

History



San Juan Fish Company during the 1900s



The early days of halibut fishing



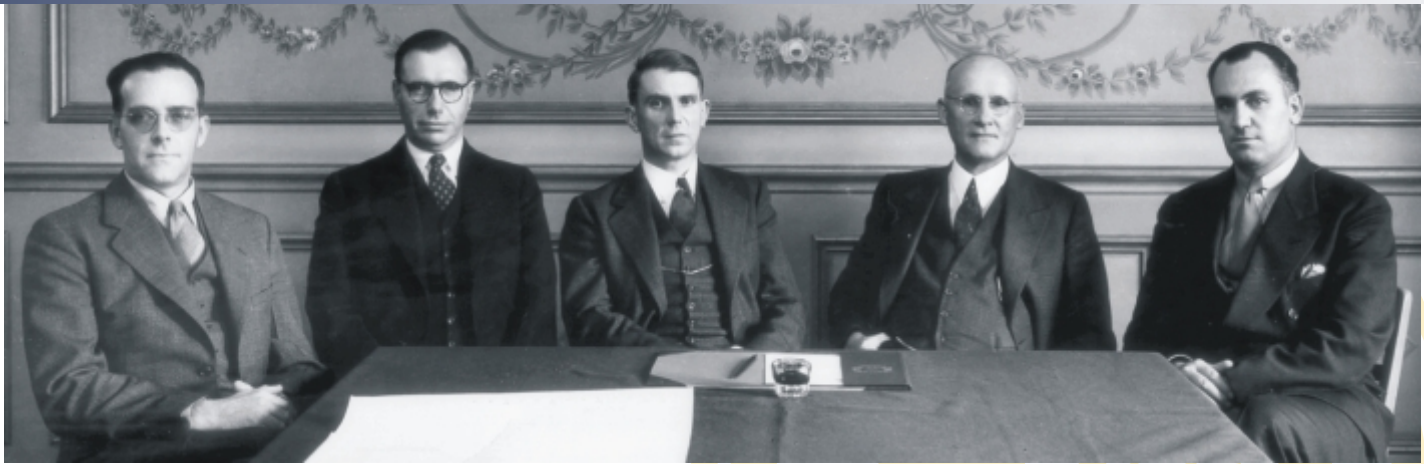
Commission research, 1929

Pacific halibut commercial fishing began in the late 1880s with the movement of the Atlantic halibut fleet to the Pacific to pursue the large stocks found along the coast of Washington and Vancouver Island. From a small fishery off Cape Flattery, WA and the southern end of Vancouver Island, B.C., it expanded rapidly in protected inside waters, and by 1910, extended some 700 miles northward to Cape Spencer in southeastern Alaska. Subsequent expansion extended the fishery both south and north and out to the offshore banks throughout the known range of halibut on the American side of the Pacific, from northern California to the Bering Sea, a distance of over 2,000 miles.

By 1914, when halibut stocks appeared to be declining, the halibut industry petitioned to both governments to manage and control the fishery. Efforts to consummate a treaty in 1919 were unsuccessful, but the halibut industry persisted in advocating international control. In 1922, another convention was drafted that excluded sensitive provisions of port-use and tariffs, and Canada and the United States signed the Convention for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the Northern Pacific Ocean on March 2, 1923. The treaty of 1923 was also noteworthy in that it was the first treaty to be concluded anywhere for the conservation of a depleted deep-sea fishery.

The Convention went into effect on exchange of ratifications on October 23, 1924. It provided for a 3-month closed season during the winter and for

International Pacific Halibut Commission



The Commission, circa 1940



Biological data collection for stock assessment purposes, circa 1970

regulations concerning halibut caught incidentally during the closed season. The Convention also created an International Fisheries Commission (IFC) of four members. Each country was to pay the expenses of its two Commissioners, but expenses of the Commission and staff were to be shared equally by the contracting parties. The Commission was charged with studying the life history of halibut and with recommending regulations for the preservation and development of the fishery. Subsequent treaties in 1930, 1937, and 1953, as well as a 1979 protocol to the convention, left much of the original intent and wording in effect.

Throughout the first four decades of the halibut fishery, the IFC, later renamed the International Pacific Halibut Commission, managed the length of season to control the effort and, effectively, the quotas within the fishery. In 1975 the season was 125 days, but improving stock and price conditions increased effort and demand and the season shrank to nearly 25 days by 1985. Nearly a decade later in 1994, the season had shrunk to less than three days for a majority of the U.S. fishery.

In 1991 the Canadian government adopted individual vessel quotas (IVQ) to manage the fishery. Subsequent to this, in 1995, the U.S. adopted the individual fishery quota (IFQ). This fishery is now allocated to vessels and individuals respectively and the resulting fishery is now managed on a nearly nine month season. The results of this change in the fishery are positive and have resulted in a) increased value for the fishery, b) less wastage, and c) increased safety for the coast-wide fleet.

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