

INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION
1995 ANNUAL MEETING OF CONFERENCE BOARD

REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER AND APPROVE ANY NEW
REPRESENTATIVES

The Conference Board has requested that the Canadian and United States chair develop guidelines for submitting applications for approval to become members of the Conference Board and have authorized the chairs to appoint a subcommittee to address this issue.

REVIEW AREAS

The Conference Board with exception to the staff recommendation with regard to Area 4 has no changes to recommend in the Convention areas.

Area 4

The Conference Board unanimously supports the staff recommendation, which is also under Item G. 3, which would incorporate 4D-N into Area 4D.

The United States Conference Board deliberated the issue of incorporating Areas 4D, 4C, and 4E into one area. The Conference Board took action on two motions, the first of which advises the Commission not to change the areas that currently exist. The second motion dealt with providing adequate timing before any changes are made by the Commission so that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) can address the allocative regime under their IFQ and CDQ programs in these respective areas. There was a suggestion to give a one-year notice to the NPFMC to address this issue, however, the United States Conference Board did not feel this was adequate time. In any event, before the Commission aggregates Areas 4D, 4C, and 4E, the NPFMC needs to have adequate notice so that the elaborate allocative structure in these areas can be addressed.

REVIEW QUOTAS

Area 2A

The Conference Board recommends 520,000 pounds.

This recommendation to the Commission is based on Table 1. 1994 Assessment of Yield -Rate = .30 (based on projected 1995 exploitable biomass). This is consistent with the new philosophy that the Commission staff is using for new area quotas. Additionally, the Conference Board supports this quota because it is consistent with the 95/5% division between Areas 2B and 2A.

Area 2B

The Canadian Conference Board recommends 9.52 million pounds on a vote of 11 to 1.

The Conference Board supports this quota because it is consistent with the recommendation that is generated on Table 1. 1994 Assessment of Yield - Rate = .30 (based on projected 1995 exploitable biomass). This new procedure for developing quotas more accurately reflects what the Canadian fishermen were experiencing with their CPUE rates which were discounted when the staff developed their recommendations. The Conference Board feels the need for scientific consistency and if the staff and Commission are going to use the new procedure for developing quotas they should feel comfortable enough to accept the result. The fishermen do not believe that the CPUE should be discounted until a survey can confirm the concerns of the staff. The CPUE data now available in Area 2B is the best information available and provides CPUE information over eight consecutive months. The Canadian Conference Board also believes that a constant exploitation rate should be applied to all regulatory areas.

Area 2C

The Conference Board recommends a quota of 9 million pounds.

The Conference Board recommends this quota because the staff recommendation is less than either the projected Area 2C quota in Table 1 for stock assessment based on projected 1995 exploitable biomass or that based on the 1994 exploitable biomass. The 9 million pound quota seemed adequately conservative based on the two procedures for developing quotas and represents a 2 million pound reduction from 1994. The Area 2C quota has been consistently set below the staff's recommendations for the last three years. The bycatch in this area is also the lowest of all areas in Convention waters. The United States Conference Board also is convinced that there will be additional savings from wastage with the United States IFQ program.

The Conference Board took three different votes to recommend this quota to the Commission. The final vote was 15 in favor and 12 opposed. The 12 in opposition support a harvest of 8.5 million pounds.

Area 3A

The Conference Board recommends a quota of 20 million pounds, which is the staff recommendation.

Area 3B

The Conference Board recommends the staff recommendation of 3.7 million pounds. The United States Conference Board voted 17 in favor to 6 opposed to support this recommendation. Those in opposition support a 5 million pound harvest based on habitat area and the highest CPUE of any area and a very low bycatch mortality which occurs in Area 3B. There has been

very little survey work done in this area and, hence, some of the Conference Board believe the Commission staff have under-estimated the harvest strength in this area.

Area 4

The Conference Board recommends a total harvest of 6.2 million pounds in Area 4.

The recommendations by subarea are as follows:

Area 4A

The Conference Board supports the staff recommendation of 2 million pounds.

Area 4B

The Conference Board recommends a harvest of 2 million pounds.

Area 4B must be considered a distinct habitat range from Areas 4A, 4C, 4D, and 4E. The Aleutian Chain has many areas that have been inaccessible to the fleet because of the nature of the openings for the last fifteen years. Many of the areas west of 170°W. have not been fished. The westward area of Area 4B has not been fished because of its distance from the clearing ports. It is estimated the last 300 miles of Area 4B has not been harvested in the last seven to eight years. There are many areas which are not considered in the staff's habitat area because fishing gear was not deployed in those areas. Many of those areas are between the islands where there are strong currents and gear cannot be deployed. Nevertheless, those areas are prime habitat for many species including halibut. Area 4B is unique in that it has two continental shelves which provide significant habitat much of which has not been exploited in many years. The IFQ program should allow vessels to prospect and find additional fishing opportunities.

Areas 4C and 4D

The Conference Board recommends a quota of 800,000 pounds in Area 4C and 1,200,000 pounds in Area 4D.

The Conference Board considered a couple of harvesting strategies using the Commission staff's recommendation of a total harvest between Areas 4C and 4D of 2 million pounds. The Conference Board considered a harvest of 1,300,000 pounds in Area 4D and 700,000 pounds in Area 4C which was amended to 1 million pounds in each area and later refined to the current recommendation which was supported by 17 and opposed by 7.

Those representatives from Area 4C felt that since Areas 4D and 4C have had similar quotas in the past that this should continue and that this type of parity was appropriate in determining the harvest levels between these two areas. Those that are dependent upon Area 4D recognize that significant changes in Area 4C will affect the NPFMC allocation strategies in that

area and initially supported 1,300,000 pounds in Area 4D and 700,000 pounds in Area 4C. Area 4D has had recommendations from the Conference Board the last two years recommending a harvest level in the range of 1.3 million pounds because of the larger habitat area of Area 4D.

The Conference Board acknowledges in Area 4C the CPUE over the last several years has been based on seasons that were designed to conflict with Area 3 fishermen rather than the optimal time for this area, which would be mid-July to mid-August. The CPUE data would in all likelihood reflect a higher number had seasons been available at this time.

Area 4E

The Conference Board recommends a quota of 200,000 pounds .

The Conference Board recommendation is 100,000 pounds less than the staff recommendations and reflects a harvest which would be 80,000 pounds greater than the 120,000 pounds taken in 1994. This should be adequate expansion for fishing opportunities in 1995.

SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATION FOR ALL AREAS

Area 2A

The Conference Board supports the staff recommendation in the Blue Book starting with July 5.

The Conference Board recommends to the Commission an opening date of March 1 and a closing date of November 15.

This recommendation is based on separate votes taken by the Canadian Conference Board and the United States Conference Board. The Canadian Conference Board supports this recommendation on a vote of 11 to 1. The United States Conference Board supports this recommendation on a vote of 14 in favor to 11 in opposition with 6 abstentions.

The Conference Board had a general discussion on season lengths including a 12-month season to take advantage of market opportunities. The following actions by the Conference Board were taken on this agenda item:

The United States Conference Board initially supported an opening date of March 15 and a closing date of November 15 on a vote of 20 to 6. The United States vote on these dates preceded the Canadian vote and there may have been some misunderstanding because some of the United States industry representatives thought the Canadian industry was supportive of March 15 based on the lack of opposition in the general discussion. The Canadian Conference Board unanimously voted in opposition to the March 15 opening date and November 15 closing date.

Support for a March 1 date from the Canadian and United States Conference Board is based on having maximum access to markets. Additionally, there was some concern by the United States harvesters that an April 1 date may invite too large of a fleet because of better weather conditions and exacerbate the bycatch of halibut in the longline black cod fishery in Alaska. It was believed that a March 1 date would not result in a rush to the grounds whereas an April 1 date would. An earlier date should result in a lower bycatch mortality because vessels will be retaining their halibut in all hook and line fisheries in Alaska. It was pointed out that with an IFQ/IVQ program vessel owners can choose the optimum time to fish both in terms of weather and market.

Those in opposition cited the Halibut Commission staff's concerns for migration between Areas 2C and 2B, and between Areas 2B and 2A. Sports interest in the Area 2A region were concerned about the affects of a March 1 opening and a March 15 opening in Area 2B because they believed this would limit the amount of migrating fish available to them. Additionally, smaller vessels would probably not participate in a March 1 opening due to weather considerations.

There was some suggestion that the opening date should be based on a tidal date rather than a calendar date to minimize gear loss. There was not much support for this nor debate. The Conference Board also discussed an opening scenario where the southern part of Area 2C open April 1 and the southern part of Area 2B open April 1 as well, to protect the migrating stocks, and all other areas would be open March 1. This was not acceptable in the United States to have a split opening. There was also some discussion on limiting the amount of harvest in March but this did not seem to be workable at this time.

The Conference Board unanimously supports that the Commission aggressively pursuing tagging studies, as soon as possible, on migratory stocks between Areas 2C and 2B and between Areas 2B and 2A.

AREA 2A MANAGEMENT

It was the understanding of the Conference Board that these issues had been acted on by the United States Government and did not need action.

STAFF REGULATORY PROPOSALS

Hook strippers

The Conference Board unanimously supports legalizing the use of automated hook strippers as outlined on page 63 in the Blue Book.

The Conference Board additionally adopted recommendation to broaden the regulation requiring careful release to include all halibut that are not retained, which is outlined on page 63 of the Blue Book.

Clearance requirements in 4A and 4B

Area 4B - Provide for physical clearance in Nazon Bay and allow for VHF radio clearance on the way out.

Areas 4C and 4D - Allow for physical clearance in existing ports such as Dutch Harbor and Akutan and VHF radio clearance in the Pribilofs.

VHF radio clearance should ensure that the vessel is within 20 miles of the port it is clearing.

The Conference Board unanimously supports existing requirements where residents of Area 4 who have not participated in fisheries outside Area 4 would not be required to clear.

Eliminate Area 4D-N

This was addressed in the area issues above. The area is not actually eliminated, but is re-incorporated in Area 4D.

Minor word changes in Regulations

The Conference Board took no action on this.

Mandatory office logbooks in 1996

The United States Conference Board members request that the staff work with members of the industry. The industry would like to have one logbook as the IFQ program in Alaska will allow fishermen to harvest both groundfish and halibut and we prefer having one logbook such as the federal logbook or a modified halibut logbook, which is acceptable to National Marine Fisheries Service.

All fish must be dressed before landing

The Conference Board unanimously supported this action.

INDUSTRY PROPOSALS

Northern Native Fishing Corporation, Prince Rupert, BC

No action taken.

Alaska Sablefish Inc., Homer

The Conference Board supported the request by Alaska Sablefish Inc. to endorse an Aleutian-only January 1 opening date for black cod in 1996.

Matt Langdon, commercial fisherman, Castle Rock, WA

No action taken.

Alaskan commercial fisherman

No action taken.

Sqeean Stau Do Tien, Southeast Alaska

No action taken.

North Pacific Fishery Management Council, Anchorage, AK

These issues were addressed above.

OTHER ISSUES

72-hour prohibition - The Conference Board failed to take this issue up, but the two chairmen note that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council approved a motion to recommend to the IPHC that the 72 hour prohibition continue, and that it would apply to vessels who intend to participate in directed sablefish and halibut fisheries.

The Conference Board requests that the Commission provide dialogue with those Conference Board representatives that can attend July and November meetings to expedite the regulatory process that affects industry.

The Conference Board requests that the Blue Book and the industry proposals be made available to the Conference Board members one week prior to the annual meeting. This would assist in the Conference Board's deliberation.

The Conference Board received a late proposal and without prejudice either for or against requests the following concept be looked at by the IPHC staff in light of enforcement and bycatch implications:

"Beginning January 1, 1996, non-halibut and black cod directed fisheries using hook-and-line gear be allowed to retain halibut up to historical bycatch rates for each fishery. That halibut would be deducted from the vessel's IFQ."

NEW BUSINESS

ACCREDITATION

The Conference Board discussed the current Accreditation Application Form and recommends the following changes:

1. The application need not have all the member's names. The total number would be sufficient.
2. It should be made clear to those submitting an application that the Conference Board membership is based on the representation of harvesters and that government agencies such as port commissions and chambers of commerce would not qualify for membership. The application needs to be submitted by a group that can verify that it is involved in representing a group of harvesters. There can be some exceptions due to the nature of the remoteness of areas in Alaska and the style of representation that has developed in this area.
3. For those members of the Conference Board that were not represented in a prior year, they will need to indicate their intent to participate by December 1 the following year in order to be accredited.
4. Those organizations that are seeking to be a member for the first time need to have their application in by December 1.
5. All applications should be mailed to the International Pacific Halibut Commission, P.O. Box 95009, Seattle, WA 98145-2009.

INDUSTRY PROPOSALS

The Conference Board recommends that December 1 be used as a cut-off time for the submission of industry proposals to the Conference Board and IPHC for consideration at the January Annual Meeting. The purpose of this would be to provide adequate time for the IPHC staff to distribute proposals along with the Blue Book to the Conference Board representative.

FEES

The Conference Board has authorized the co-chairs to set up a joint account and solicit the existing Conference Board members for a voluntary \$200 fee which would be used to distribute information developed at the July and November interim IPHC meetings in 1995. Funds would not be used to cover traveling expenses during 1995.

INTERIM MEETING REPRESENTATION

The Canadian Conference Board has chosen Ralph Shaw, Gregg Best, and Rod Pierce to represent the Conference Board at any interim 1995 meetings of the IPHC. The United States Conference Board has selected Gorden Jensen, Linda Kozak, Bob Alverson, Stan Weikle, and there will be a representative authorized from Area 4, a representative from the Sport Industry, and a representative from the Kenai-Homer area.

It is not contemplated that new proposals other than those actions taken at the January annual meeting would be authorized to be spoken to by the delegates at the interim meeting. New proposals will be only considered for the January annual meeting.

RECREATIONAL COMMENTS

The sport charter representatives fielded a lively discussion of future allocation issues between the different user groups. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is currently addressing several alternatives to allocate between commercial and charter boat operations. The discussion included the increasing participation of charter boat operators in the Alaska area as well as a discussion on capping the growth to some percentage of the overall quota.

MINUTES

The Conference Board decided that minutes would henceforth be considered a DRAFT until minor corrections can be made by Conference Board members so that an accurate set of minutes can be created.

The Conference Board adjourned the meeting and thanked the chairs.

Gregg Best, Canadian Chairman
Robert Alverson, United States Chairman

