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Conference Board Agenda
75th IPHC Annual Meeting
January 25-28, 1999, Prince Rupert, B.C.

Attendance:

United States	Canada
Alaska Longline Fishermans' Assoc	Annieville Halibut Association
Atka Fishermen's Assoc	Pacific Blackcod Fishermen's Assoc
Bering Sea Fishermen's Assoc	Pacific Coast Fishing Vessel owners Guild
Bristol Bay Economic Development Corp	Pacific Longline Fisherman's Assoc
Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Assoc	Pacific Trollers Assoc
Coastal Villages Fishing Cooperative	Sport Fishing Advisory Board
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific	Halibut Advisor Board
Kodiak Longliners Assoc	Northern Halibut Producers' Assoc
Kodiak Vessel Owners Assoc	Steveston Halibut Assoc
Makah Fisheries Management	Nu'Chal' Nuth Tribal Council
North Pacific Fisheries Assoc	Northern Trollers Assoc
Norton Sound Economic Development Corp	Prince Rupert Vessel Owners Assoc
Petersburg Vessel Owners Assoc	United Fishermen and Allied Workers Assoc
St. George Fishermen's Assoc	Native Brotherhood of BC
St. Paul's Fishermen's Assoc	
Seafood Producers Coop	
Tribal Government of St. Paul	
United Fishermen's Marketing Assoc	
Washington Recreational Fishing Industry Assoc	
Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Assoc	
False Pass Fisheries Development	
Kachemak Bay Fisheries Assoc	
Westport Charter Boat Assoc	
Gulf of Alaska Coastal Communities Coalition	
Quinault Indian Nation	
Concerned Area M Fishermen C.A.M.P	
Bristol Bay Drift Net Assoc	

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1. SELECT CHAIRPERSONS - Canada and United States

On the Canadian side, John Secord was selected as chair.

On the United States side, Bob Alverson was selected as co-chair.

2. REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER AND APPROVE ANY NEW REPRESENTATIVES

There were 14 accredited organizations from Canada present and 29 accredited organizations from the United States.

3. PRESENTATION ON IPHC BUDGET – Bruce Leaman

The Conference Board discussed the finances of the IPHC and the making up of their budget with survey income. It was felt that a 30% price increase would help balance the cost of those surveys that may have gone “in the red” in 1998. The Conference Board recommends that those surveys that are scheduled for the Western areas not be canceled at this time, but be kept open until April or May when the grounds price for halibut will be established. The Commission can then make a determination if they will put the surveys out for bid.

The Conference Board believes that there needs to be a discussion and a policy on how much halibut will be taken to make up Commission deficits. This issue could develop into a conflict between industry and the Commission in the event harvest levels were to decline and the Commission gets in competition with industry for access to limited numbers of fish.

To make up deficits, the following ideas were discussed in the Conference Board:

- 1) IPHC could charge a fee for each license, both commercial and sports charter.
- 2) Increase the government funding from the respective countries.
- 3) Let out for bid that part of the quota that remained unharvested in all areas for a winter survey.
- 4) It was pointed out that the United States catches a greater share of the halibut than Canada and possibly should contribute more funding to the IPHC. However, there was concern that if the United States did so then they may ask for a greater say in the affairs of the IPHC.
- 5) It was also pointed out that for the Canadian government to match the United States contribution dollar-for-dollar in US funds, it was contributing \$1.50 Canadian.
- 6) There was talk that the IPHC was a bureaucracy, and that some limits should be set on its growth, and any surplus, as it could expand to spend any increased available funds.

4. REVIEW AREAS

The Conference Board has no recommendations for new or altered IPHC areas. The Conference Board received a report from the Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association regarding the Northern boundary of the Bering Sea and the Southern boundary of the Chukchi Sea. This issue was taken up under later agenda items.

5. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATION FOR ALL AREAS

A. Commercial

It was moved and seconded that the season start March 15th and end Nov 15th for regulatory areas 2B through 4. The motion was passed with 1 opposed, which was

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the Kodiak Vessel Owners, who wanted to use the dates March 1st to Nov 30th.

The Conference Board entertained a motion to begin the Washington Treaty seasons on March 1st. This failed 3-11 with 10 abstentions from the US section and failed 13-0 with 1 abstention on the Canadian side.

The Conference Board was informed that Area 2A commercial seasons would be similar to 1998 and no further discussion took place. There were no commercial representatives from Area 2A.

B. Sports

The Conference Board was informed that Area 2A sports seasons would be similar to 1998 and no further discussion took place.

6. CATCH LIMIT & REGULATORY PROPOSALS

The following harvest levels are recommended by the Conference Board:

A. Catch Limit Recommendations - Review of Quotas

i)	Area 2A	810,000 lb *			
ii)	Area 2B	12,500,000 lb **			
iii)	Area 2C	10,490,000 lb also staff recommendation			
iv)	Area 3A	24,670,000 lb	“	”	“
v)	Area 3B	13,370,000 lb	“	”	“
vi)	Area 4A	4,240,000 lb	“	”	“
vii)	Area 4B	3,980,000 lb	“	”	“
viii)	Area 4CDE	4,500,000 lb ***			

* The Conference Board recommends a harvest level of 810,000 lbs in Area 2A which is 120,000 lbs greater than the staff recommendation for the following reasons:

- 1) Because of the uncertainty surrounding the true natural mortality rate for halibut and the fact that the 1999 staff recommendation for changing the assumed natural mortality rate results in a significant decrease in the recommended CEY for Area 2A, we would like to phase in the new mortality rate over a three year period.
- 2) We believe that because the stock is currently relatively abundant, we do not need to be in a hurry to make a dramatic change.
- 3) By making this change in an incremental process, we believe it will give a chance for our fisheries to adjust and may provide more time to thoroughly review and further analyze the appropriate value for natural mortality.
- 4) The incremental adjustment follows a similar approach that the IPHC used in the early to mid 1990's during a period when it was necessary to reduce the exploitation rate, as well as more recently when exploitation rates and quotas were increasing.
- 5) Using a percentage of the difference in harvest levels, is necessary as a surrogate for using some value for natural mortality between 0.20 and 0.15 because it is not possible to run the model again with a new natural mortality at this late date.

This action was based on a vote of 13 in favour, 12 opposed and 1 abstention from the US section and 3 in favour with 11 abstentions on the Canadian side.

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** The Conference Board recommends a harvest level of 12,500,000 lbs in Area 2B which is 1,280,000 lbs greater than the staff recommendation for the following reasons:

- 1) Recruitment is fairly strong in Area 2B.
- 2) It was felt that the new lower mortality rate should be phased in incrementally.
- 3) IPHC staff member, Bill Clark, stated that there was enough bio-mass in Area 2B to support a phased in change in mortality rate.
- 4) It was pointed out that the West coast of Vancouver Island was not surveyed by the IPHC in 1998 and there were anecdotal reports of good catch rates there.

This recommendation was passed with 9 in favour, 7 opposed, and 10 abstentions from the US section and 13 in favour with 1 abstention on the Canadian side.

*** The Conference Board recommends a harvest level of 4,500,000 lbs in Area 4CDE, which is 370,000 lbs greater than the staff recommendation for the following reasons:

- 1) The estimated CEY in these combined areas is 9,800,000 lbs. The above recommendation is still less than half of what may be available in this Bering Sea area.
- 2) This Area supports a large trawl by-catch of halibut and if these numbers of halibut are available, then there must be a large number of halibut in that area.
- 3) It was pointed out that these areas did not harvest all of their quota in 1998, and the principal reason for this is the low price and that there are a number of quota share units that are very small (6,000 lbs and less) which were uneconomical to harvest. Weather was also a complicating factor in 1998.

There was opposition to this action. Those opposed supported the staff recommendation which is approximately a 20% increase over 1998.

This action was passed with 18 in favour, 5 opposed, and 2 abstaining from the US section and 9 in favour, 2 opposed, with 3 abstentions on the Canadian side.

There was a vote on the amended quotas for all areas and it passed on both sides with only 1 in opposition.

B. Fishing Periods

The Conference Board received a report from Dr. Bill Clark regarding the biology and movement of halibut during the Winter spawning season. It is felt that the catching of halibut while they are spawning is not a biological issue. Dr. Clark indicated that the peak spawning period occurs from December through February. The main issue is that halibut migrate to the north and west from Area 2B to southern Area 2C in the Winter months. This would mean that in any Winter fishery, halibut that resided in BC during the Summer would be captured in a fishery in south-east Alaska in the Winter.

The Conference Board recommends for the 1999 season an opening date of March 1st and a closing date of Nov 30th. This action replaces the Conference Board's earlier recommendation under agenda item 5. This was supported with 18 in favour, 1 in opposition, and 4 abstentions in the US section and 10 in favour with 3 abstentions on the Canadian side.

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The Conference Board identified several logistic issues which were as follows:

- 1) The North Pacific Council has indicated that it wants the halibut fishery and sablefish fishery to run concurrently.
- 2) Restricted Access Management of NMFS has indicated that it will need a closed time in order to issue new quota share units to the fleet.
- 3) There is an issue of shore-side enforcement that the Conference Board was unable to get a complete discussion on. If the season were extended to 12 months, or for the above recommended duration, enforcement would need some lead time to design their 1999 or 2000 program.

Both the Canadian and US sections unanimously supported the Commission analyzing the above logistic concerns as well as the biological issues concerning Area 2B and 2C spawning bio-mass in order to debate whether or not a 12 month season is realistic. The Conference Board requests this information be available by the Interim Meeting.

C. Area 4 Management?

Clearing Restrictions:

The Conference Board recommends that the clearing regulations going into 4B require an in-person clear-in in Atka and/or Adak. The current clearing out provisions, the Conference Board recommends be amended to allow a vessel to clear with VHF radio in either Atka or Adak. This action was unanimously recommended by the Conference Board.

The United States Coast Guard representative indicated they did not have a problem with this proposal, however, the NMFS enforcement representative indicated they did not support the recommendations. The clearing out restrictions with VHF radio, due to the limitations of this type of radio, will require the vessel to be within 40 miles of the port from which it was clearing. The clearing out restriction that would allow using the VHF radio, will help save up to 18 hours transit time which can be very significant in the Aleutian Island area. There are weather and market conditions that this clearing out procedure helps to address.

The Conference Board similarly recommends in Area 4A that the clearing restriction require an in-person clear-in to begin fishing and a VHF clearing when leaving the 4A district. The in-person clearings and the VHF clearings would still be in Dutch Harbour and Akutan.

Allowing 4D CDQ Harvests to Occur in 4E:

The Conference Board unanimously recommends this action. The Bering Sea Fishermen's Assoc. abstained in voting. This action is requested by the CDQ corporations on the Bering Sea mainland so that their small boat fleet can take advantage of harvesting the 4D CDQ and delivering it shore-side in Area 4E.

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It is not the intent of the Conference Board that the above action would apply to IFQ harvests. Nor is it the intent of this action to imply that there should be a change in catch-sharing arrangements between areas 4C, 4D, and 4E.

It is not the intent of the Conference Board that the geographic boundaries of these areas be altered.

D. Proposed Changes to the IPHC Regulations

The Conference Board recommends that the IPHC staff work with the NMFS to rewrite the off-loading regulations to allow the weighing of headed and washed halibut as intended by the 1998 instructions.

The Conference Board asks NMFS what their intent was on their careful release language and their representative indicated that it would be acceptable to take a marginally undersized halibut aboard a vessel to measure it before releasing it. If this intent can be worked into the regulation, the Conference Board is supportive of the IPHC changes.

The Conference Board supports a staff recommendation regarding the reporting of 4E undersized halibut intended for subsistence use.

7. INDUSTRY PROPOSALS

A. Industry and Agency

- 1) Request to use NMFS survey information in Area 2A assessment.

The Conference Board recommends that the staff ask Mr. Johnson for clarification of his request.

- 2) Shark damaged fish

The Conference Board does not support this action as it is unenforceable.

- 3) This recommendation was withdrawn.

- 4) Southeast Alaska Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council: Supports local management plans and subsistence use.

The Conference Board is supportive of this action provided that all allocation issues in the United States go through the North Pacific Council and that the intent of the Southeast council is not to usurp authority from the IPHC or other regulatory bodies.

- 5) Re-authorize experimental commercial longline fishery in Chukchi Sea

The Conference Board recommends that this be renewed for 1999 and that the Norton Sound Development Corp and Bering Sea Fishermen's Assoc each receive 10,000 lbs of halibut quota to carry out this research.

- 6) Address chalky halibut problems

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The Conference Board recommends that the IPHC continue its studies of chalky halibut in 1999.

7) Valdez Fish & Game Advisory Committee: Supports IPHC sport tagging program

The Conference Board asked the IPHC staff to contact the Valdez Fish & Game Advisory Committee to review their request.

8) Increase in Western Alaska Quota

The Conference Board addressed this issue under agenda item 6.

9) Halibut Advisory Board: Continue efforts to reduce US bycatch to level recommended at special bycatch meeting in 1991

In 1991 a bi-lateral agreement was signed between Canada and the United States to reduce trawl bycatch mortality of halibut by 10% per year until the mortality level reached one half of 1991's levels. Canada has complied with this agreement but the United States still has not. The trawl bycatch mortality of halibut in the Bering Sea, in numbers of fish removed, is similar to the number of halibut caught in the commercial fishery throughout the entire west coast of North America. The Magnuson Act requires the reduction of bycatch mortalities which has not been adequately addressed at this time by the North Pacific Council. The Conference Board recommends the use of a Vessel Bycatch Accountability program with each trawl vessel to assist in the reduction of trawl bycatch mortality of halibut. The Conference Board suggests that the North Pacific Council look at trawl IFQ programs in the directed fisheries that would help reduce bycatch of halibut.

10) Less conservative approach in setting quotas in Area 2A

This issue was addressed in agenda item 6

Agency Proposal 1) IPHC collect catch data by ADF&G stat. Areas

IPHC staff indicated that this was already being addressed between agencies.

Agency Proposal 2) Extend the regulation allowing retention of undersized halibut in 4E in 1999

This item was addressed in agenda item 6D.

Agency Proposal 3) Joint meeting to discuss enforcement issues associated with the IFQ fishery

The Conference Board is supportive of this action.

B. Industry and Agency – Late (after 1/4/99 deadline)

1) Requesting a repeal of no round deliveries

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This item is addressed under agenda item 7B, Agency Proposal 1

2) Requesting trial fishery of 1.5 million lbs per year in Area 2A

This item was addressed under agenda item 6A.

3) The northern boundary of the Bering Sea

This was an information item and no action was taken.

4) Use of crucifiers

The Commission is already looking into injuries caused by hooking mortalities and no action was taken by the Conference Board.

5) Area 4 Clearance Requirements

This item was addressed under agenda item 6C.

6) Extension of test fishery in the Chukchi Sea for 1999

This item was addressed under agenda item 7A, item 5.

7) Extend seasons

This item was addressed under agenda item 6B.

8) Chalky Halibut

This item was addressed under agenda item 7A, item 6.

9) Small boats, later opening

The Conference Board would like to reiterate to the Commission that IFQ programs give maximum flexibility for each participant to choose when they can fish. Smaller boats, as well as large boats, should be given the maximum time to choose during the year when to harvest their catch. This proposal actually reduces the amount of time that vessels could deliver fish to the fresh fish market.

Agency Proposal 1) Requesting a discussion for changing the Commission regulation to allow the landing of live halibut by removing the prohibition on landing round fish

A representative from the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans gave a presentation on a Canadian initiative to pond and land live halibut in the round. It is presently against IPHC regulations to land halibut in the round. This regulation was brought in several years ago to give better halibut quality in the Alaskan derby fishery, however, it is not on the law books of Canada. There was considerable

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debate about the ponding of halibut. There were concerns about enforcement and aquaculture. On the pro side, people spoke of greater prices for a live product. It was felt that delivery of live halibut would help to forestall the incursion of farmed halibut into the marketplace. It was felt that the ponding of live halibut was not aquaculture because the fish were not fed, and that they were only kept for short periods of time.

A motion was made and seconded stating that it should be legal to deliver live, round halibut but they must be killed before weighing. This motion was carried with 13 in favour, 2 opposed, and 8 abstentions on the US side and 6 in favour, 2 opposed, and 5 abstentions on the Canadian side.

Another motion was made which is as follows:

- 1) Making it illegal to use any Pacific halibut or Pacific halibut reproductive material for any commercial aquaculture purpose
- 2) Making it illegal to import or use any Atlantic halibut or Atlantic halibut reproductive material for any commercial aquaculture purpose on the Pacific coast of Canada and/or the United States
- 3) That the IPHC go on record strongly opposing any commercial aquaculture or any halibut in the United States or Canada.

This motion passed unanimously.

Agency Proposal 2) Allowing the retention of sub-legal halibut in Area 4E for subsistence

It is the understanding of the Conference Board that this was addressed with actions taken in 1998.

Miscellaneous Action 1) The Conference Board unanimously recommends that the Commission request from the respective governments, action that would prohibit the importation of less than 32 inch Pacific halibut into the United States and Canada. Additionally the Conference Board requests that in the annual report the Commission include the importation of Russian halibut.

8. OTHER BUSINESS