

Conference Board Report
87th Annual Meeting
January 25th – 28th 2011
Victoria, BC

United States	United States, Continued
Adak Commercial Development Corp.	West Brothers Group
Adak Fishermen's Association	Westport Charter Association
Alaska Charter Association	Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association
Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association	Washington Trollers Association
Alaska Trollers Association	
Aleute Corp	
APICADA Vessel Inc.	Canada
Area 3B /4A False Pass	Annieville Halibut Association
Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association	BC Halibut Longline Fisherman's Assoc.
Coastal Villages Regional Fund	BC Longline Fisherman's Association
Cordova District Fishermen United	
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific	Canadian Culinary Federation
Edmonds Veteran Indev Longliners	Canadian Sablefish Association
	Ditidaht F.N.
Fishing Vessel Owners Assoc.	FAS
Freezer Longliner Coalition	Gulf Crab Fishermen's Association
Halibut Coalition	Gulf Trollers Association
Jamestown S'Kallum Tribe	Halibut Advisory Board
Juneau Charter Boat Operator Assoc.	Hook and Line Groundfish Association
K Bay Fishermen Association	Huu-Ay-Aht First Nation
Kodiak Longliners Association	Northern Halibut Producer's Assoc.
Kodiak Vessel Owners Association	North Pacific Halibut Fisherman's Association
Lower Elwa	Northern Trollers Association
Makah Fisheries Management	Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council
North Pacific Fisheries Association	NVI Chef's Association
Petersburg Vessel Owners Association	Pacific Coast Fishing Vessel Owners Guild
Point No Point Treaty Council	PHMA
Puget Sound Anglers	Sport Fishing Advisory Board – Main
Quiliute Indian Nation	
Quinault Indian Nation	Sport Fishing Advisory Board – North
Seafood Producers Coop	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - South
SE Alaska Fishermen's Alliance	Steveston Halibut Assoc.
SE Alaska Guides Association	Ucluelet F.N.
Sitka Halibut & Blackcod Marketing Assoc.	
Southeast Outside Longliners	UFAWU
St. George Fisherman's Association	Vancouver Island Longline Assoc.
St. Paul Fishermen's Association	
Swinomish Tribal Communities	
Tribal Government of St. Paul	
UFMA – Kodiak	

REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER

The United States section accredited 43 organizations for participation for the 2011 Conference Board proceedings.

The Canada section accredited 26 organizations for participation for the 2011 Conference Board proceedings.

SELECT CHAIRPERSONS FROM CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

On the Canadian side, Chuck Ashcroft was selected as Chair.

On the United States side, Robert Alverson was selected as Co-Chair.

MISCELLANEOUS

Presentation: - “Electronic Monitoring and the BC Halibut Fishery”:

Howard McElderry (Archipelago Marine Research Ltd)

Howard McElderry of Archipelago Marine Research Ltd made a presentation on monitoring technologies developed and used in British Columbia Canada Groundfish fisheries Hook and Line fisheries since 2006. This presentation was made as a result of an invitation from the U.S. fisherman. Their fisheries are moving toward increased monitoring and there is quite a bit of interest in the monitoring technologies that have been developed and are currently being used in the groundfish fisheries in British Columbia.

While the primary cost advantages were illustrated, other additional benefits were suggested such as:

- Addressing management principles
- Motivating fishers to reduce bycatch and accurately report catch
- Leveling the playing field since everyone fishing to the same standards
- Providing flexibility while being cost effective
- And supporting standards for MSE Certifications

CONFERENCE BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS TO IPHC

A. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALASKAN & CANADIAN WATERS

The Conference Board recommends an opening date of March 12 with a start time of 8:00am and a closing date of November 18.

The following are comments from the Canadian and U.S. delegates:

US:

South East Alaska preferred an earlier opening date of March 5 for marketing purposes. This would allow an extra week of fresh sales. An earlier date helps avoid interactions with sperm whales. However, the groups from SE Alaska compromised on a March 12 opening.

Canada:

A later opening provides extra time for returning spawning stocks to have finished migrating back to eastern and southern areas. The 8AM opening is requested to minimize safety concerns in 2B. A noon opening results in the fishermen hauling gear at midnight and the early morning opening of 8AM will be safer, in that the gear will be hauled during daytime.

March 12 is a compromise date which coincides with good tides and importantly a Saturday opening. Several Canadian groups had indicated a preference for March 26 but compromised on a March 12 opening date.

The Conference Board supported a November 18 closure of the fishing season. This was requested from the fishermen of Area 4. Much of their season does not begin until early June due to ice conditions. The November 18 date falls on a Friday which would be helpful for coordinating deliveries out of Dutch Harbor.

B. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATION 2A

The Conference Board supports the seven staff recommendations for the Area 2A commercial openings which begin on June 29

CATCH LIMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference Board supported the following catch limits for 2011 except for Area 2C. The US and Canadian sections were divided on the harvest limit for 2C.

2A	0.86 million pounds
2B	7.65 million pounds
2C	3.36 million pounds (US proposed)
3A	14.36 million pounds
3B	7.51 million pounds
4A	2.41 million pounds
4B	2.18 million pounds
4CDE	3.72 million pounds
Total	42.05 million pounds

The Canadian and U.S. delegates agreed on most of the harvest limits; however the Conference Board members from Canada and the United States confirmed that there was still continued disagreement over apportionment between the two sectors.

The Conference Board agreed and requests the Commissioners, should they support a harvest limit in Area 2C greater than the staff recommendations, that no deduction from other areas will take place.

The Canadian contingent has consistently rejected the Staff's recommended catch limits for 2B as they believe the Staff's apportionment method is overestimating halibut abundance in the western areas and underestimating available halibut in the east. For example, since 2008 the 2B adopted Fishery CEYs were on average about 840,000 pounds or 9% more than staff recommendations. These catch limits are associated with improving 2B survey and commercial catch indices. The adopted Fishery CEYs in 2B have been consistent with Canada's available exploitable biomass, despite being higher than staff recommendations.

For 2011 staff is recommending a 2B Fishery CEY of 7.65 million pounds. This is still too low and based on Canada's 2010 commercial and survey indices, a catch limit in the range of 8 million pounds is more appropriate. However, considering the large decreases recommended for the western areas and the overall decline in the coast wide EBIO, Canada is willing to accept an Area 2B Fishery CEY in the range of 7.65 for 2011.

COMMENTS ON CATCH LIMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Area 2C

The US section of the Conference Board recommends on a vote of 18 yes, 6 no, and 11 abstentions that the harvest limit in 2C be 3.36 million pounds. Those in favor of this cited that the commercial WPUE in 2C had risen from 155 pounds per skate to 165 pounds per skate. They also observed that the resource charts that show size at age is increasing and the survey weight per unit of effort has ranged from 108 pounds per skate to 115 pounds per skate. This suggests the area is beginning to stabilize.

The Canadian section of the Conference Board opposed a 3.36 million pound harvest limit unanimously with two abstentions. Their concerns are with the overall stock and with other removals taking place in Area 2C. Canada suggested they would have accepted 3.17 m lbs for area 2C which would have kept the total harvest to within the FCEY of 41.86 m lbs.

Additionally, those in opposition were concerned about removals of charter boat harvests and subsistence harvests being excessive. There is concern that the accounting for subsistence and charter boat removals is not reflecting accurately the total removals. Additionally, there are concerns that if the cuts are not taken this year, we could be further behind in 2012 if the resource doesn't respond positively in the upcoming season.

The Conference Board had a vote on whether to support slow up fast down as an overall policy for all areas for the 2011 season. This motion failed in the US section 28 no, 5 yes, and 4 abstentions. This motion also failed in the Canadian section with 22 no and 2 abstentions.

In summary, the Canadian delegation did not support the 3.36 million pound harvest limit and the US section did. West Brothers submitted additional objections. See addendum attached.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED ACTIONS AND CONCERNS BY THE CONFERENCE BOARD

Canadian Concern

Canada does not accept the IPHC's apportionment model

The IPHC's proposed area biomass determination methodology, or "apportionment", estimates the percentage of the coastwide exploitable biomass in each IPHC regulatory area, which is determined from the survey catch rate (WPUE) and scaled to the amount of habitat available (total bottom area between depths of 0 and 400 fathoms). Catch limits within each regulatory area are in turn determined by applying a harvest rate to the above calculation. While this approach uses data readily available to the IPHC staff, the methodology depends on assumptions which Canada still considers untenable. Canada acknowledges the changes that have been made to address various concerns raised since 2007; however, the overall methodology is still unacceptable. In particular, Canada is concerned that the apportionment model is incorrectly estimating exploitable biomass.

The primary concern is that use of the survey catch rate in the current apportionment method assumes constant catchability between all regulatory areas (i.e. the probability of catching a halibut is similar across ecosystems, habitat type and competitor assemblages). In addition, the bottom area used in the apportionment method is calculated for habitat between 0-400 fathoms. The inclusion of depths greater than 300 fathoms is to accommodate recent commercial fishing between 300-400 fathoms in area 4, particularly area 4A. These depths are not fished to a great degree in any of the other areas, and the impact of this re-classification of bottom area to apply in the apportionment scheme reduced Area 2B proportion of coast-wide habitat by 25% (from 9.7% to 7.5%); other areas declined on average by 20%, while area 4CDE increased by 20%. This highlights the extent to which the current apportionment method is influenced by selection of bottom area, which is somewhat subjective, and which has a great impact on the apportionment of biomass to areas.

The estimated exploitable biomass in 2B has increased for 2011, despite catch limits in 2009 and 2010 that were higher than the fishery constant exploitation yield (FCEY) and the IPHC recommended catch limits. This suggests that the exploitable biomass may have been underestimated in 2B for 2009 and 2010, and that higher catch limits were sustainable. This also suggests that the current apportionment is not suitable for determining area-specific exploitable biomass. Moreover, it also suggests that provision of harvest advice as a single possible catch limit derived from a single point estimate of biomass has limitations that could be avoided if harvest advice was provided as a range of catch limits that are based on the range of biomass estimates (e.g. 90% confidence interval range) that are produced from one of the stock assessment model runs.

Motion: Conference Board strongly recommends that the Commission implement in 2011 the necessary management measures to ensure all sectors are managed to their allocations; and the US Delegation wishes to emphasize area 2C guided sport overages in particular.

The US section voted 28 in favor and 3 in opposition, with 7 abstentions. The Canadian section voted 100 percent in favor. Those supporting the motion from both sections cited the need for each group that has an allocation to be managed such that there are no overages of allocation assignments. It was pointed out that in District Court in Washington D.C., the judge ruled that the charter boat GHJ is equivalent to a hard allocation and it was appropriate to implement regulations to keep the harvest within their assigned allocation.

The following is a minority statement from charter boat interests in the US delegation of the Conference Board:

The Alaska Charter Association and the Southeast Alaska Guides Organization assert that internal allocation issues (catch limit distribution, for example) are handled domestically and should be addressed by the respective governments. This policy is further clarified in IPHC Technical Report 26. In his January 2010 letter to NPFMC Chairman Olson, NMFS Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, Dr. James Balsiger, correctly pointed out that development of regulations that allocate or assign halibut fishing privileges among U.S. Nationals or vessels is within the authority of the North Council. Dr. Balsiger added that the Council's development of such regulations through analysis of alternatives provides maximum public participation and transparency. In summary, the North Council is the proper venue for deciding domestic allocation issues in Alaskan waters.

The Area 2C and 3A charter fleets are the only fishing groups whose target catch number, the GHJ, is hard wired to the TCEY. Whatever was added to the FCEY to reach the Catch Limit over the past 10 years has not added a single fish to the Alaska charter fleet's GHJ.

We believe there will be additional restraints on harvest for the charter industry in 2011 via the newly implemented limited entry program which will leave up to 40% of the operators from 2010 without a permit to fish halibut and constrain catch. Additional regulations to the 2C charter halibut fishery will inflict serious financial hardship to individual charter operators and exacerbate widespread economic dislocation to local economies throughout the region.

The South East Alaska Guides Organization (SEAGO) and Alaska Charter Association (ACA) are currently working on a long term solution that supplements our allocation through a compensated transfer of halibut quota. The goal is catch accountability with a sustainable management system that allows flexibility in allocation.

Bycatch Motion:

The Conference Board unanimously adopted the following motion.

The Conference Board believes that accurate accounting of all removals is critical for development of accurate stock assessment, and for understanding the health of the halibut resource and the exploitable biomass available to the directed fisheries. Therefore the Conference Board recommends that the IPHC strongly encourages NMFS to implement the Restructured Observer Program in 2013 as planned, not 2014.

The Conference Board recommends that the IPHC request NMFS to use its regulatory authority to deploy additional observers on vessels harvesting groundfish in the GOA,

including those vessels under 60 ft., to improve the estimation of halibut bycatch that the IPHC requires to manage the halibut stocks.

The Conference Board recommends that the IPHC advocates for bycatch reduction and provides necessary staff expertise to support the NPFMC review of the current bycatch levels in the GOA and BS and the affects of this bycatch on the halibut resource and the catch limits available to the directed fisheries in the U.S. and Canada.

The Conference Board recommends that the IPHC work with the U.S. and Canada to define minimum standards of accuracy for monitoring fisheries where halibut are encountered.

Motion: regulatory proposal:

The Conference Board recommends the commissioners direct the IPHC Staff to develop a regulatory proposal for consideration at the 2012 annual meeting to use jaw tags as an accounting tool for all IPHC regulatory areas. Staff should look at appropriateness for each area/fishery.

This passed with two opposed in the US section and four opposed in the Canadian section.

Motion: Harvest policy and process:

The Conference Board requests that the Commission establish a process that allows timely comment by industry stakeholders and scientists of proposed changes to adopted harvest policies prior to incorporating changes into the catch limit recommendations.

There were a number of policy and process changes that have been recommended by the staff that affect the 2011 harvest limits. They included going from slow up fast down to slow up full down, a change in how survey WPUE is weighted, the use of O26 to U32 bycatch and wastage mortalities, while increasing the harvest rates. This many significant changes make it difficult from a stakeholder perspective and providing some additional time for public comment would be helpful.

Motion: Study on Size Limits

The Conference Board unanimously requests that the IPHC staff provide the Conference Board with a presentation on the pros and cons of dropping the size limit from 32 inches to 31 or 30 inches.

The issues that the Conference Board would like to see discussed are the number of male fish that would become accessible to the fleet and if this would be a biological benefit if they were harvested.

CONFERENCE BOARD DISCUSSION ITEM

Zero to 400 Fathoms – Bottom Depth Discussion

It is the understanding of the Conference Board that the IPHC surveys may be broadened to include stations down to 400 fathoms. The Conference Board is concerned that a general summer survey is going to reflect few fish at 400 fathoms with the exception of Area 4. One of the concerns is how this data will affect apportionment and harvest policy. It was observed by some of the fisherman that unless surveys were done in very early spring and very late fall; many of the regulatory areas would not have halibut in the 400 fathom depth areas. The suggestion was made that there should be no policy changes until the survey expansion process is concluded and any results fully analyzed.

IPHC STAFF REGULATORY PROPOSAL: 2011

The Conference Board approved unanimously the following staff regulatory proposal:

i) **Log book location Options:** Recommendation to change the logbook regulations by removing the option of recording loran coordinates as a fishing location for each set or day. (The LORAN-C stations were decommissioned in 2010 and all LORAN transmissions in North America from Canada and the U.S. ceased broadcasting in August 2010)

INDUSTRY REGULATORY PROPOSALS 2011

Proposal 1 – This proposal was addressed with a previous motion to restrain the guided sport harvest to its allocation.

Proposal 2 – The Conference Board in 2010 sympathized with the Trident proposal and recommended that it be sent to enforcement during the 2010 season for refinement. There was nobody present to discuss this with the Conference Board when it came up for consideration and the Conference Board took no action.

Proposal 3 – Equal opportunity for overnight charter operators: There was nobody present to address this proposal and the Conference Board took no action.

There were eight additional late proposals but they were not taken up by the Conference Board. The Conference Board requests that the Commission staff prior to the 2012 meeting alert the public that proposals need to be submitted by deadline.

Catch Limit Proposals 1 – 11: are taken up under apportionment and harvest limit discussions.

STATEMENT 2011 MEETING
WEST BROTHERS 2C HALIBUT GROUP

(A) The Present Apportionment Model should be dropped. It is destroying the Halibut stock in the West 3A, 3B areas, as well as the other 4 areas.

(1) State of Alaska letter (ADF&G's in 2008) says the method of closed area assessment should be used to apportion biomass.

(2) Everyone except Staff has rejected the present model.

(3) Canada 2009 states that closed area assessment along with historical shares should be used for apportionment.

(4) The University of Miami review (Paul Medley) found the area apportionment of coastwide estimate on survey data to be "reasonable".

(5) West Brothers in 2008 supported historical shares and using closed area apportionment plus an emergency order. This would be used for areas with drastic changes in surveys.

(B) West Brothers still believes (as they did in 2008) that they should not take any greater reduction in harvest than the fisher people to the area south of them.

(1) Total removals have for 15 years have been within one million pounds between 2B and 2C.

(2) West Brothers believe that the exploitable biomass in 2B and 2C are the same.

(3) If the NMFS takes action, the 40% reduction in charter operators should reduce their catch to about 700,000 pounds in 2011.

(4) The level of by-catch and discard mortality rate occurring in Areas 3 and 4 is having a significant impact on the area's exploitable biomass in both 2B and 2C.

(5) We have always figured that we have more migration(which the pit tags show) than staff estimates.

(6) The 2010 Halibut Stock Assessment shows that both 2B and 2C have stabilized and with a 64% cut in the past 3 years in 2C, we need to see some increases.

(7) We feel because of seeing 100% increase in U32 on the grounds and an increase in O32 size, our biomass could be underestimated.