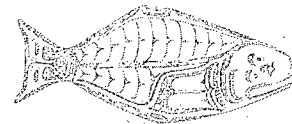


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WHY SPLIT THE HALIBUT SEASON ?

The Halibut Commission (IPHC) is responsible for managing the halibut resource for Canada and the United States, and many fishermen think that the lay-up program is a part of IPHC's management system. In fact, the lay-up program is a voluntary, industry arrangement that was developed by fishermen and vessel owners to provide rest periods between fishing trips, extend the fishing season, and obtain a more orderly distribution of the landings. The lay-up program was successful in attaining these goals and was supported by most of the fleet for many years. In recent years, however, many new fishermen, who either were unaware of the objectives of the plan or disagreed with the rules, did not follow the lay-up system. As a result, more and more of the fishermen who had supported the program began to drop out and the lay-up system has been in jeopardy for several years.

This year at IPHC's Annual Meeting, the Fishermen's Lay-Up Committee announced that the lay-up program was being discontinued because it lacked the needed support. With the diversity of today's fleet, it is impossible to devise a lay-up program that will satisfy everyone. IPHC couldn't adopt the lay-up plan in its regulations because, among other reasons, it would have been impossible to enforce. IPHC had the option of letting the season run its natural course and be over within 60 days or splitting the season so that fishing would be extended over a longer period of time. A short single season would have concentrated the fishing effort and resulted in excessive mortality on certain components of the stock. Some of the landing and cold storage facilities would have been severely taxed. The Commission decided that the fishing season would have to be divided into open and closed periods to extend the fishing time and spread the fishing mortality between early and late components of the stock.

Splitting the season into a series of fishing periods is a new concept in the halibut fishery. In adopting this plan, the Commission attempted to

provide for a fishing season similar to 1976 with respect to overall length and timing. The opening date is only 2 days later than in 1976. The open periods which were scheduled to avoid weekends and holidays are: May 10 to May 29, June 16 to July 4, July 20 to August 7, and August 23 to September 10. Fishing will begin at 1500 hours on each opening day and close at 0600 hours on each closing day.

Large vessels will probably make only one trip during the 18-day open period, whereas smaller vessels will make two or more trips. Large vessels that fished more than 20 days in 1976 will have to reduce their fishing time. This limitation will help to maintain a high quality product. Fishing will continue until the end of the fourth period, unless the catch limit (quota) is taken earlier. The Commission will give a 12-day notice of the closing date in Area 2 and an 18-day notice in Area 3.

The closed periods are 15 or 16 days. The closures are longer than those of the lay-up program but this step was necessary to extend the season into August and to allow vessels ample time to land their catch at any port on the coast. During the closed periods, vessels are free to fish for other species, but they may not retain or possess halibut when fishing for other species.

All vessels will have to adjust their fishing operations; obviously, the adjustments will be more difficult for some vessels than for others. Small boats in certain areas will have advantages under the new system, but in other areas they may encounter difficulties with scheduling due to weather, tides, etc. The same will be true for larger vessels; some may benefit by the change and others will not.

The industry has appointed a committee to review different regulatory options for 1978 and IPHC will welcome suggestions from interested individuals. If the lay-up is not reestablished, it may take several years of adjusting open and closed periods to work out a system that will permit optimum use of the resource and will provide a rational schedule of exploitation for the fleet and processors.

The 1977 regulations have been submitted to Canada and the United States and, when approved, will be published and distributed by IPHC on or about April 1, 1977. A summary of the regulations is available from IPHC or from federal fishery officers.