

PROCESSOR ADVISORY GROUP

January 22-24, 1996

Meeting Report

CHAIR: BRIAN BIGLER; WARDS COVE PACKING COMPANY

VICE-CHAIR: JORN NORDMAN; S.M. PRODUCTS

HARVEST ALLOCATIONS

The PAG submits that adoption of the staff recommendations for harvest in all areas are prudent, with the following exception:

Area 2B: According to statements provided by IPHC staff, the Area 2B halibut stocks are abundant, and the imposition of bycatch quotas by Department of Fisheries and Oceans is expected to lower the annual incidental harvest of halibut. DFO has established a targeted reduction of halibut bycatch from 1.517 million pounds to 1.0 million pounds. We request the Commissioners consider an increase in the allocation to 10,000,000 pounds.

HARVEST SEASONS

Area 2A

Processors buying halibut in area 2A feel very strongly about not buying after the month of April due to the increased incidence of chalky halibut. We recommend a 30-day season: March 15-April 15.

All Remaining Areas

We recommend that the 1996 season be opened on March 15, but closed two weeks earlier than the 1995 season; on November 1. The incidence of chalky halibut is an increasing problem after November 1st for many American and Canadian buyers. There is some evidence that worsening weather during this portion of the season may cause changes in handling patterns that exacerbate the inherent chalkiness. The losses due to chalkiness were substantial in 1995, primarily during the last two weeks of the season. This phenomenon is pervasive in some areas and leaves a bad impression for wholesalers and the consuming public when faced with this unacceptable quality. These fish are not acceptable to the fresh fish market and some are questionable for the frozen market. Furthermore, the American Thanksgiving holidays in late November cause a depression in halibut demand, causing American and Canadian processors and fishermen to lose marketability of fresh product during this period. An earlier season closure would alleviate these problems.

INDUSTRY PROPOSALS

FLETCHING AT SEA (Faith Fisheries)

Vessels operating under Class "A" quota shares are the only vessels effected by this proposal; approximately 2-3% of the halibut quota shares. Regulations state that: "No person shall fillet, mutilate, or otherwise disfigure a halibut in any manner that prevents the determination of the *minimum* size limit." The PAG recommends that Class "A" quota share operators be permitted to fletch their catch at sea under the stipulation that no (whole) fletch be less than 40 inches in

Withdrawn.

total length. Under the apparent intent of the regulations, fletching is not allowed because of the potential for cheating on less than minimum size fish. Allowing the fletching of fish of sufficient size to produce a minimum 40-inch fletch would provide the desired flexibility to these processors, but retain the ability to de-facto conclude that the fletch was taken from a fish of at least 32" in total body length.

Product Recovery Rates: No Product Recovery Rates are necessary for providing data to the INPFC. Under present regulations, all halibut must be weighed and counted within a specified number of hours after harvest. The Daily and Weekly Production Reports, and Transfer Logs contain these data and provides INPFC the body weight. The Transfer Log includes body weight and fletch weight.

NOTE: In our deliberations we arrived at the minimum fletch length of 40". On reflection, 40" may be too high a standard. It is our intention that the minimum length of a whole fletch be sufficient to conclude without doubt that the fletch came from a legal size halibut.

CHEEKING

Two proposals included the desire to cheek halibut prior to delivery. The original language, and we feel the intent, of the proposals directed that Class "A" vessels only should be allowed to remove cheeks from harvested halibut. The subsequent language provided to the Commissioners and public did not include the stipulation of Class "A" vessels only, and we therefore must address this issue separately according to the language in each version.

Original ALFA and Faith Fisheries Proposals: It is clear to the PAG that the original request (more or less) requested clarification of existing regulations that allow Class "A" vessels to process their catch at sea. Uncertainty has arisen from a strict interpretation of regulatory language that states: "No person shall fillet, mutilate, or otherwise disfigure a halibut in any manner that prevents the determination of the *minimum* size limit." We have no objection to allowing Class "A" vessels to remove cheeks from their harvest, if there are no objections from NMFS Enforcement.

Staff Proposal Language: Allowing the entire fishing fleet to cheek halibut was not the intent of the original proposal, and we reject the proposal language provided by IPHC staff.

NORTHWEST FOOD STRATEGIES

The halibut industry has seen this proposal in several iterations. We strongly reject this proposal on the grounds that the amount of product that could be provided through this proposal is insignificant when compared to the present success of the program, but represents an unacceptable risk that improperly handled fish could damage the halibut industry.

1. The most reliable information on the amount of incidental halibut landed at shore-based facilities is 44,000 pounds. It is unlikely that more than a portion of this could be made available to Northwest Food Strategies, and is thus a minuscule fraction of the present effort totaling 700,000 pounds annually.
2. Halibut delivered as incidental catch to shore-side processors is sorted and stored unprotected and unprocessed. This catch is subject to severe degradation and poses the strong possibility of being in less than wholesome

condition if offered to Northwest Food Strategies. The salmon industry suffered enormous harm when a single can of salmon infected with botulism was found in 1981. The halibut industry cannot accept the risk of a similar occurrence.

CHANGES IN LANDING NOTICE REQUIREMENT IN ALASKA

The PAG discussed this proposal, but was informed by NMFS Enforcement that the six-hour notice requirement is necessary to allow a variety of ports of landing. We took no action, but representatives of processors in Atka and Savoonga recommend that NMFS reevaluate this requirement for villages in Western Alaska where many fishermen operate from small open skiffs.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES


Sport Harvest

The PAG is unified in the deep concern that the sport harvest in all areas is under-reported and unmonitored. Decreases in salmon available to sport charter organizations in areas 2A and 2B has focused more attention on halibut. Analysis by IPHC staff has indicated that sport harvest in all areas is increasing rapidly; 7.7 million pounds in 1995. We request that the Commissioners direct IPHC staff to review the analysis of sport harvest and present an assessment of the technique at the next annual meeting.

These minutes of the first annual meeting of the Processors Advisory Group are respectfully submitted to the Commissioners and Staff of the International Pacific Halibut Commission.

Members In Attendance

Aero Trading Co., Ltd. Atka Pride Seafoods Cloud Trading Faith Fisheries, Inc. French Creek Sfd. Icicle Seafoods	Kake Fisheries Kake Tribal Corp. Fisheries Kelliher Fish Co. Norquest Seafoods Norton Sound Sfd. Prod. Pacific Wild Sfd., Ltd.	S.M. Products Sitka Sound Seafoods Trident Seafoods Corp. Wards Cove Packing Co. Western Alaska Fisheries
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Brian Bigler, Chairman