

Conference Board Report

78th IPHC Annual Meeting

January 22-25, 2002, Seattle, WA

Attendance:

United States	Canada
Aleut Corporation	Annieville Halibut Association
Area 3B/4A False Pass	BC Aboriginal Fisheries Commission
Atka Fishermen's Association	Canadian Sablefish Association
Bristol Bay Drift Net Association	Dididaht First Nation
Bristol Bay Economic Development Corp	Halibut Advisory Board
Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association	Hesquiat First Nation
Concerned Area M Fishermen	Northern Halibut Producers Association
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific	North Pacific Halibut Fisherman's Association
Fishing Vessel Owners Association	Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council
Kachemak Bay Fisheries Association	Pacific Coast Fishing Vessel Owners Guild
Kodiak Longliners Association	Pacific Longline Fisherman's Association
Kodiak Vessel Owners Association	Steveston Halibut Association
North Pacific Fisheries Association	Ucluelet First Nation
Norton Sound Economic Development Association	
Petersburg Vessel Owners Association	
St. George Fishermen's Association	
St. Paul Fishermen's Association	
Seafood Producers Coop	
United Fishermen's Marketing Association	
Washington Recreational Fishing Industry Association	
Washington Treaty Tribes	
Westport Charter Boat Association	
Washington Troller's Association	
Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association	

REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER

Two new organizations were accredited. The Hesquiat Tribe was accredited for Canada and the Washington Trollers were accredited for the United States.

SELECT CHAIRPERSONS FROM CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

On the United States side, Robert Alverson was selected as chair.
On the Canadian side, Chris Sporer was selected as co-chair.

CONFERENCE BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS TO IPHC

A. Review areas

The Conference Board has no recommendations for new or altered IPHC areas.

B. Season date recommendations for all areas

The conference board discussed extending the commercial halibut season.

A motion was passed for the 2002 fishing season to close on December 1, 2002. The conference board requests that the next IPHC annual meeting be scheduled for the first week of January, 2003, as the conference board requests that the 2003 season begin March 1.

C. Catch limit recommendations all areas

The Conference Board recommends the following harvest levels for the 2002 fishing season:

2A	1.31 million pounds (staff recommendation)
2B	11.75 million pounds (staff recommendation)
2C	8.5 million pounds (staff recommendation)
3A	22.63 million pounds (staff recommendation)
3B	17.13 million pounds (staff recommendation)
4A	4.97 million pounds (staff recommendation)
4B	4.2 million pounds
4CDE	5.0 million pounds

Total: 75.49 million pounds

Conference Board comments:

Area 3B.

There were two organizations of the Conference Board that supported keeping the harvest level the same as in 2001 (16.53 million pounds). All other organizations supported the staff recommendation of 17.1 million pounds. The arguments that support the staff recommendation include (1) CEY level of 28.56 million pounds of which the proposed harvest is more than 10 million pounds less than the current CEY. (2) Commercial CPUE levels remain relatively high continuing at over 400 pounds per skate. Those concerned about the staff recommendation noted a discrepancy between the survey CPUE and the commercial CPUE. The commercial CPUE dropped 29% in 2001. Additionally, it was pointed out that harvest levels in 3B had been continuously on the rise and that it was perhaps time to take a pause with regards to any increases in this area.

Area 4B.

The Conference Board recommends a two-year phase-in for the decrease proposed by the staff. The Conference Board's recommendation of 4.2 million pounds reflects a fifty percent reduction of the staff's recommended decrease of 1.47 million pounds. The Conference Board believes that the change in habitat methodology in determining the harvest level in this area needs further surveys to confirm its validity. This phase-in addresses economic issues within Area 4B and will allow an additional year of survey work to confirm any needed decrease in the harvest in 4B.

There was concern expressed that the survey time frame from June to August in the Aleutian Islands area needs further consideration. The concern is that the month of June, due to water temperatures, can push the fish to deeper areas than the survey covers. The staff might consider a July time frame for surveying the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea when the fish are generally above 200 fathoms.

There were some members of the Conference Board who spoke to their specific lower CPUEs in 4B and were concerned that the cut in quota was justified.

Area 4CDE.

The Conference Board recommends that the harvest level be increased approximately ten percent over the staff recommendation. The Conference Board notes that the CEY in this area is up twenty percent over last year. The CEY is 11.81 million pounds and the Conference Board proposal of 5 million pounds is less than fifty percent of what the staff suggests is the upper-end potential. Increases in other areas have been based on taking one-third of the staff's new CEY if greater than the preceding year's harvest level and adding it to the new year's quota. This policy is not being followed in Area 4CDE. The Conference Board proposal is 1.5 million pounds less than the procedure used in Area 3B and 3A for increasing quotas. The procedure for increasing quotas in 3A and 3B would net a two million pound increase in 4CDE and the Conference Board proposal is for approximately half a million pound increase. The commercial CPUE in 4D remains extremely high, which is 517 pounds per skate. Last year the Conference Board recommended a higher quota based on an increasing CEY, but this recommendation was not accepted by the Commission. The CEY has increased again in 2002. There were Conference Board members that were opposed to this recommendation as the quota numbers still appear to be soft and the methodology of using a habitat formula for population estimates is still being developed.

D. Staff proposals for changes to IPHC regulations (page 100, blue book)

1. Catch sharing proposal. The Conference Board unanimously recommends the proposal, as presented in the blue book.
2. Subsistence regulations for Alaska. The Conference Board recommends that the Commission recognize subsistence fishing in Alaska.

3. Illegal possession of halibut. The Conference Board accepts the recommended staff changes. There was one delegate in opposition.
4. Legal purchase of halibut for bait. The Conference Board recommends acceptance of this item, however, they had two issues of concern. The first concern is for crab vessels that may be leaving the Seattle area with no crab pots on board but halibut heads to be used as bait in their freezers, and the second concern is for IFQ halibut fishermen who may save the heads of their fish for crab fishing and keep the heads in a freezer on their boat. The NMFS enforcement representative indicated that these two issues could be taken into consideration in drafting their regulations.
5. Retention of sub-legal halibut for subsistence use in 4D and 4E. The Conference Board recommends approval of this proposal. A representative from 4C indicated a request that Area 4C be included in this proposal; however, this is not part of the Conference Board recommendation.
6. Commercial treaty fishing. The Conference Board unanimously agrees with the changes proposed by the staff.

E. Industry proposals for changes to IPHC regulations

1. Clearing for Area 4. The Conference Board requests that the commissioners provide in their regulations that the use of a vessel monitoring system (VMS) will satisfy the requirement to physically clear in and out of Area 4.
2. April opening. The Conference Board did not support this recommendation. There was only one in favor. The Conference Board recommendation on fishery openings and closures is discussed under season date recommendations.
3. Bycatch in the longline fishery. The Conference Board recommends the IPHC Commissioners request the NPFMC and DFO develop a discussion paper, to be presented at next year's annual meeting, to allow the retention of halibut by IFQ/CDQ/IVQ fishers in directed fixed gear fisheries, where applicable. The discussion paper may include the impacts on Alaska longline P-COD, Turbot, DSR, and troll salmon. In addition, it should address Canadian sablefish and dogfish fixed gear operations. The focus of this is to have fresh fish on the market to better serve the consumer and to minimize discard mortality. The motion carried, but two groups were in opposition.
4. Chalky fish report. The Conference Board recommends support for this proposal. There was one delegate in opposition who expressed concerns that there was no control standard for reporting of chalky fish and there is some question as to whether fish that are chalky and going into the frozen market really reflect an economic problem for the industry.

5. Bycatch of halibut. The Conference Board dealt with this under Proposal C. We would like to bring to the attention of the Commissioners that the Brindle Proposal does not specify that the bycatch would be delivered by only those who hold IFQ halibut.
6. Area 4 check in. This was addressed under Item A.
7. This proposal was withdrawn as it was addressed under harvest limits.
8. This proposal was withdrawn as it was addressed under harvest limits.
9. This proposal was withdrawn as it was addressed under harvest limits.
10. Bait type and gear type requirement. The Conference Board investigated this proposal with Commission staff and the owner of the vessel involved in the survey. It was determined that the statements presented in this proposal were inaccurate and the survey was conducted with standard gear and bait.
11. This proposal was withdrawn as it was addressed under harvest limits.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Eco-Labeling

The Conference Board reviewed the attempt by the harvesters to acquire an eco-label for Pacific halibut. The Conference Board continues to support this effort. It has been determined that the cost of acquiring an eco-label through the Marine Stewardship Council may cost eighty thousand dollars for Alaska halibut and an additional thirty thousand dollars for Canadian halibut. The Conference Board would be pleased should the Commissioners choose to fund this initiative, or identify means for the industry to acquire funding.

2. Aquaculture

It was the understanding of the Conference Board from last year that the Commissioners were to present a report on the plans of the respective governments for the development of halibut aquaculture in Canada and the United States. It would be appreciated if the Commissioners could put this on the 2003 agenda for discussion, as a presentation to the harvesters.

The Conference Board recommends with one in opposition the following separate motions:

- i. That the IPHC recommend to the governments of Canada and the United States that the development and expansion of halibut aquaculture be stopped until research has been conducted and analysed regarding the impacts of halibut aquaculture on the

environment (i.e. pollution, oxygen depletion, chemical and antibiotic discharge), wild stocks (i.e. pathogens transfer and genetic diversity), and the commercial fishing industry (from biological, health, environmental, and economic impacts).

- ii. That the IPHC shall be the primary organization of the Canadian and United States governments for assessing the various impacts of halibut aquaculture on the wild halibut stocks.
- iii. The IPHC shall not allow Pacific halibut or Pacific halibut eggs to be used in aquaculture in any way. That the IPHC ensure that its resources, expertise, facilities, and staff not be employed or made available in any way to support the advancement of commercial aquaculture.
- iv. That the IPHC recommend to the governments of Canada and the United States that the practice of open netcage aquaculture or penning of wild halibut should be banned due to risks of escapes, pathogen transfer, algae blooms, pollution, and discharge of drugs and chemicals into the marine environment.
- v. That the IPHC recommend to the governments of Canada and the United States that the use of Atlantic halibut for aquaculture purposes be prohibited in the Pacific waters of North America.
- vi. That the IPHC take a position opposing research on and the use of genetically modified organisms to advance aquaculture.
- vii. Commissioners Beamish and Balsiger give the Conference Board a report on the plans of the respective governments for the development of halibut aquaculture in Canada and the US.

3. Multi-Year Quotas

The Conference Board unanimously supports the IPHC in its move towards investigating a multi-year strategy for setting harvest levels.

4. Bycatch

The Canadian delegates expressed concern with bycatch mortalities (mainly in the bottom trawl fisheries in the Bering Seas, e.g., rock sole, yellowfin sole, codfishes) and their potential impacts on Canadian halibut stocks. The Conference Board asked the Commission to re-examine the relative effects of bycatch mortality on all areas (adjacent or downstream) for discussion for the 2003 meeting. The motion was passed with no opposition.

Additionally, the Conference Board would like the blue book to include the bycatch of sub-legal and legal halibut in numbers of fish by area as well as weight.

The Conference Board reiterates its 2001 comments, which are as follows:

- a) "The Commission write a letter to the U.S. State Department endorsing Individual Bycatch Quotas (IBQ) for halibut for the US trawl fleet as IBQs would allow NPFMC/NMFS to reduce halibut bycatch from happening and permit the US to live up to the commitments made under bilateral agreement with Canada."
- b) "The Canadian government send a letter to the US government requesting the US government take action to deal with the halibut bycatch issue and live up to commitments made in a bilateral agreement with Canada and allow for the changes necessary to reduce bycatch to the agreed level."

5. Miscellaneous

It would be helpful for the Conference Board if the staff could provide the following information in spreadsheet format. The information that is requested would include, for the last five years, by regulatory area: commercial quota set; commercial quota harvested; percentage of quota harvested; setline CEY; and, CPUE (commercial and survey).