

**Conference Board Report
89th Annual Meeting
January 21st – 25th 2013
Victoria, British Columbia**

United States	Canada
Alaska Charter Association	Annieville Halibut Association
Alaska Trollers Association	A-Tlegay Fisheries Society
Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association	Area F Troll Association
Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association	BC Halibut Longline Fisherman's Assoc.
Aleute Corp	BC Wildlife Federation
Adak Commercial Development Corp.	BC Longline Fisherman's Association
Area 3B /4A False Pass	BC Tuna Fisherman's Association
Area 4 Harvesters Alliance	Canadian Sablefish Association
Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association	Ditidaht First Nation
Coastal Villages Regional Fund	FAS
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific	Gulf Crab Fishermen's Association
Edmonds Veteran Indev Longliners	Gulf Trollers Association
Fishing Vessel Owners Assoc.	Halibut Advisory Board
Freezer Longliner Coalition	Hook and Line Groundfish Association
GOAC3	Huu-Ay-Aht First Nation
Halibut Coalition	Northern Halibut Producer's Assoc.
K Bay Fishermen Association	Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council
Kodiak Longliners Association	Pacific Coast Fishing Vessel Owners Guild
Kodiak Vessel Owners Association	Pacific Trollers Association
Lower Elwa	PHMA
Lummi Indian Nation	Sport Fishing Advisory Board – Main
Makah Fisheries Management	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - South
North Pacific Fisheries Association	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - North
Petersburg Vessel Owners Association	Steveston Halibut Assoc.
	Sport Fishing Institute of BC
	South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition Society
	Ucluelet First Nation
	UFAWU
Prince William Sound Charter Boat Assoc.	Vancouver Island Longline Assoc.
Point No Point Treaty Council	North Pacific Halibut Fisherman's Assn
Quinault Indian Nation	
Seafood Producers Coop	
SE Alaska Fishermen's Alliance	
Sitka Halibut & Blackcod Marketing Assoc.	
St. Paul Fishermen's Association	
Tribal Government of St. Paul	
United Fishermen's Marketing Association	
West Brothers Group	

REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER

The United States section accredited 34 organizations for participation for the 2013 Conference Board proceedings.

The Canadian section accredited 30 organizations for participation for the 2013 Conference Board proceedings. (4 of these were new member organizations)

SELECT CHAIRPERSONS FROM CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

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

On the United States side, Linda Behnken was selected as Co-Chair.

MISCELLANEOUS

Presentations:

1. Canada USA Bycatch Working Group Presentation: (Project Team) Rebecca Reid and Glenn Merrill

The Conference Board appreciated the update given by the Bycatch Working Group Project Team. This presentation informed the Board on some of the improvements that are starting to occur but just as importantly, the issues that still exist regarding bycatch mortality and its negative effect on the directed Halibut fisheries. Identified as concerns were; area-specific reliability in accuracy of bycatch estimates, downstream effects of bycatch due to migration, lost yield, and lost Female Spawner Biomass annually of 2.26 lbs for every 1lb of bycatch. Additionally this 1 lb of U26 bycatch is estimated to reduce future Female Spawner Biomass by 6.6 lbs.

As part of this presentation, immediate and longer term options were presented for discussion and input from the Conference Board, which generated considerable discussion and the following **motion**:

“The Conference Board appreciates the work of the Halibut Bycatch Working Group and the presentation given by the Project Team. The Conference Board urges continued work on the bycatch project. In regards to longer term options listed at the end of the report, the Conference Board requests that the bycatch group continue to develop these options in consultation with industry. Additionally the Conference Board recommends that all halibut caught with currently prohibited gear continue to be required to be carefully released and not be retained for sale.”

The motion passed 35 – 19 with 5 abstentions

Those opposing the motion supported the work of the HBWG but believed the working group should consider the full range of options and have all tools available to reduce bycatch, and that determining what should be done with bycatch halibut after capture should be a separate decision made at a later date.

CONFERENCE BOARD SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS TO IPHC

A. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALASKAN, CANADIAN WATERS, and Washington Treaty Nations:

The Conference Board recommends an opening date of March 16 and a closing date of November 15.

B. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATION 2A

The conference board supports the seven staff recommendations for the Area 2A commercial openings that begin on June 26th as per:

IPHC Staff recommends an opening pattern similar to 2012, starting the last week of June with a series of 10-hour periods, with fishing period limits. Therefore we recommend the following series for 2013: June 26, July 10, July 24, August 7, August 21, September 4, and September 18. The size of the fishing period limits will be determined when more information is available on fleet participation.

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

U.S. (Alaska) indicated a strong recommendation for season opening NO LATER THAN March 16, however, many preferred an earlier opening of Feb 28 for marketing purposes, which ties in with the early sablefish fishery, to reduce delivery conflicts with the herring fishery and to minimize interactions with Sperm Whales. A Feb 28 motion failed 19-26 with most groups in the US voting in favour. The groups from SE Alaska did compromise on a March 16 opening.

Washington Treaty tribes also indicated their support for the March 16 opening.

Canada: The opening date of March 16th falls on a Saturday, which enhances sales for the beginning of the season and is also a date that coincides with good tides.

CATCH LIMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference recommends the following catch limits for 2013

2A	0.99 million pounds
2B	7.04 million pounds
2C	3.12 million pounds
3A	11.03 million pounds
3B	4.29 million pounds
4A	1.33 million pounds
4B	1.45 million pounds
4CDE	<u>1.93 million pounds</u>
Total	31.18 million pounds

Catch Limit Motion

Discussion:

The U.S. adopted the blue line reference level for Area 2C and moved to set other U.S. catch limits 1/3 step down between the blue line catch limit and the 2012 FCEY for those areas. Canada and Area 2A amended the motion to set catch limits in their areas equal to the 2012 FCEY. This amended main motion passed 59 -3 with 2 abstentions

The conference board noted that stakeholders evaluated the risks associated with various catch limits and recommend these catch limits with full awareness of those risks. More specifically, conference board members noted the resource is not at risk; the risk is to stakeholders. Stakeholders from individual areas did their own risk analysis and are comfortable with those risks and these recommendations. Conference board members voting against the motion believed that catch limit recommendations should follow a consistent policy and rationale across all areas and that any recommended reductions should be phased in consistently in all areas.

OF NOTE: The conference board's intent is that the total FCEY be a sum of the area FCEYs recommended by the conference board and that no increase in one area cause a decrease in another area.

Rationale for the conference board recommendations

2A:

Current model does not reflect reality on the grounds
Survey WPUE is up; Commercial WPUE is up 30%
Statements were made by stakeholders such as commercial catch is phenomenal.
Surveys are hit and miss as halibut is concentrated into specific areas and topography.
Halibut has high historic cultural and economic importance to communities.

2B:

As expressed in previous years, the Canadian stakeholders continue to reject catch limits for 2B based on the current harvest policies (e.g. assumptions on harvest rates, apportionment, migration and bycatch impacts etc.) as the stakeholders believe IPHC has consistently underestimated halibut abundance in the Canadian Zone.

Canada points out the 2B catch limits the Commission has adopted since 2006 have been above harvest policy recommendations and setline survey and commercial catch indices have shown recovery and slow improvement since 2008 in Area 2B, in contrast to the western regulatory areas.

Canada further points out that it has dealt effectively with its bycatch and has implemented monitoring programs that greatly reduce the uncertainties associated with 2B total removal estimates. High bycatch and uncertainties in the estimates of total removals in the western areas continue to negatively affect Canada.

For these reasons Canada recommends the 2013 catch limit for 2B remain at the 2012 level 7.04 million pounds.

2C:

Commercial CPUE increased 19%; Survey WPUE up 18%. 2C catch limit dropped “full down” in 2011; came “slow up” in 2012 to 1/3 of possible increase. 2013 blue line is less than 2012 FCEY prior to harvest policy adjustment. Area 2C had the strongest survey results of all areas and strong indications of a recovering stock. Some Area 2C stakeholders are willing to accept the blue line reference level (if implemented consistently in all areas) but others feel 2C stocks could support a higher quota.

3A:

Survey WPUE is up; fishing is better than last year; 3A took some big quota reductions for two years and stakeholders believe stocks have stabilized or are increasing as a result. Changing one parameter in a model and losing 36 million fish is hard to except. The blue line reference level is comparable to the 1974 catch limit and fishing is much better now than it was in 1974. Other view: 3A catch limit should be reduced or time/area closure needed to conserve stocks and address local depletion in Prince William Sound.

3B:

Survey WPUE is increasing. Some reduction is supportable but should be phased in; blue line reference level imposes too big a cut for one year. A lot of concern was expressed about halibut bycatch in this area and its effect on stocks. Some 3B fishermen expressed mistrust in reinterpretation of survey data (change in selectivity).

4A:

Survey WPUE is up slightly and commercial WPUE is level. Harvesters can support some reduction but believe it should be a step down; the blue line reference level is too drastic. Fishermen are seeing lots of little fish.

4B:

Fishermen maintain that the trawl survey is the best information on Bering Sea stocks. Trawl survey shows biomass has tripled; quota in areas has been devalued by 80%. Some stakeholders questioned whether science should be trusted now after being “wrong” about recruitment/selectivity for the past 10 years. One stakeholder maintained that halibut in 4B is part of Russian stock so harvest in this area does not hurt other areas and that there are lots of little fish in 4B. Halibut has considerable socioeconomic and cultural importance to coastal villages.

4CDE:

This area is huge and equivalent to 50% of all fishable area in Gulf of Alaska. Hook competition adjustment always hurts this area and data has not been updated since 2006. Socioeconomic impact to communities in this area from blue line reference level would be extreme.

Catch limit recommendations by stakeholders were incorporated into the discussions and decision making process during this Conference Board session

Minority statement from West Brothers Group:

West Brothers does not support the blue line catch limit reference level for Area 2C. For the last three years the Area 2C IPHC survey has increased from 110 pounds to 161 pounds. In the blue line table the Area 2C biomass is very close to Area 2B biomass. The 2013 harvest rate for Area 2C should be 27.5%. This would result in an Area 2C catch limit one million pounds less than the Area 2B catch limit.

Proposed changes to the 2013 IPHC regulations

Catch sharing plans: Areas 2A, 2B, and 4CDE page 116 BB

The Conference Board supported by motion the catch sharing plans for 2A and 4CDE

Statement from Canadian commercial sector on the 2B catch sharing allocation:

“We object to the recommendation being made at all. Since the Commission does not make allocative decisions and is not apprised of all of the considerations that go into those decisions (or that ought to go into those decisions), it would be inappropriate for the commission to endorse or recommend any allocation between the commercial and recreational sectors in Canada. Further, the reasonableness of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans’ most recent decision to change the allocation between the sectors without compensation is presently before the courts in Canada, so the Commission should not take actions here which could interfere with, or become evidence in, that process. The recommendation should not be passed.”

Area 2C/3A sport fishing regulations for the charter vessels

The Conference Board recommends to IPHC to maintain the current regulation of the reverse slot limit allowing the retention of one fish, ≤ 45 inches or ≥ 68 inches in length, with head on in Area 2C. In addition, as in the past, if the halibut was filleted the entire carcass must be retained on board the vessel until all fillets are offloaded. Likewise the Conference Board recommends maintaining existing guided sport management measures in Area 3A (two fish bag limit, no size restriction; harvest allowed by skipper and crew).

Charter representatives on the Conference Board commented that these management measures were developed by the Halibut Charter Implementation Committee, that 2013 charter harvest is expected to be below the GHF and that stability in management measures is important to the charter fleet.

INDUSTRY REGULATORY PROPOSALS 2013

Ron Antaya - NOAA OLE (Office Law Enforcement), Jonathon Pollard - NOAA GC (General Council) and Lynne Maddis-Oregon Fish and Wildlife were in attendance to answer questions.

i) James Whitethorn: Management: (Alaska only) Require Harvest ticket for Sport caught Alaskan Halibut and Blackcod.

-The conference board took no action due to regulatory, legal and cost issues.

ii) Shawn Crittenden: Management: (Oregon only) Sport fisherman: Create a state wide Charter Tag at a cost which would allow for doubling the daily bag limits for sport caught halibut while using a charter. Annual limits would apply.

-The Conference Board took no action. Oregon Fish and Wildlife has jurisdiction; this is not the jurisdiction of the IPHC

iii) Ronn Buschmann: Regulatory (coast wide) Adopt circle hooks as the legal gear in the directed halibut fisheries: Adopt the circle hook or the soft circle type hooks used commonly with mechanical baiting machines as the sole legal gear in directed commercial, sport (both guided and unguided) and subsistence halibut fisheries. This would outlaw “J” hooks which are still used on some commercial boats and treble hooks which some charter and recreational users utilize. Traditional Native American halibut hooks would be legal gear in the personal use and subsistence halibut fishery.

-Conference Board took no action due to legal and enforcement issues

iv) Don Martin: Regulatory (Alaska only) Account for preserved fish on board sport fishing vessels: Modify Alaska Halibut Sport Fishing regulations to allow possession of preserved halibut on boats that are also used for fishing. This would allow operators of larger live-aboard vessels that are sport fishing while travelling through Alaska to preserve fish above the two day possession limit.

-Conference Board took no action. NOAA OLE advised fish can not be reconstructed and enforcement can not determine if the vessel is within possession limit once fish are frozen.

v) Ronn Buschmann: Regulatory (coastwide) Establish guideline for careful catch and release methodologies for sport caught halibut that are not going to be retained. Prohibit harpooning and gaffing of fish that are to be released in commercial, recreational or charter fisheries.

-Conference Board took no action. Proposal required additional refinement and information.

Proposal numbers 6 and 7 were forwarded on to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) by letter on December 1, 2012 and not dealt with.

CONFERENCE BOARD DISCUSSION ITEMS: BYCATCH

Bycatch Motion 1:

WHEREAS, the impact of halibut bycatch on resource health and fishery yields has long been a topic of importance for the IPHC; and,

WHEREAS, the move to a coast-wide assessment which recognizes halibut migration has also renewed concerns about the impacts of bycatch in one area on available harvest in other areas; and,

WHEREAS, bycatch was the second largest source of removals coast-wide after the directed commercial fishery in 2011; and,

WHEREAS, halibut bycatch now exceeds the directed halibut catch in some Bering Sea areas and accounts for more than 1/3 of halibut removals in some GOA halibut regulatory areas; and,

WHEREAS, a significant amount of halibut bycatch is composed of under 26" fish (U26); and,

WHEREAS, according to the best available scientific information every 1 pound of U26 halibut bycatch represents an estimated 6.6 pound loss to future female spawning biomass; and,

WHEREAS, the impact of halibut bycatch is felt beyond the area of occurrence through reduced spawning and exploitable biomass in all areas and downstream areas due to migration patterns; and,

WHEREAS, IPHC Commissioners and staff have acknowledged the need for accurate accounting of all removals to ensure current CEYs and harvest rates are sustainable; and,

WHEREAS, U.S. members of the Conference Board have noted that the recently restructured North Pacific Observer Program reduces observer coverage in many GOA trawl fisheries to a 15% target level in 2013, does not provide a workable alternative for small hook and line vessels, and contains regulatory loopholes related to the definition of a trip and the use of tenders; and,

WHEREAS, the Conference Board would like to highlight that no action has been taken to reduce bycatch in the Bering Sea area, then,

THEREFORE, the Conference Board urges IPHC Commissioners and staff to advocate aggressively at NPFMC meetings and other appropriate forums for bycatch reductions and the development of measures that create incentives to lower bycatch and bycatch rates to ensure conservation of the halibut resource; and,

FURTHER, the Conference Board requests IPHC staff evaluate the adequacy of halibut bycatch monitoring under the newly restructured North Pacific Observer Program and identify target coverage levels according to effective, agreed upon monitoring standards; and,

FURTHER, the Conference Board requests the IPHC Commissioners provide the results of the North Pacific Observer Program evaluation to the US Secretary of Commerce along with a request to the Secretary for funding and a mandate to the NPFMC to address halibut bycatch immediately; and,

FURTHER, the Conference Board requests IPHC or DFO staff offer to provide a presentation to the NPFMC on the efficacy of using electronic monitoring (EM) to monitor hook and line fisheries, and how fishery managers have addressed data management issues common to EM programs. This presentation should be made at the April or June 2013 Council meetings.

The Conference Board wishes to emphasize that this was a unanimously accepted motion.

Bycatch Motion 2: The Conference Board members recommend forming a harvester sub-committee of the Conference Board to ensure progress is made on bycatch and on the requests contained in bycatch resolution.

Bycatch Motion 3: The Conference Board supports 100% observer coverage on the GOA trawl fleet in 2014 with implementation of integrated EM/human observer coverage by 2015.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW DISCUSSION ITEMS:

The Conference Board was tasked with making recommendations to the Commissioners and IPHC on specific performance review recommendations. Our comments are below.

Recommendation #1: Adopt Clear and Comprehensive Protocols/Rules

The Conference Board advises the Commission that we intend to form a TOR/Policies-Procedures committee to draft new TOR for the Conference Board. Although the sitting members are not yet identified, it is agreed that 3 or 4 from each Nation would be an appropriate number for such a committee. Distribution of a first draft is expected in the next 3 or 4 months with an objective of having a final draft ready for a vote at the 2014 Conference Board Meeting.

The Conference Board also thanks the IPHC staff for providing a discussion draft to serve as a guideline for the committee's work.

To improve communications, the Conference Board request that the IPHC establish a Conference Board link on the IPHC website to post CB materials.

Recommendation #3: Adopt a multi-step process over the next two years to transition the current stakeholder advisory arrangement into a unified, integrated body.

The Conference Board feels that the PAG and the Conference Board have unique issues and strengths that serve the IPHC and the process better if operating as separate Boards. Harvesters and processors bring a wide range of perspectives to the table from different regions and different fisheries. Reducing the size or restricting participation to create one group would compromise inclusiveness.

As such, the Conference board recommends through a motion that the structures of the Conference Board and PAG remain status quo. (Passed with 2 opposed)

Improving CB function and efficiency (Accreditation, voting processes, inclusiveness of membership, etc) will be addressed by the TOR committee

Recommendation #4: Develop Strategic Approach to Research

The Conference board received an update on the Research Advisory Board from Jim Hubbard. Conference Board members agreed that RAB serves an important function and works well, although communication between RAB industry members and other stakeholders should be improved.

The Conference Board also received a description of the Science Research Board from Steve Martell. Steve described the SRB is a small external peer review board of scientists from both countries.

Recommendation #5: Strengthen Stock Assessment Process

MSE/MSAB:

Steve Martell kindly answered a long list of questions on the MSAB from Conference Board members.

The Conference Board understands the Management Strategy Advisory Board will be a critical part of the MSE. This will be a very involved process and will take 2 plus years. Those who get involved will need to be involved for the long term. The Conference Board understands the time commitment to be: initial meeting in the fall (possibly 2-4 days), a webinar spring meeting as well as substantial amounts of material to read throughout the process (probably 2 weeks total time commitment per year). MSAB members will be reimbursed for travel and travel expenses.

Motion: the Conference Board supports creation of the Management Strategy Advisory Board subject to a bilateral agreement on a process by which to identify satisfactory representation of harvester interests from all management areas. Additionally the

Conference Board would like assurance that there will be at least one harvester from the Conference Board to represent each regulatory area.

Passed 30 to 10

Those in support of this motion appreciate the invitation to participate in defining objectives for halibut management. Those who opposed wanted a designated seat for labor (deckhands); others were concerned that the MSAB would not have adequate representation or would be too large to be functional.

Recommendation #11: Strengthen Interim and Annual Meeting Process; #12 Improve communication; #2 Improve transparency

The Conference Board supported changes made in response to the performance review, e.g., both the interim and annual meetings have been improved with the webinar. The Conference Board supports the more open and transparent administrative process. Presentations were clear, concise; communication has been good, clear and open.

Concurrent timing of meetings is an issue for some. Some Conference Board members expressed concern that the public may choose to bypass the Conference Board or PAG processes and participate directly in administrative sessions. The Conference Board also prefers to conclude on Wednesday unless a specific and additional issue is added to the meeting agenda prior to or during the first day of the meeting.

Strong concern was expressed regarding the request from Commissioners for Conference Board and PAG to revisit catch limit and season date decisions in search of a compromise. Some stakeholders had left the meeting with the understanding these decisions had been made by the two advisory bodies and resolution of differences was the responsibility of the Commissioners.

A **motion** was made to request that Commission deliberations and actions on catch limits be open to the public. This motion failed 16-17. (Please note the reduced size of the Conference Board for this Thursday session)

Those not favoring this motion believed Commissioners need privacy to discuss issues of international sensitivity; those in favor believed all debate should be transparent to the public.
