

# Information Bulletin



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## PROGRESS REPORT ON THE 1979 HALIBUT FISHERY

The catch of halibut by the middle of August 1979 was 21.5 million pounds. Canadian vessels took 6.9 million and United States vessels took 14.6 million pounds. The fishing seasons in Area 2 and in Area 3 have been closed for the remainder of 1979, except that Area 3C (west of 173° W. longitude) will remain open until November 15. Preliminary data on the 1979 halibut catch in thousands of pounds by regulatory area and by Canadian and United States vessels is shown in the table below.

Regulatory Area	National Waters	Canada	United States	Total
2	Canada	5,051	-	5,051
	U.S.	164	4,421	4,585
3	U.S.	1,639	10,052	11,691
4	U.S.	-	152	152
Total		6,854	14,625	21,479

### Area 2

The catch taken from Area 2 at the end of the second fishing period was 100,000 pounds over the 9 million quota set for the area. The Protocol and Annex which amended the 1953 Halibut Convention requires that the Area 2 quota be divided between Canadian and U.S. waters on a 60%-40% basis. Accordingly, the Canadian share was set at 5.4 million pounds and the U.S. share was set at 3.6 million pounds.

At the close of the first fishing period, landings from the U.S. portion of Area 2 were 2.7 million pounds, of which 164,000 pounds were taken by Canadian vessels. After examining all available data the Commission estimated that the catch limit for the U.S. portion of Area 2 would be taken on July 3 and announced that those waters would close on that date. Fishing effort increased and fishing improved during the second period and consequently, the catch reached 4.6 million pounds, 1 million pounds over the U.S. allocation. In the Canadian portion of Area 2 fishing was relatively poor and by the end of the second fishing period only 4.5 million pounds had been taken, 900,000 pounds below the limit for Canadian waters.

Because the Area 2 catch limit of 9 million pounds had been taken, the Commission was required to close the area, although Canadian vessels had not taken the catch allocated to them under the negotiated agreement. The Commission was faced with conflicting regulations and had no guidelines for meeting its responsibilities under these circumstances. After careful consideration of all alternatives, the Commission recommended to the governments that the catch limit for Area 2 be raised by 600,000 pounds to permit additional fishing by Canadian fishermen. The original 9 million pound quota was set below the 11 million pound equilibrium yield to provide for growth in the halibut stocks. By raising the catch limit to 9.6 million pounds, the Commission was still assured that the resource was protected, although the rebuilding would be somewhat delayed. The Commission notified the governments of its decision and the governments quickly approved the change. The Commission announced on July 23 that the Canadian part of Area 2 would close on August 2, 1979. A second announcement on July 25 changed the closure to August 5 when new information on the amount of fishing effort became available. Some Canadian fishermen requested a delay in the start of the third fishing period due to confusion arising from the change in the Area 2 catch limit, dissatisfaction with the length of the third fishing period, and the amount of catch that could be taken by Canadian fishermen. The Commission decided that a change in the opening date for the third period, already set in the regulations, would be impractical.

The actual catch by Canadian vessels during the third fishing period was 521,000 pounds, only 350,000 pounds below the Canadian allocation bringing the total Area 2 catch to the revised 9.6 million pound limit. The Commission decided that Area 2 should be closed for the remainder of 1979.

The Commission has requested guidelines for achieving the 60-40 division of the Area 2 catch between Canadian and U.S. fishermen in future years, since unforeseeable conditions in the fishery can prevent the Commission from precisely achieving this allocation each year. The Commission also needs better information on the size of the available fleet if it is to achieve the regulatory precision required by the new agreement.

### Area 3

The catch from Area 3, during the first fishing period, reached 5.9 million pounds, of which 1.6 million were taken by Canadian vessels. Fishing effort was expected to decline during the second period because Canadian vessels and some U.S. vessels would not participate. Accordingly, the Commission expected that nearly all of the Area 3 catch limit would be taken by July 12, the end of the second fishing period. However, the catch rate was much better than expected and the catch at the end of the second period was 700,000 pounds

over the 11 million pound catch limit. Accordingly, the Commission announced that the catch limit had been taken by the 12th of July and that there would be no further fishing in Area 3 in 1979, exclusive of Area 3C. Most of the Area 3 catch came from the eastern part of Area 3 where fishing was much better than last year. Fishing was relatively poor in the western part of Area 3.

#### Area 3C and Area 4

The spring fishery in Area 3C and Area 4 (Bering Sea) produced a total catch of 312,000 pounds, of which 119,000 pounds were taken in Area 4. The regulations stipulate that the second fishing period of 19 days in the eastern Bering Sea should open 12 days after the final closure of fishing in Area 3. Accordingly, this season was set for July 24 to August 11. The western Bering Sea and Area 3C will remain open until November 15, as provided in the regulations.

#### Canadian Catch in U.S. Waters

According to the Protocol and Annex amending the Halibut Convention, Canadian vessels were allowed to take 2 million pounds of halibut in U.S. waters in 1979 and 1 million pounds in 1980. At the end of the first fishing period Canadian vessels had taken 1.8 million pounds from U.S. waters and the governments agreed upon recommendation by the Commission that it would be impractical to attempt to take the remaining 200,000 pounds in 1979. Consequently, the remainder of the 1979 allocation will be added to that for 1980 and Canadian vessels will be allowed to take 1.2 million pounds from U.S. waters in that year.

#### General Comments

The 1979 halibut fishery has been marked by controversy and confusion. During the early part of the year there was serious question as to whether the Halibut Commission would continue as the halibut management agency. The new Protocol and Annex negotiated by the two governments continued the Commission for at least two more years, terminated U.S. fishing for halibut in Canadian waters, restricted Canadian fishing in U.S. waters in 1979 and 1980, and divided the Area 2 quota between Canadian and United States waters. The Commission and the halibut industry can adapt to the new conditions, but several years may be required. The spirit of cooperation, which has characterized the halibut fishery and the management of the resource, must be maintained if this valuable resource and the industry that depends upon it are to be preserved.