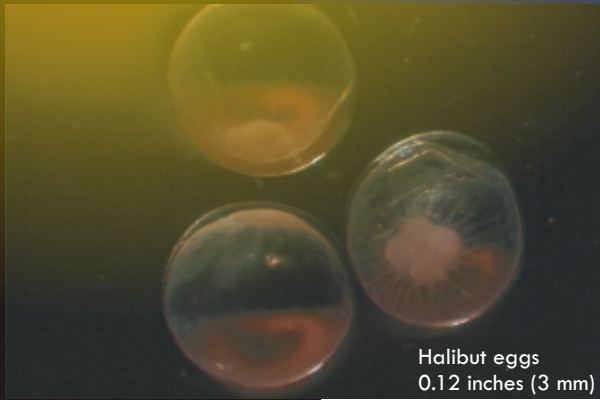




Biology



Photo by R. Brooks



Halibut eggs
0.12 inches (3 mm)



Newly-hatched larva
0.38 in (0.96 cm)



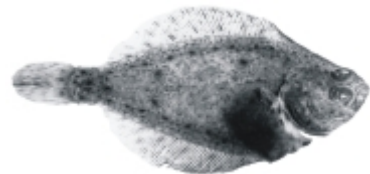
Postlarva
0.69 in (1.75 cm)



Mid-postlarva
0.88 in (2.24 cm)



Late postlarva
1.0 in (2.54 cm)
Beginning of eye migration



6-month old halibut
1.38 in. (3.50 cm)

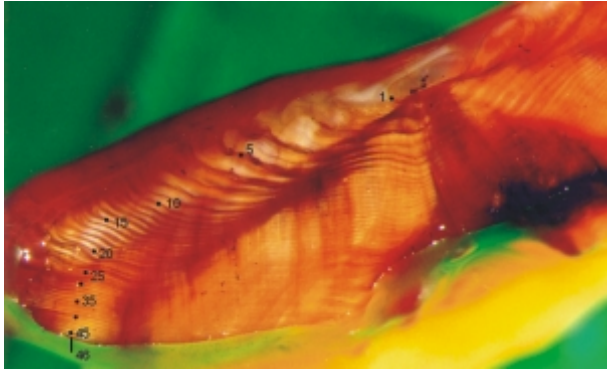
Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) is one of the largest species of fish in the world, with many individuals growing to over eight feet in length and over 500 pounds. Fish of this size are still regularly caught in the commercial and sport fishery.

The range of Pacific halibut that the IPHC manages covers the continental shelf from northern California to the Aleutian Islands and throughout the Bering Sea. While not managed by the IPHC, Pacific halibut are also found along the western north Pacific continental shelf of Russia, Japan, and Korea. In 2010, the total exploitable halibut biomass estimate for IPHC convention waters was 334 million pounds (151,500 m.t.).

The depth range for halibut is up to 250 fathoms (460 m) for most of the year and up to 500 fathoms (920 m) during the winter spawning months. During the winter, the eggs are released, move up in the water column, and are caught by ocean currents. Prevailing currents carry the eggs north and west. The young fish settle to the bottom in bays and inlets. Research has shown that the halibut then begin what can be called a journey back. This movement runs counter to the currents that carried them away from the spawning grounds and has been documented at over 1,000 miles for some fish.

Using the ear-bone, or otolith, the researchers at the IPHC can tell the age of a fish by counting the growth

International Pacific Halibut Commission



A halibut ear-bone in cross-section can be used to age the fish by counting annual rings. An example from a 46-year old halibut can be seen above.

most fish found in the fishery are in their teens and early 20s. Pacific halibut are generally pre-teens (8 to 12 years old) when they are large enough to meet the minimum size limit for the commercial fishery of 32 inches.

The Resource

Management of the halibut stock by the International Pacific Halibut Commission has produced a history of sustained and increasing production from this resource. This has often required that the Commission identify problems to the contracting parties and initiate directed actions to resolve major issues affecting halibut productivity. In the 1970s, the Commission found that discard mortality of halibut on foreign trawlers was impacting the halibut resource severely. Acting with the two governments, the Commission was able to control and reduce this mortality as a component of the extension of fisheries jurisdictions in 1977. Continuing bilateral efforts by the United States and Canada have further reduced bycatch mortality and increased yield to all sectors of the halibut industry and the public.

After 85 years of IPHC management and stewardship, the yield from the halibut resource is presently at record high levels.



Photo by G. Becken

“The range of Pacific halibut that the IPHC manages covers the continental shelf from northern California to the Aleutian Islands and throughout the Bering Sea.”

Halibut Price and Catch 1929-2008

