires management measures be identified before an Area 2C/3A catch limit is set, but supported the process at this point. Strong support for the process established by the Catch Sharing Plan was voiced by other Area 2C and 3A representatives.

CATCH LIMIT DECISIONS

The Conference Board majority adopted the following catch limits for 2014

2A	0.99 million pounds
2B	7.04 million pounds *
2C	4.75 million pounds
3A	10.73 million pounds
3B	3.025 million pounds
4A	1.01 million pounds
4B	1.13 million pounds
4CDE	<u>1.93 million pounds</u>
Total	30.605 million pounds

*The motion to amend the Area 2B catch limit from the blue line (4.98 million pounds) to 7.04 million pounds was supported unanimously by Canada but failed on the US side 12 in support, 16 opposed, 8 abstentions.

Catch Limit Recommendations and discussion:

A motion was made and seconded to adopt the 2014 Blue line catch limits for all areas. The maker of the motion cited the need to establish scientifically-based catch limits that foster rebuilding into the future. The motion maker further emphasized that under the coast-wide assessment and given current assumptions about migration, what happens in one area affects all areas. Speakers further noted that the model continues to overestimate abundance, although not by much, indicating the retrospective bias may not be completely resolved.

This motion was subsequently amended to establish catch limits that differed from the blue line in every area.

Rationale put forward by each area to support their recommendations

Area 2A: CB adopted 990,000 lbs FCEY

Proponents of the motion maintain that the survey trend is relatively stable as well as showing a considerable increase in the 2013 commercial WPUE; assert catch limit decrease is not justified for 2014. CB members further noted that the survey is unreliable in this area because halibut are not evenly distributed. The IPHC recognizes the weakness of the survey in this area and intends to survey new grounds within and approximate to Area 2A in 2014.

Bycatch in 2A has been significantly reduced through trawl rationalization.

With such a small fishery there is a huge socioeconomic difference between the 720,000 lb blue line catch limit proposal and the 990,000 requested.

2A sectors assert that the existing harvest policy does not fit 2A.

The 2A area of the coast covers the 3 states of Washington, Oregon, and California and includes a complicated CSP dependant on the quota requested. The long standing

elaborate CSP which is managed cooperatively with yearly adjustments to ensure all sectors remain within their TAC is jeopardized if the catch limit falls below this 990,000 pound level. 2A is at the far southern end of the range and risks taken in this area affect no other areas.

Motion carried--US voted 25 in support, 9 opposed, and 3 abstentions; Canada voted unanimously in support.

Area 2B: Simple majority of the CB adopted 7.04 million pounds FCEY

As expressed in previous years, the Canadian stakeholders continue to reject catch limits for 2B based on the current harvest policies (e.g. assumptions on harvest rates, apportionment, migration and bycatch impacts etc.) as the stakeholders believe IPHC has consistently underestimated halibut abundance in the Canadian Zone. There is a need to put the current harvest policy into perspective. Some of the lowest catch limits are proposed since the 1970s, yet biomass is approximately 200% higher than it was coast-wide in the 1970s.

As recognized by the Science Review Board (SRB), the method currently used to apportion exploitable biomass is also serving as an allocation exercise. However, apportionment and allocation are distinct exercises. Apportionment is a process for estimating the proportion of the exploitable biomass (EBio) in each regulatory area. Allocation is a process for allocating allowable catch between the two parties to the treaty. This extends beyond the realm of science to the parties' objectives for sharing the resource. The allocation approach that informs the catch advice for Canadian and US areas is a bilateral policy discussion that must be led by Commissioners.

Area 2B survey WPUE continues to trend upward, at historically high levels (with exception of 1995-1997 thought to be when the 1987 year class moved through and significantly increased WPUE, which also occurred in Area 2C), has recovered from downward trend that bottomed out in 2006 and 2007 – groundfish integration introduced in 2006 – and has been trending upward since. (BB page 62)

Area 2B commercial WPUE continues to trend upwards and is at record levels compared to the past few decades (BB page 64). Canada has not accepted apportionment but if those metrics are used, EBio in Areas 2B increased from last year (BB page 160) and realized harvest rate will decline from 31% to 29% if catch limit remains as 7.04 M lbs (BB page 154)

Total removals in Area 2B directed and bycatch fisheries are well documented with independent at-sea monitoring programs. There is much less uncertainty associated with Area 2B removals.

Area 2B has addressed bycatch, with significant reductions – trawl fleet bycatch is 10-20% of what it was in the early to mid-1990s and since 2006 commercial groundfish hook & line and trap bycatch has been zero, and is now part of the directed commercial catch as part of groundfish integration. Like other IPHC regulatory areas, Area 2B has

taken significant cuts over the past few years; there has been a 49% decline in total removals in Area 2B since 2006 (BB page 68).

For these reasons Canada recommends the 7.04 million lb Commercial/recreational FCEY.

Majority of U.S. representatives supported the **blue line catch limits** for Area 2B. Members noted that while Canadian fishermen cite high catch rates, the area is well surveyed, survey WPUE is down 10%, and the status quo recommendation does not acknowledge this downward trend from last year. U.S. members opposing the Area 2B catch limit adopted by Canada cited the lack of a clear path to Area 2B catch limit reductions; i.e., status quo despite ongoing stock changes was not supportable.

Area 2C: CB adopted 4.75 million pounds (combined commercial and guided sport catch limit)

Motion cited Table 9 on page 153 of Bluebook. CB representatives noted that the survey WPUE in 2C is the highest of any area and both survey and commercial catch rates have trended upwards for 3 years. Area 2C was the first area to face substantial reductions (76% over five years) and the only area with a catch limit below the blue line in 2013. Members pointed out that the bycatch and habitat impact associated with trawling had been eliminated from 2C. Some CB members believed 2C catch limit should be higher; some 2C groups opposed setting the catch limit above the blue line, stating a firm commitment to resource conservation, confidence in the science, and the importance of supporting rebuilding. These 2C groups look to rebuild the stock and stabilize at a higher level. One guided sport representative spoke in favor of the increase, stating the inch added to the lower bound of the slot limit at the increased catch limit level would be significant.

Motion carried—US vote: 22 in support, 11 opposed, 2 abstentions; Canada vote: 22 in support, 0 opposed, 3 abstentions.

Area 3A: CB adopted 10.73 million pounds (combined commercial and guided sport catch limit)

Motion cited Table 9 on page 153 of Bluebook. Conference board members acknowledged that while 3A indices are declining, the magnitude of the cuts imposed by the blue line were not acceptable given the status quo catch limits set for other areas. Members stated Areas 3A/3B should not solely bear the burden of conservation, and that all areas should rise and fall together. Some members stated that fishing remains relatively stable; others stated that catch rates had declined and the resource should be protected for the future. CB members opposing the motion expressed concern about the magnitude of declines in Area 3A, the significant change in size at age in Area 3A, and the need to “get below” the decline to rebuild stocks.

Motion carried US vote 21 in support, 13 opposed, 2 abstentions; Canada vote: Abstain

Area 3B: Conference Board adopted 3.025 million pounds

First Motion for 3B catch limit from Table 9 on page 153 of the Bluebook failed.

CB members supporting and opposing the 3.025 million pound catch limit stated many of the same reasons listed above from the Area 3A discussion. Some CB members stated they came to the meeting prepared to support the blue line catch limits for all areas, but objected to the inconsistency of deviating from the blue line in some areas while adhering to the blue line in other areas. CB members in opposition remain concerned about the need to reduce pressure on stocks and foster rebuilding. Opposing CB members also cited the downstream effects of 3A/3B harvest above the blue line and the need to reduce bycatch.

Motion carried--US vote 18 in support, 13 opposed, 3 abstentions; Canada vote: 20 in support, 1 opposed, 3 abstained

Area 4A: Conference Board adopted 1.01 million pound catch limit

Motion cited Table 9 on page 153 of Bluebook. Proponents supported the 1.01 million pound catch limit to be consistent with catch limits set above the blue line in all other areas and to stair step in reductions. Halibut in 4A/4B may be a different stock that moves west rather than east. Opponents believe declining WPUE in both the survey and the commercial fishery justify blue line catch limit reductions.

Motion passed- US: 15 in support, 12 opposed, 9 abstain; Canada vote: abstain

Area 4B- CB adopted 1.13 million pound catch limit

Supporters of the motion identified the significant increase in the commercial CPUE, and the limited extent of the survey in Area 4B. Proponents requested stair-step reductions in catch limits to buffer impact on area fishermen. Fishermen noted halibut in this area may be part of a different stock; harvest in this area has minimal impact on the productivity of the stock in other areas. Increase over blue line translates to a small amount of halibut but significant socioeconomic impact to area fishermen.

Motion passes US: 18 in support, 10 opposed, 7 abstain; Canada 25 in support, 1 abstain

Area 4CDE: Conference Board adopted 1.93 million pounds catch limit

Area representatives noted that total biomass in these areas is at or near all time high level, with abundant small fish poised to recruit into the fishery. Area 4CDE includes 55% of the total halibut grounds (see page 76) but only 10.6% of the apportioned exploitable biomass. In some sub-areas, 60% of the commercial catch comes from grounds shallower or deeper than the grounds surveyed by the IPHC. WPUE in the commercial fishery is 4-5 times higher than WPUE in the survey, indicating the survey is missing productive areas. Most small boats use snap on gear, which is not included in the commercial WPUE. Bering Sea communities are highly dependent on the halibut

fishery. Proponents of the higher catch limit objected to the 67% reductions imposed by the blue line catch limit. CB members stated firm support for reducing bycatch in Area 4 as a more appropriate approach to limiting removals.

Motion passed US vote--25 in support, 9 opposed, 3 abstentions: Canada—26 in support

IN CLOSING COMMENTS ON CATCH LIMITS: Some CB members expressed significant concern that catch limits differed too far from the blue line to halt stock decline and promote rebuilding. Members who expected to support the blue line supported higher limits in all areas once amendments passed in support of catch limits above blue line in other areas. Some felt this thinking was flawed and placed the stock at too much risk. CB members asked for a decision table that evaluates the risk associated with the catch limits. One CB member believes the coast-wide assessment places the stock at too much risk since no individual area can be closed once minimum thresholds are reached. Other CB members believed the catch limits adopted by the conference board are conservative, given their assessment of stocks, and that decisions were made in full awareness of the risk presented by the IPHC staff in the decision tables.

OF NOTE: The conference board's intent is that the total FCEY be a sum of the area FCEYs recommended by the conference board and that no increase in one area cause a decrease in another area.

Catch limit comments by stakeholders, both written and oral, were incorporated into the discussions and decision making process during this Conference Board session

PROPOSED CHANGES TO IPHC REGULATIONS

NPFMC Regulatory proposals:

A. Retention of halibut caught incidentally in sablefish pots in Area 4A

The CB supports development of a regulatory amendment to allow retention of halibut caught incidentally in sablefish pots in area 4A.

B. Area 2C/3A sport fishing regulations for the charter vessels

This was addressed in the discussion above in the 2C/3A CSP

INDUSTRY REGULATORY PROPOSALS 2014

1. Abundance based Management of all halibut removals:

Motion made to adopt abundance-based management proposal. CB members questioned the capability and authority of the IPHC to assess and manage the U26 halibut component of the stock, since any assessment would rely on trawling (which the CB opposes) and removals are in the federal groundfish fisheries (which the IPHC does not control). One

CB member identified that the proposal would undermine the new Area 2C/3A Catch Sharing Plan. After this discussion, the maker of the motion decided to withdraw the motion. No further action was taken by the CB.

CONFERENCE BOARD DISCUSSION ITEMS

MISCELLANEOUS

Conference Board (RoP) discussions:

After some informed discussion, several revisions were suggested to the Draft RoP. The draft RoP has been referred back to the committee to resolve some outstanding procedural issues before formalizing a final version.

MSAB discussion:

Steve Martell and the six Conference Board individuals who are involved in the MSAB led a discussion on this process as it relates to the Conference Board. After discussing the challenges facing the MSAB (timelines, infancy of the process, how the MSAB fits into the process, objectives, and inclusion of all sectors) the Conference Board has a better understanding and confidence that the ideas and concerns of CB members will be adequately represented at the MSAB. A MSAB update will be placed on the agenda for the 2015 CB meeting.

PRESENTATIONS

Conference board received presentations from NMFS on the Alaska Observer Program, and from the Bycatch Working Group.

Initial Conference Board comments on Alaska Observer Program and Bycatch:

The Conference Board is disappointed with lack of progress on addressing halibut bycatch in some regulatory areas. One important role of IPHC is to work with the national fisheries management agencies to make recommendations and encourage them to address the bycatch of halibut in the fisheries they manage, since bycatch affects the IPHC's ability to properly manage halibut and meet conservation and economic objectives.

The Commission has made effective recommendations in the past that have been implemented with positive results (e.g., 1991 Bycatch Working group which led to bycatch limits that were introduced in Canada and led to significant reductions in halibut bycatch by the Area 2B groundfish trawl fleet). The Conference board continues to support expanded observer coverage in high bycatch fisheries through a combination of at-sea observers, electronic monitoring, and dockside verification.

While it appears the new observer program has taken steps to address the observer deployment issue, it is difficult at this time to evaluate the success of the program. Based on the information provided, it is unclear how NMFS can assert that the new Alaska observer program is providing statistically better bycatch estimates. Until a coefficient of variance (CV) is identified, these claims are unsubstantiated.

The Conference Board expects more substantive actions to reduce bycatch, and a more detailed report on the Alaska observer program.
