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Conference Board Report
84th Annual Meeting
January 14th – 18th 2008
Portland, Oregon

United States	United States, Continued
Adak Fishermen's Association Ad Hoc Recreational Fishing Assoc. Alaska Charter Association Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association Alaska Native Fishermen's Assoc Alaska Travel Association Alaska Trollers Association Aleutian Pribilof Is. Association APICADA Vessel Inc. Area 3B /4A False Pass Atka Fishermen's Association Bay Area Sportsmen Assoc. Bell Buoy Crab Company Inc. Bristol Bay Driftnetter's Association Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association Coastal Villages Region Fund Cordova District Fishermen United Curry Sportfishing Assoc. Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific Fisherman's Advisory Committee of Tillamook Fishing Vessel Owners Assoc. GOAC ³ Halibut Charter Coalition of Alaska Halibut Coalition HOH Homer Chamber of Commerce Iwaco Charter Association K Bay Fishermen Association Kodiak Assoc. of Charter Boat Operators Kodiak Longliners Association Kodiak Vessel Owners Association Lower Elwa Makah Fisheries Management North Coast Halibut Advisory Committee North Pacific Fisheries Association Northwest Sportfishing Association Oregon Anglers Oregon Coast Sportfishing Assoc. Pelican Advisory Panel Board Petersburg Vessel Owners Association	Prince of Whales Lodge Assoc. Quiliute Indian Nation Quinalt Indian Nation Recreational Fishing Alliance – Oregon Chapter Seafood Producers Coop SE Alaska Fishermen's Alliance Sitka Charter Boat Assoc. Sitka Halibut & Blackcod Marketing Association Southern Oregon Halibut Fishermen St. George Fisherman's Association St. Paul Fishermen's Association Tribal Government of St. Paul UFMA – Kodiak Unalaska Native Fishermen's Assoc Washington Trollers Association Western Aleutian Fixed Gear Group Westport Charter Association Canada Annieville Halibut Association BC Halibut Longline Fisherman's Assoc. Canadian Sablefish Association FAS Gulf Crab Fishermen's Association Gulf Troller's Association Halibut Advisory Board Huu-Ay-Aht First Nation Northern Halibut Producer's Assoc. Northern Trollers Association Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council Pacific Coast Fishing Vessel Owners Guild Pacific Trollers Assoc. PHMA Sport Fishing Advisory Board - Main Sport Fishing Advisory Board - North Sport Fishing Advisory Board - South Steveston Halibut Assoc. Ucluelet F.N. UFAWU

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REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER

The United States section accredited 57 organizations for participation for the 2008 conference board proceedings.

The Canada section accredited 20 organizations for participation for the 2008 conference board proceedings.

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. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL AREAS

The conference board entertained an action to start the 2008 season March 1st for 2008, March 7th for 2009 and March 6th for 2010. These opening dates are Saturday openings and the intent for setting three consecutive opening dates is to provide stability for future seasons. The United States delegation supported this action on a 27 to 3 vote with 23 abstentions. Those abstaining were from areas or fisheries that the opening date would not affect. The March 1st opening date for 2008 provides the maximum market opportunities and an early date in March has provided an opportunity to introduce halibut into the market that benefits later sales during the year.

The Canadian delegation was unanimously opposed to the motion. The Canadian delegation met in caucus on Sunday night and discussed season dates. Potential opening dates of March 1, 15 and April 1 were proposed. Those in favor of an earlier opening date cited market concerns, while those favoring a later date had migration and interception concerns and cited page 46 of the Blue Book. The figure shows halibut are still migrating from their winter grounds to their summer grounds until the beginning of April. They pointed out that the earlier the fishery begins prior to April, the more potential there is for 2B fish to be caught before they return to the Canadian zone. With these issues in mind, the Canadian contingent reached a consensus to go with staff recommendations of a March 15th opening date and a November 15th closing date.

The conference board unanimously recommends a closing date for the season of November 15th. This closing date assists in spreading the halibut deliveries over eight months of fishing time so that inventories are minimized.

B. CATCH LIMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Conference Board supported the following catch limits for 2008:

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2A	1.22 million pounds
2B	9.0 million pounds
2C	6.21 million pounds
3A	24.22 million pounds
3B	10.90 million pounds
4A	3.10 million pounds
4B	1.86 million pounds
4CDE	3.89 million pounds
Total	60.40 million pounds

COMMENTS ON CATCH LIMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Area 2A

The catch limit recommendation for 2A represents a 9.1% reduction from the 2007 harvest limit of 1.34 million lbs. This percentage reduction was developed using last year's total catch limit of 65.17 million lbs and the 2008 total catch limit of 59.24, which happens to be a 9.1% reduction of total harvest. In proposing this harvest limit for 2A, the participants in 2A, and the conference board as a whole, are not supporting the harvest apportionment alternative from the staff.

Under a separate action that affects only 2A, the conference board unanimously supports the recommendations from the Pacific Fishery Management Council to their catch sharing plan.

The conference board took up regulatory proposal #9 by Steve Gray and unanimously supported his recommendation, which is to start the commercial halibut season in 2A on May 14th, with subsequent openings occurring every two weeks. The other restrictions on opening hour and poundage limits are recommended to stay the same.

Area 2B

The harvest limit in 2B is recommended to be 9 million pounds; the increase of by approximately one million pounds is not to come out of the Alaskan fishery harvest limits. This recommendation is supported unanimously by the Canadian delegation. It is also supported by the US delegation 11 to 2, with 36 abstentions. This vote also included support for the coast-wide assessment, support for the 20% harvest rate policy, and non-support for the apportionment alternative from the staff. This proposed harvest level represents a 21.5% reduction from the harvest in 2007. The Canadian delegation felt that the biomass estimate for 2B is being underestimated and is not consistent with the population of halibut the industry is seeing on the grounds.

Alaskan Waters (Area 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4CDE)

The Conference Board acted on a motion to support the 2008 staff recommended catch limits

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for Alaska with the request that the IPHC convene a workshop evaluating apportionment techniques to be held in the fall of 2008, not to conflict with NPFMC or PFMC meetings. The endorsement of these staff recommendations does not represent agreement on the staff apportionment alternative. This action was supported by 27 groups out of the United States with 13 opposed and 6 abstentions. Canada also supported this action with a vote of 14 in favor, zero opposed, with 6 abstentions.

The conference board did entertain a minority action that would set the harvest limit in 2C at 6.21 million pounds, which would have been a 0.286 harvest rate with the presumption that the CEY for this harvest level being 9.3 million pounds. This proposed action failed with 27 opposed, 7 in favor, with 13 abstentions from the US delegation, split along commercial and charter boat interests. The Canadian delegation abstained on this proposed action. The minority comments follow:

A proposal was made by Mr. Comstock of the Ad Hoc Recreational Fishing Alliance to use the actual exploitation rate for Area 2C for the purposes of calculating Total CEY for that area in 2008. The actual exploitation rate is determined by adding other removals to the staff catch recommendation and dividing that amount by the exploitable biomass and more accurately portrays the level of removals being recommended by staff. This proposal would have allowed the IPHC to minimize their impact on a pending rulemaking in the United States to establish the appropriate level of charter catch in Area 2C. Proponents of the proposal pointed out that the IPHC's fast down policy adds 2.29 million pounds to the Fishery CEY for the benefit of the commercial sector, but provides no similar benefit for the charter sector, whose guideline harvest levels are determined under US regulations by the Total CEY.

The conference board unanimously supports the coastwide assessment presented by the staff. The conference board however, does not support the proposed staff apportionment, and as noted above, requests that there be a workshop on apportionment in the fall of 2008.

Migration - The Conference board request the IPHC staff prepare a report or undertake a workshop on migration dynamics and on the current tagging experiments that are being conducted by the IPHC. The CB would like to know what the primary focus of the PIT tag program provides as well as the pop up tagging program. The CB would like to know the limitations of these tagging programs relative to the Coastwide Assesment as well as apportionment discussions, what they add to the science and what should not be assumed they project. Migration plays a part of both these debates and the CB would like to know the limitations and appropriate uses of these tagging programs relative to each.

Standardizing Table 1. The Conference Board request that the staff for 2009 attempt to standardize the different deductions and assumed catch limits that appear on this annual table. Currently each 2008 catch limit recommendation has one or two built in assumptions

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making it difficult to judge what is included in each recommendation, particularly sports and charter catches. This table is found on page 109 in the 2008 blue book.

IPHC STAFF REGULATORY PROPOSALS: 2008

Revise Area 2A vessel license application requirement

No action taken, pulled by IPHC staff.

Further define net weight in IPHC regulations

The conference board unanimously supports this.

Determining the minimum size of sport caught halibut in Alaska

The conference board set up a work group consisting of Tom Ohouse (sp?), Rex Murphy, Don Lange, Larry McQuery (sp?), Chris Peraman (sp?) and a representative from the state of Alaska to work with NMFS and the IPHC staff. They will meet Thursday, January 17th and report directly to the Commissioners. The conference board did not support the regulation as presented in the Blue Book.

Defining the acceptable logbooks used by U.S. commercial fishing vessel operators

The conference board unanimously supports this action.

INDUSTRY REGULATORY PROPOSALS 2008

Proposal 1 – Prohibit tagging of halibut except by IPHC or appropriate state/provincial government agency (Kathy Hansen)

This was approved by the conference board. The conference board recommends that anyone doing any tagging of halibut needs to get approval from IPHC. The conference board also supports the tagging derby that occurs in Homer, AK. This is a big promotional derby and it is not the intent of the conference board to stop this event. There is concern that halibut could be retained that are not IPHC tagged and someone could be in violation of an undersized fish.

Proposal 2 – Shellfish pots on board (Kathy Hansen)

The conference board recommends the following wording change with regards to the prohibition of shellfish pots on board a commercial halibut vessel: “or fishing pots capable of catching legal-sized halibut except for a vessel with 10 or less sport or personal use crab pots.

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The problem that was brought to the conference board was that many vessels in Alaska carry pots for crab and shrimp for personal use. Some of these vessels have been given warnings by the NMFS for carrying these personal use and sports pots on their vessels.

Proposal 3 – 100% VMS coverage for commercial halibut/sablefish (Ludger Dochtermann and Walter Sargent)

The conference board did not take any action on this proposal.

Proposal 4 – Combine Area 4 fish with VMS (Todd Hoppe)

The conference board supports Mr. Hoppe's request. The issue that he raises is that there is an inconsistency in regulations regarding the retention of halibut from multiple areas within Area 4. The change in regulation would allow a vessel that had a transponding VMS unit while operating in Area 4, or a certified observer on board, to retain halibut from multiple areas. Mr. Hoppe was working with NMFS enforcement and IPHC in regards to this request.

Proposal 5 – Pot retention of halibut in the Bering Sea (Jay Hebert)

There was no proponent from the conference board in regards to this proposal.

Proposal 6 – Alaska halibut season opening date (Linda Behnken)

The conference board dealt with season opening date on previous action.

Proposal 7 – Prohibit the use of electric or hydraulic reels when sport fishing for halibut (Walter Pasternak)

The conference board recommends that this proposal be reworked and be brought back in 2009 after consultation with IPHC and NMFS enforcement. The concerns here are the proper way of defining an electric reel versus someone who might want to bring on board a commercial hauling or jigging machine. There was general agreement on the conference board that commercial gear of this sort should not be used in the sport and charter industries.

Proposal 8 – Commercial size limit reduction (Colleen Vanderheide)

The conference board had a spirited discussion in regards to this proposal. There was a suggestion for no size limit, as well as the proposed reduction to 30 inches.

The conference board did take a vote on this. It was opposed at this time, but the proposal was not entirely rejected. Some of the concerns at this time are that we do not understand the impact that this will have on migration, total yield or yield by area. At this time the conference board and the Commission are debating a new assessment model as well as an apportionment model and the conference board is not prepared to take action on a change in size limit at this time. The conference board requests that the Commissioners instruct staff to gather data and prepare an analysis on this issue.

Proposal 9 – Earlier start date for open access halibut off Washington, Oregon, and California (Steve Gray)

Addressed above.

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Proposal 10 – Alaska halibut season opening date, prohibit the use of electric reels when sport fishing for halibut, and 100% VMS coverage for commercial halibut/sablefish (Kathy Hansen)

No action taken, as this comments on other proposals.

Late Proposals:

Proposal 11 – April 1 – November 15, 2008 season; accounting of removals by all user groups (Terry Henshaw)

Addressed under a previous action.

Proposal 12 – Allow Pacific whiting shoreside vessels to retain Pacific halibut until offloading (Frank Lockhart)

There was no objection by the conference board on this proposed action.

Proposal 13 – Proposal on tagging of halibut proposed by Kathy Hansen (Tina Day)

This was taken up under previous discussion.

Catch Recommendation Comments #23 - #25:

The conference board took no action as the Secretary of Commerce and the NPFMC are already dealing with these issues.

All other catch limit comments were addressed during the discussions on opening dates and harvest limits.

New Business

Trawl Bycatch

The conference board expressed increasing frustration with the lack of progress on this issue. The United States has just finalized rationalization options for the large trawl operations on flounders and cod in the Bering Sea. The coops that were formed in this rationalization process are anticipated to be able to significantly reduce their prohibited species catches. The conference board requests that IPHC staff meet with Canadian and US industry members and agencies during 2008 to consider additional bycatch management and reduction options that should be available with this new management regime in the Bering Sea. Additionally, the United States observer program in the Gulf of Alaska is not accurately recording discard mortalities in portions of the trawl fleet that are not covered by observers. It is requested that additional measures be supported by the Commission to get better bycatch estimates in the Gulf of Alaska through appropriate changes in the GOA observer program. The conference board noted that bycatch can and has been addressed citing the significant actions that have been taken in 2B and 2A.