

IPHC-2017-CB087-R

Conference Board Report
93st IPHC Annual Meeting
January 23th – 27th 2017
Victoria, BC

United States	Canada
Adak Community Development Corp.	A`Tlegay Fisheries Society
Alaska Charter Association	Amalgamated Conservation Society
Alaska Travel Association	Annieville Halibut Association
Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association	Area F Troll Association
Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association	BC Commercial integrated Groundfish Society
Aleut Corp	BC Halibut Longline Fisherman's Assoc.
APICDA Vessel Inc.	BC Longline Fisherman's Association
Area 3B /4A False Pass	BC Tuna Fisherman's Association
Area 4 Harvesters Alliance	BC Wildlife Federation
Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association	Canadian Sablefish Association
Coastside Fishing Club	Central Coast Indigenous Resource Alliance
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific	Esquimalt Anglers Assn.
Edmonds Veteran Indev Longliners	FAS Seafoods
Fishing Vessel Owners Assoc. (FVOA)	Ditidaht First Nation
Freezer Longliner Coalition	Gulf Trollers Association
Halibut Coalition	Council of Haida Nation
Homer Charter Association	Halibut Advisory Board
Jamestown S'Kallum Tribe	Hook and Line Groundfish Association
Humbolt Area Saltwater Anglers	Huu-Ay-Aht First Nation
Kruzof Fisheries	Island Marine Aquatic Working Group
K Bay Fishermen Association	Kyuquot/Cheklesah First Nation
Lower Elwa	Northern Halibut Producer's Assoc.
Lummi Indian Nation	Northern Trollers Association
Makah Tribe	North Pac Halibut Fisherman's Assn
Native Village of Mekoryuk	Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council
North Pacific Fisheries Association	Pacific Coast Fishing Vessel Owners Guild
Petersburg Vessel Owners Association	Pacific Trollers Association
Point no Point Treaty Council	PHMA
Port Gambel S'Klallam Tribe	Sidney Anglers Association
Pudget Sound Anglers	Sport Fishing Advisory Board – Main
Quiliute Tribe	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - South
Quinault Indian Nation	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - North
Recreational Alliance N. California	Steveston Halibut Assoc.
Recreational Fishing Alliance-Oregon Chapter	Sport Fishing Institute of BC
Seafood Producers Coop	South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition
SE Alaska Fishermen's Alliance	Ucluelet First Nation

Seward Charter Boat Association
 Sitka Charter Boat Owners Association
 Sitka Halibut & Blackcod Marketing Assoc.
 Skokomish Indian Tribe
 St. Paul Fishermen's Association
 Tribal Government of St. Paul
 Trinadat Rancheria (Tribe in California)
 Swinomish Tribal Communities
 Tulalip Tribes
 United Cook Inlet Drift Association
 Westport Charter Association
 West Brothers Group

United Fishermans & Allied Workers Union)
 Vancouver Island Longline Assoc.
 West Coast Guides Association

Selection of Conference Board Chairs

United States selected Jeff Kauffman as Co-Chair.

Canada selected Jim Lane as Co-Chair.

Accreditation of Conference Board Members

The United States section accredited **49 organizations** for participation for the 2016 Conference Board proceedings.

The Canadian section accredited **39 organizations** for participation for the 2016 Conference Board proceedings.

The Conference Board Chairs would like to acknowledge and thank the IPHC Secretariat for the help with meeting notes. The Chairs also point out that the time allocated for the Conference Board at this meeting was a few hours less than in the recent past and made it problematic to all the business of the CB completed.

IPHC Sex Marking Project

IPHC staff Tim Loher made a short presentation to the CB on the IPHC Sex-marking project for the directed commercial halibut fisheries. The objective of the presentation was to inform the commercial fishermen about the importance of the project for improving the understanding of the harvest of females and males in the directed fisheries. Improving the IPHCs ability to separate males from females in the commercial fisheries will improve the stock assessment and ultimately the management of the halibut resource.

The commercial fishing organizations were supportive of the initiative and will inform the fishermen in their organizations.

Commercial Season Date Recommendations

The Conference Board recommends an opening date of March 4, 2017 and a closing date of November 20, 2017.

Discussion

The US delegation recommended a March 4 opening date so as to get as long a season as possible and reduce overlaps with Alaskan herring and sablefish fisheries. As well, March 4th allows for a Saturday start to the season and has good tides. The next good tides are March 18th, but that time conflicts with the Boston Seafood Conference.

The Canadian delegation would prefer a March 18th opening date for the season to allow more time for fish migrating back from their spawning areas and reduce conflicts with BC's herring fisheries, but agreed to a March 4th date to accommodate the US fishermen concerns.

The US side closing date recommendation is consistent with their wanting as long a season as possible. The US delegation acknowledged that a November 20th closing date was two weeks later than has been the procedure for the past few years, but felt it is important to convey to the Commissioners the Conference Board is conveying to them what dates are appropriate for the harvesters.

Canada recommended a closing date of Nov. 7th, but agreed to support the US closing date. The Conference Board members were all in agreement that if the Commissioners did not support a November 20th closing date, the season would not close earlier than November 7th.

Motion passed with 83 in favour and one opposed for the opening date and 78 in favour and one five opposed for the closing date.

MSAB

The Conference Board had reports from the MSAB Chairs a couple of times during the meeting. The MSAB Chairs requested the CB recommend people to fill MSAB vacancies with understanding that a new North Pacific Fishery Management Council representative will be nominated by the Council in advance of the May MSAB meeting.

The Conference Board made three nominations to replace recent vacancies on the MSAB.

Nominated Member	Country	Sector	Affiliation
Martin Paish	Canada	Recreational	Sport Fishing Advisory Board, Halibut Committee chair
Robert Hauknes	Canada	Commercial	Area 2B harvester
Dan Falvey	U.S.	Commercial	Area 2C harvester, Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association

CATCH LIMIT DECISIONS

The Conference Board adopted the following catch limits for 2017

2A	1.33	million pounds (Canada 38-0; US 36-3-4)
2B	7.90	million pounds (Canada 38-0; US 15-20-10)
2C	5.40	million pounds (Canada 35-0-1; US 37-4-4)
3A	10.225	million pounds (Canada 13-5-18; US 36-2-8)
3B	3.335	million pounds (Canada 7-12-19; US 29-6-10)
4A	1.345	million pounds (Canada 33-0-5; US 39-2-6)
4B	1.185	million pounds (Canada 34-0-4; US 40-2-2)
4CDE	1.735	million pounds Canada (36-0-2; US 32-2-10)
Total	32.455	million pounds

Discussion

Area 2A:

The consensus of the harvesters in the northern areas of 2A is fishing was great in 2016 but was better in 2017. Fishing time was constrained by high catch rates, making managing to the 2016 2A TAC challenging. Fish were abundant as well as being more broadly distributed. For example, instead of just good fishing being restricted to 10-12 hot spots as has been the norm, good catch rates were experienced outside of these areas.

They point out that in general their commercial WPUE were better than in 2016, and the drop in WPUE observed in the data reflected the derby style fishery, rather actual abundance in the 2A area. 2A representatives also wanted to point out to Commissioners and staff that their fishing area is large relative to their allocation and TACs. When the Commission sets TACs for the 2A area below 1.25 million pounds, it makes it extremely difficult to execute their catch sharing plans. While they are not suggesting the Commission set 2A TACs above what is sustainable, the abundance of halibut observed by fishermen is not reflected in the Commission's 2016 2A TAC or the set-line surveys.

2A strongly believe the set-line survey does not represent habitat abundance and distribution between 100 and 150 fathoms between Neah Bay and the Columbia River. 2A representatives from California suggest the 42 expanded proposed survey sites located below the 40 degree latitude line in Northern California have slight chance of catching any Pacific halibut. This area historically has reported only occasional Pacific halibut encounters by groundfish anglers. They propose 8-10 of survey sites be placed between the 40 to the 42 degree line, and 12 be located into the 100 to 150 fathom edge between Neah Bay and the Columbia River. The remaining proposed sites, if deemed appropriate, could be relocated within the 2A area where they may provide more valuable survey and

abundance information to the Commission. We suggest this would be a more efficient use of the IPHC resources and Staff time.

2C representatives pointed out 2A is at the end of the migration line, which is an important consideration.

Area 2B:

The message coming out from 2B commercial fishermen was the “fishing was incredible this year” and fishing has never been this good for years. This was in spite of halibut fishermen being not able to fish many of their traditional grounds due to conservation concerns for other species such as Yelloweye rockfish, Bocaccio rockfish and glass sponge reef areas. Commercial fishermen also pointed out the Commission’s method of apportioning stock distribution is wrong as it has not matched up with actual fish abundance experienced by fishermen.

The recreational fishery also experienced great halibut fishing coast wide.

2B also pointed out the survey O32 WPUE and NPUE has also been increasing or stable over the past 10 years. As well, the commercial fishery WPUE has been increasing since 2008 and is now approaching the highest values on record for 2B. These trends have occurred during a period when Canada’s total removals have ranged from 7.71 million lbs to 15 million lbs. The catch limit Canada is seeking will still result in a total mortality for 2B at the low end of this range.

Further, 2B pointed out they have 100% at sea and dockside or At-Sea Monitoring of all hook and line/trap and trawl groundfish fisheries since 2006. So there is low uncertainty in the 2B estimates of halibut removals from all these commercial groundfish fisheries. 2B also pointed out, Canada accounts for all recreational and non-trawl Halibut mortality (landed and released mortality) within the FCEY.

Some representatives from 2C stated they will not be supporting the 2B catch limit proposal. They believe 2B is doing well because 2C harvest rates are so low. They proposed an alternate scenario where catch is spread around 2A to 2C for perspective. Regulatory areas 2C have for the past couple of meetings requested that all of Area 2 be subject to a similar harvest rate. The conference Board was given a table requested by 2C groups and prepared by IPHC staff that showed potential 2017 Area 2A, 2B, and 2C FCEYs using a harvest rate based off of the three-year average of the aggregated Area 2 realized harvest rates. Under such an approach, the harvest rate based on the current perception of stock distribution and harvest policies would be about 30% and FCEYs would be: 2A 1.08, 2B 6.83, and 2C 6.39 and TCEYs would be: 2A 1.21, 2B 7.71, and 2C 8.18. Furthermore, members of the minority felt that a harvest rate above 30% was too aggressive for the current biomass projections. The Conference Board

recommendations result in an assumed harvest rates based on current harvest policies of 34.3% and 26.4% in 2B and 2C respectively.

Area 2C:

2C representatives pointed out their area has the fastest growth at age on the coast and all their abundance indices are continuing to trend upwards. 2C fishermen continue to see good fishing and high WPUE in both the survey and commercial fisheries. They point out their TACs set by the Commission for the past few years are increasingly at odds with what fishermen are observing and catching on the grounds. 2C continues to see significant increases in their abundance indices, but their TACs are not matching them. Apportionment is wrong; we need area by area management. It was also noted that 2C has minimal bycatch and trawling is not allowed.

Area 3A:

3A stocks seemed to have stabilized, WPUE and size of fish has been increasing in the previous two year for survey and fishery results. O32 WPUE has increased 10 percent in the 2016 survey. Of the coast wide stock estimate, an increased portion of the stock is returning to Area 3 in general and specifically to Area 3A.

Area 3B:

Fishing success matches up well with setline survey results; increase in abundance of halibut and more larger , Lots of fishing in shallows. Better catches than 3 or 4 years ago. Some 2C representatives were concerned the 3B's proposed 22% increase from 2016 is too much. 3B responded that they are seeing a positive response from conservative harvest they have had in prior years.

Representatives from 3A familiar with 3B point out 3B has taken significant harvest reductions, and now it's stock is rebounding. There is less risk in giving this area a harvest increase, which is also supported by the decision table.

2B representatives pointed out that bycatch estimates for the Area 3 area are the most uncertain in all the regulatory areas, so they are not supportive of increasing their directed harvest until bycatch estimates improve.

Area 4A:

Fishing was better and the size was incredible. 33-38 pound average per fish this year compared to upper 20s in the past few years.

Area 4B:

Better fishing. 4-5 thousand pounds a day, easily. Their WPUE was not reflective of reality because it does not include boats with snap gear or automated systems. These boats consistently have the highest catches in our area.

4B pointed out the quota is already so low, that one person could have taken the whole quota. So reducing it more would force fishermen to not to fish.

Area 4CDE:

The status quo SPR as shown, is a status quo level of removals that seems to be sustainable in the Bering Sea, in particular. They see generally increasing trends in setline WPUE and in commercial catch rates – that seems to support maintaining the same fishing intensity. Based on that, we support the status quo SPR FCEY in Area 4CDE of 1.92 million pounds.

4CDE reported good fishing, especially when there is no whale predation. Their biggest challenge is dealing with the weather. They also pointed out their entire quota is so small it could be caught in a matter of days even with just one small boat. The cost of living is high, and this is an important source of income.

The representatives of 4CDE pointed out bycatch is being handled, albeit slowly, and significant reductions in bycatch have come from the efforts of the Amendment 80 fleet. This sentiment was also expressed by some of the representatives of 2B.

Note: The Deep Sea Fisherman’s Union and N. Pacific Fisheries Association wanted to be on record as not supporting any of the catch limit proposals as they deviated from the Blue Line. The Blue Line was their highest acceptable risk. According to the harvest decision table a harvest rate of SPR F48% was their highest acceptable risk of future stock decline.

Comments by Conference Board members on overall catch limits:

The Conference Board had a general discussion on the range of catch numbers without debate and then the meeting was adjourned. The following day the catch limits were made by area and the total coast wide catch limit was discussed. There was not consensus within the CB that the propose coast wide catch limit was appropriate. A proposal was put before the CB to reduce the coast wide proposed catch limit proportionally by 5%, but the disparities between the FCEY and TCEY issues resulted in the proposal being withdrawn. Catch limits were then discussed and voted on by area.

Bycatch

The Conference Board invited Glen Merrill of the National Marine Fisheries Service to address the membership. Subjects covered by Mr. Merrill included Deck Sorting, observer coverage rates in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea and Electronic Monitoring (EM). Regarding Electronic Monitoring, Merrill made it clear that EM will be used for “real time catch accounting” rather than for enforcement. EM is currently being tested voluntarily by hook and line and pot

vessels. The North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) will implement EM for hook and line vessels between 40' and 57.5' in 2018.

The Conference Board then invited Mark Fina and Chris Woodley of the Amendment 80 fleet (bottom trawl, flatfish, catcher processor fleet) to present on their Bycatch Avoidance Plan. The discussion included topics such as fleet description, Deck Sorting, discard mortality rates, observer training and tagging studies conducted from their vessels.

In general, the Conference Board was receptive to the Amendment 80 bycatch reductions, use of best practices and incentive programs.

The following Bycatch resolution as introduced:

Whereas at the January 2012 IPHC Annual Meeting the IPHC approved a commissioner-led initiative focused on a better understanding of the implications of the current levels of halibut bycatch and to explore possible actions to address these concerns; and

Whereas the Commission developed and approved the following specific objectives:

- a. To gain a better understanding of the amount of halibut bycatch occurring in each regulatory area;
- b. To gain a better understanding of the impact of bycatch on the conservation and allocation of the halibut resource and on the available harvest;
- c. To explore options for reducing the overall level of halibut bycatch; and,
- d. To explore options for mitigating the impact of bycatch in one regulatory area on the available harvest in other regulatory areas.

And whereas the Conference Board acknowledges the importance of the Council working cooperatively with the Commission on Halibut bycatch management;

And whereas Conference Board understands that the Council has indefinitely postponed work on a Gulf Trawl Bycatch Management Program;

And whereas the RARA (p. 76) says, "bycatch in Area 3 remains the area where bycatch mortality is estimated most poorly";

And whereas the Conference Board understands that the NPFMC is exploring abundance based halibut bycatch management;

And whereas the halibut convention says the Commission may "during both open and closed seasons, permit, limit, regulate or prohibit the incidental catch of halibut that may be taken, retained, possessed, or landed from each area or portion of an area, by vessels fishing for other species of fish;

Therefore the Conference Board recommends:

- 1) That minimizing bycatch and improving monitoring as outlined in the preamble remain a high priority, particularly in Area 3;
- 2) That the existing ad hoc meetings between Council members and the Commission be formalized into a standing body that meets regularly to provide direction to the development of a coordinated relationship between the Council and the Commission.;
- 3) Such a body should consist of Commissioners from both countries and Council leadership. That in accordance with the Magnuson Stevens Act National Standard 9 that the Commission encourage the Council to incorporate the minimization of bycatch to the “extent practicable” as part of any harvest control rules and indices that are developed.

The motion passed by hand vote with 1 opposed and 1 abstention.

Proposed changes to the IPHC Rules and Procedures (ROP)

The CB had a short presentation by IPHC Executive Director regarding the proposed changes to the IPHC’s ROP. The IPHC would like comments and recommendations from the CB to on the proposed changes. The CB decided they would like to think about this issue overnight and provide their recommendations to the Commission staff and on Wednesday.

The CB had a short discussion about the ROP and in general did not see any glaring issues of concern and wanted to acknowledge the Commission for not considering changes to the ROP without input from the CB. The CB passed the following motion:

The CB recommends to the Commissioners accept the proposed changes to the IPHC Rules of Procedure. Passed unanimously.

Regulatory Proposals

Regulatory Proposal A: A motion was made to support Proposal A “to eliminate a recently identified bias in Pacific halibut removal estimates (net weight), by requiring all Pacific halibut to be landed and weighed with their heads attached for data reporting purposes.” In addition, the motion requested that an exemption for frozen at sea halibut be made. The exemption for delivering head off, frozen at sea halibut, will maintain the 24-inch minimum size described in the Pacific Halibut Fisheries Regulations 13(1)(b).

Motion passed by hand vote with 1 ‘no vote’ and 5 abstentions.

Regulatory Proposal B: A motion was made “to remove the IPHC Closed Area, as defined in IPHC Regulation 10, which applies to ‘halibut fishing only.’” Concern was expressed by members of the Conference Board regarding implications of opening the Closed Area to the longline halibut fishery. The Conference Board discussed the idea of the Closed Area as a nursery and felt it should be closed to all other fisheries rather than allowing the longline halibut fleet to fish in the area.

Motion failed: 0 in support, 11 abstentions and all remaining votes were No.

Regulatory Proposal C: A presentation was made by the NMFS Office of Law Enforcement regarding this proposal. Several questions were asked by the Conference Board to provide clarity on this proposal.

A motion was made to “harmonize IPHC Regulation Section 18 with 50 C.F.R 679.7(f)(4) – fishing in multiple regulatory areas (2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E).

Motion passed by hand vote with 1 opposed, 1 abstention and all others in favor.

Regulatory Proposal D: Update the US-Canada Treaty – Withdrawn by proposer.

Regulatory Proposal E: Drop the Blueline – Withdrawn by proposer.

Regulatory Proposal F: Drop IPHC setline survey – Withdrawn by proposer.

Regulatory Proposal G: Closure of the Nursery Area – after a fairly lengthy discussion regarding other fisheries in the closed area, concern over implications if trawl, longline and pot fleets are displaced from this area and the need to understand effort and catch in the area. The motion to recommend that the IPHC advocate to the NPFMC to close the nursery area was tabled.

Regulatory Proposal H: Non-resident, self-guided sport same regulations as charter, other than need for a Charter Halibut Permit – No action taken

Regulatory Proposal I: Unguided sport same standards as Catch Sharing Plan sectors – No action taken

Regulatory Proposal J: Elimination of Law requiring skin to be left on halibut – No action taken

Regulatory Proposal K – Allowed filleted halibut in sport fishery – No action taken

Regulatory Proposal L – Charter boat trip limits, 3A, trips per season - No action taken

Regulatory Proposal M – Charter boat trip limits, 3A, trips per week – No action taken

Regulatory Proposal N - Guided Angler 3A Daily Limit – No action taken

Regulatory Proposal O – Clarify pot gear requirements – The proposal was modified from its original form for clarity and intent. A motion was made to allow commercial halibut fishermen to have aboard and deploy shellfish pots during the halibut season as long as those pots have rigid perimeter openings that do not exceed 36 inches. This proposal does not alter or supersede any other regulations in place for the area the pots are deployed.

Due to the last minute modification by the author of the proposal, and maker of the motion, language was included that clarified the staff would review the proposal in 2017 and potentially take action in 2018.

Motion passed: no opposition, 5 US members and all Canadian members abstained

Regulatory Proposal P – Size limit clarification – The following motion was made: Proposal P should be adopted. If commissioners approve Regulatory Proposal A as amended by the Conference Board, there may be some overlap with this proposal. Recommend IPHC staff review content of both proposals, if approved, and reconcile any redundant language.

Motion passed by hand vote: 2 US and 1 Canadian abstention, all others voted in support.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 PM on January 25.