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COOPERATIVE HALIBUT RESEARCH WITH U.S.S.R.

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) announced the completion of a cooperative cruise with Soviet scientists. Biologist William H. Hardman of Edmonds, Washington and fishing captain Arthur L. Hansen of Delta, British Columbia, employees of IPHC, returned recently from Nakhodka, U.S.S.R. after 2 months aboard the Soviet research vessel RAKITNIY. The purpose of the cruise was to tag halibut in the western Bering Sea and to collect biological data needed to determine the extent of intermingling by halibut in the eastern and western Bering Sea.

The research project was proposed by Soviet scientists in 1974 during discussions with Canada and the United States on means of reducing the incidental catch of halibut by Soviet vessels. It was agreed that additional information on the halibut in the Bering Sea was needed and IPHC was asked to represent Canada and the United States in this joint venture. The Soviets provided the vessel, men, and trawl gear and IPHC provided the tags and setline gear. Captain Hansen was responsible for the setline fishing and Mr. Hardman supervised the tagging and sampling. During the next 2 years, the Soviets will continue to tag halibut in the western Bering Sea and IPHC will tag in the eastern Bering Sea.

The RAKITNIY, a new 60-meter class, all electric, side-trawler equipped for research, was adapted for setline fishing using drum and snap-on gear. The vessel was fully outfitted with sophisticated fish-finding equipment and carried a complement of 23 men, 2 women, 4 scientists, and IPHC personnel.

During the 5,600 mile cruise, halibut were caught by trawl and setline gear, chiefly between Cape Olyutorski and Cape Navarin, northeast of the Kamchatka Peninsula. Over 500 halibut were caught and 323 were tagged and released. Orange plastic tags were attached to the opercle bone (cheek) of the halibut. The serially-numbered tags have English, Japanese, and Russian identification so that commercial fishermen from the different countries fishing in the area can return the tags to their respective research agencies. In addition to the tagging, biological data were collected for age, growth, and racial studies. As expected, the average size of trawl-caught halibut (79 cm) was smaller than that for halibut caught by setline gear (102 cm).

The information gained from the research with Soviet scientists will provide a better assessment of the halibut resource and will be helpful in the management of the halibut fishery in the Bering Sea.

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