

DRAFT Conference Board Report
91st IPHC Annual Meeting
January 25th – 29th 2016
Juneau, AK

| United States | United States Continued |
|--|--|
| Alaska Charter Association | Trinidad Ranchera Tribe |
| Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association | Tulalip Tribes |
| Alaska Trollers Association | United Cook Inlet Drift Association |
| Aleut Corp | West Brothers Group |
| Adak Community Development Corp. | 3A/4B Fishermen's Association |
| APICDA | Young Fishermen of Western Alaska |
| Area 4 Harvesters Alliance | Nunivak Island Fishermen's Group |
| | Canada |
| Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association | Annieville Halibut Association |
| Coastside Fishing Club | Area F Troll Association |
| Coastal Trollers Assn. | BC Integrated Groundfish Association |
| Coastal Villages Regional Fund | BC Halibut Longline Fisherman's Assoc. |
| Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific | BC Longline Fisherman's Association |
| Edmonds Veteran Independent Longliners | BC Tuna Fisherman's Association |
| Fishing Vessel Owners Assoc | BC Wildlife Federation |
| Freezer Longliner Coalition | Canadian Sablefish Association |
| Halibut Coalition | |
| Homer Charter Association | Gulf Crab Fishermen's Assn. |
| Humbolt Area Saltwater Anglers | Gulf Trollers Assn. |
| Jamestown S'Klallum Tribe | |
| Juneau Charter Boat Association | Halibut Advisory Board |
| Kodiak Vessel Owners Association | Hook and Line Groundfish Association |
| K-Bay Fishermen's Association | North Pacific Halibut Fisherman's Assn |
| Lower Elwa | Northern Halibut Producer's Assoc. |
| Lummi Indian Nation | Northern Trollers Association |
| Makah Fisheries Management | Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council |
| N. Olympic Penn. Sportfishing Coalition | Pacific Cst. Fishing Vessel Owners Guild |
| North Pacific Fisheries Association | Pacific Trollers Association |
| | PHMA |
| Petersburg Vessel Owners Association | Sport Fishing Advisory Board - Main |
| Port Gamble S'Klallum Tribe | Sport Fishing Advisory Board - South |
| Prince William Sound Charter Boat Assoc | Sport Fishing Advisory Board - North |
| Quiliute Tribe | Stevenson Halibut Association |
| Quinault Indian Nation | Sport Fishing Institute of BC |
| Recreational Fishing Alliance-California | South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition Society |
| Seafood Producers Cooperative | IMAWG |
| Seward Charter Boat Association | UFAWU |
| SE Alaska Fishermen's Alliance | Vancouver Island Longline Assoc |
| Sitka Halibut & Blackcod Marketing Assoc | West Coast Guides Association |
| Southeast Alaska Guides Organization | |
| St. Paul Fishermen's Association | |
| Tribal Government of St. Paul | |

REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER

The United States section accredited **49 organizations** for participation for the 2016 Conference Board proceedings.

The Canadian section accredited **29 organizations** for participation for the 2016 Conference Board proceedings.

Conference Board welcomed 2 new member organizations

SELECT CHAIRPERSONS FROM CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

United States selected Linda Behnken as Co-Chair.

Canada selected Jim Lane as Co-Chair.

CONFERENCE BOARD SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS TO IPHC

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

The Conference Board recommends an opening date of March 3, 2016 and a closing date of November 7, 2016.

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

Discussion:

U.S. (Alaska representatives) indicated strong support for as long a season as possible to maximize fresh market opportunities, distribute effort, take advantage of favorable tides in Alaska, and minimize interactions with sperm whales. Alaska representatives explained that a late spring opening creates a “derby” as longliners who also salmon fish race to catch their quota before the salmon season. **Canada** favored an opening date of March 19 to coincide with favorable tides, but voted in favor of March 3 date. Area 2A fishermen favored a later opening date to take advantage of favorable tides. Representatives of western areas supported a late closure date to allow the sablefish season to extend until mid-November, but the conference board recognized the late year data constraints faced by staff.

Motion adopted U.S.--28 in favor; 11 opposed; 2 abstentions; Canada—Unanimous in favor

SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATION 2A

The Conference Board supports the staff recommendations for the seven Area 2A commercial openings beginning on June 24 as outlined in Bluebook page 203 with corrections in **BOLD**:

“For the Area 2A directed commercial fishery, the staff recommends an opening pattern similar to 2015, starting the last week of June with a series of 10-hour periods, with

fishing period limits. Therefore we recommend the following series for 2016: June 22, July 6, July 20, August 3, August 17, August 31, **September 14, and September 28**. The size of the fishing period limits will be determined when more information is available on fleet participation.”

CATCH SHARING PLANS: Areas 2A, 2B, and 4CDE

Area 2A: The Conference Board adopted the IPHC recommendation to endorse the CSP developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) as described on page 187 of the 2016 Bluebook.

Area 4CDE: The Conference Board adopted the catch share plans for Area 4CDE per page 187 in Bluebook.

Note: The CB considers the 2B CSP to be domestic allocation issue that is the purview of Canada and therefore should not be addressed by the Conference Board.

Area 2C/3A Catch Sharing Plan: The Conference Board endorsed the halibut charter management measures developed by the charter stakeholder committee and recommended by the NPFMC (Bluebook p. 187).

Area 2C Charters: One-fish daily bag limit, with a reverse slot limit allowing the retention of one fish, ≤ 42 inches or ≥ 80 inches in length, with head on.

If the final charter allocation is sufficiently higher than the Blue Line to accommodate a change in the reverse slot limit, the NPFMC recommends adjusting the size of the lower limit upward to meet the allocation.

Area 3A Charters: Two-fish daily bag limit. One fish of any size and a maximum size of the second halibut is 28 inches, with head on. There is an annual limit of four (4) fish. In addition, each charter halibut permit is limited to one charter halibut fishing trip per calendar day. Also limit each vessel to one trip per calendar day. Charter halibut fishing will be prohibited on Wednesday all sport fishing season.

Additionally, the NPFMC is recommending including for the Area 3A charter fishery a requirement to record halibut information on the back of license or harvest card as an enforcement mechanism for the annual limit. If an annual limit is required for Area 2C, a similar provision will apply in that area.

Recommendations for adjusting harvest management measures if the Area 3A catch limit is above the blue line can be found on page 188 of the Blue book.

Motion passed unanimously US and Canada

Motion: CB recommends that the IPHC notify the NPFMC that they should provide the Commission with recommendations on how to adjust the harvest management

measures if final catch limits are above OR BELOW blue line to avoid IPHC adjustments to the domestic harvest measures.

The Conference Board noted that the NPFMC did not provide recommendations relative to adjusting the management measures downward in 3A and final bycatch numbers for 3A reduced the 3A Blue Line subsequent to the NPFMC meeting. Since bycatch numbers are often finalized late in the year, this blue line change could occur with some regularity. Area 3A charter representative and charter stakeholder committee chair expressed support for this motion.

Motion passed unanimously US; Canada abstained as they felt this is a domestic allocation issue

CATCH LIMIT DECISIONS

The Conference Board adopted the following catch limits for 2015

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|---|
| 2A | 1.33 | million pounds |
| 2B | 7.35 | million pounds (adopted by Canada; failed US) |
| 2C | 5.64 | million pounds |
| 3A | 10.10 | million pounds (adopted by US; failed Canada) |
| 3B | 3.00 | million pounds |
| 4A | 1.39 | million pounds |
| 4B | 1.30 | million pounds |
| 4CDE | <u>1.64</u> | <u>million pounds</u> |
| Total | 31.75 | million pounds |

Rationale to support/ oppose catch limit recommendations:

Area 2A: Area 2A catch limit- 1.33 million pounds. Proponents of the motion stated the following: WPUE has increased in both the survey and the commercial fishery. The fishing in 2014 was thought to be the best most fishermen had ever seen. 2015 fishing season was significantly better than 2014. Area 2A has a long history of good management that has prevented sector overages despite a high number of user groups, short openings and small numbers. Bycatch in Area 2A trawl fisheries has been reduced by 450,000 pounds, which is a 77% reduction. Proponents believe the stock can support this 310,000 pound increase over the blue line, and that this level will allow fishermen to fully prosecute the Area 2A fisheries and reduce wastage.

Motion passed on the U.S. Section 31-6-3; Canada supported unanimously

Area 2B: Canadian Conference Board members adopted a 7.35 million pound (combined commercial and recreational) catch limit. Canada notes that recent long-term average level of coast-wide removals from the stock is close to 60 million pounds. The current level of removals is 40 million pounds. The ratio of the current Canadian removals to around 40 million pounds of total removals is consistent with the ratio of Canada's long-term removals to the total removals. Canada notes it considers the reference point for

removals in 2B to be their recent removals, as these have shown to be sustainable for 2B as indicated by the survey and commercial fishery indices that are stable and increasing respectively.

Canada's points out its management of directed and bycatch fisheries have had 100% at-sea and dockside monitoring in all hook and line/trap groundfish fisheries since 2006. All directed and non-directed commercial harvest in these fisheries is quota applicable and comes from the commercial TAC.

U.S. members that did not support the 2B catch limit believed the harvests in Area 2B over the past few years have been too high and have negatively affected recovery of stocks in Area 2C and 2A. There are also strong concerns that the harvest rates adopted in Area 2 in recent years were not the same across all Area 2 regulatory areas, with the harvest rates in 2B significantly higher. U.S. CB members want to see a common harvest rate applied to all of Area 2 and send a strong message to this effect to the Commissioners.

Area 2B members disagreed strongly with the notion of a unified harvest rate being applied to all of Area 2, stating that the areas are different and have different management processes and hence different stock dynamics.

Motion failed on the U.S. Section 14-21-5; Canada supported unanimously

Area 2C: CB adopted a 5.64 million pound (combined commercial and guided sport) catch limit. Proponents noted that dramatic catch limit reductions have worked to rebuild stocks. Area 2C has the highest survey WPUE, large fish, lowest bycatch (no trawling allowed in area) and strong indicators of high productivity. WPUE increased relative to last year in both the survey and the commercial fishery. Other proponents noted that conservation in Area 2C has benefitted Areas 2A and 2B and that the harvest rate should be consistent across all of Area 2. Area 2C charter representative also spoke in favor of the 5.64 million pound catch limit. Area 2B representatives agreed Area 2C catch indices warrant reasonable increases for 2C, but does not support applying a constant harvest rate across all of Area 2. Some CB members considered 5.64 million pounds to be too low for Area 2C, given the clear signs of strong stocks and the stability of 2B stocks despite consistently higher harvest rates over the past six years. There was also support for setting the Area 2C catch limit at the blue line.

Motion passed US: 27 yes, 9 opposed, 4 abstentions; Canada: 25 yes, 2 opposed, 2 abstentions

(First Area 2C catch limit Motion FAILED, which would have set the catch limit at 6.44 million pounds Some Area 2C representatives supported a higher catch limit, noting that Area 2B stocks have remained stable or increasing with a harvest rate of 29% and higher, and that Area 2C stocks have been under-harvested. Proponents of the higher 2C catch limit noted 6.44 was 75% of historic catch limits, that tagging studies indicate very little out migration from Area 2C, and that all of Area 2 should have the same harvest

rate. Most Canadian representative objected to comments that the harvest rate should be the same across Area 2, but some supported the higher catch limit recommendation based on strong abundance indices in Area 2C.)

Motion failed US 15-21-4; passed Canada unanimously

Area 3A: CB adopted 10.10 million pound (combined commercial and guided sport) catch limit, which is the same as the 2015 catch limit. CB members noted that the commercial catch indices show an increase from 2015, but the survey catch indices remain low and relatively stable. Proponents noted that the survey WPUE from the Yakutat area increased significantly from 2015 (p. 519, 2015 RARA) and stated their expectation that the stock would continue to recover from east to west. Opponents stated that bycatch had increased in Area 3A, that guided sport removals exceeded allocation, that the accuracy in accounting for bycatch was uncertain, and that therefore the catch limit should be conservative and set at the blue line.

Motion passed on the U.S. Section 21-8-19; Failed Canada Section 2-7-16

Area 3B: Conference Board adopted a 3.00 million pound catch limit. Proponents of the Area 3B recommendation pointed out the survey catch indices show an apparent increasing trend and the commercial catch indices increased notably relative to 2015. Some fishermen stated fishing in parts of 3B was very good and that they are seeing a lot of halibut in areas under 20 fathoms in depths that are currently un-surveyed. They also noted that catch limits have been reduced by 87% over the past few years ago, that this reduction has contributed to stock rebuilding, and that therefore a small increase from 2015 is justified. Some members of the US side did not support the motion, stating that the survey and catch data does not provide enough evidence to warrant an increase for 2016. Also, that there is great uncertainty with bycatch removal estimates and that fishing has improved but still not as good as it used to be.

Motion passed on the US section 28-6-5; Canada passed 17-2-9

Area 4A: Conference board adopted 1.39 million pound catch limit. Proponents of this catch limit consider the 4A resource to be stabilized or increasing. Commercial WPUE increased 9% relative to 2014, and although survey WPUE is down proponents stated the survey misses the high abundance areas so underestimates the stock. Proponents characterized the stock in 1995 as unexploited, hence the rapid drop in WPUE between 1995 and 2005. Opponents stated their concern that a catch limits above the blue line could cause abundance to decline.

Motion passed US 28 yes, 6 No, 5 abstentions; Canada supported unanimously

Area 4B: FCEY at 1.3 million lbs. Proponents stated Area 4B biomass estimate, commercial WPUE and survey WPUE have all increased relative to 2015. They stated 4B was an unexploited stock in 1995 and with fishing has dropped to stable and now slightly increasing levels. Proponents stated the Aleutian Islands are a discreet ecosystem

and that the halibut stock in the Aleutians shows little if any migratory contribution to other areas, as reflected by genetics and oceanographic currents (Hauser et al. 2006), as well as tagging studies (Seitz, et al, 2008). They maintain that the Area 4B stocks can support a harvest rate of 21.5%, which is the basis of this FCEY (applied to the 4B exploitable biomass of 7.08 million pounds yields an area 4B TCEY apportionment of 1.52 million pounds, subtracting the latest estimate of O26 non-FCEY of 0.22 million pounds results in the FCEY of 1.3 million pounds)

(http://www.iphc.int/meetings/2016am/Updated2016BlueLine_1_19_16.pdf)

Opponents were concerned that WPUE is well below historic levels, that 4B stocks could not withstand this harvest rate, and that a FCEY of this level will reverse the current stock recovery.

Motion passed US 24 yes, 8 No, 7 abstentions; Canada 2 yes, 27 abstentions

Area 4CDE: Conference Board adopted 1.64 million pound catch limit, which is the blue line for this Area. Proponents noted that the expanded survey in 4CDE reduced uncertainty and resulted in higher stock indices. Voluntary bycatch reductions also contributed to a higher FCEY in this area. Proponents noted the high dependency of Area 4CDE residents on the halibut fishery, as well as the cultural, social and economic importance of the directed halibut fishery to Area 4CDE communities.

Conference Board passed Motion unanimously

Comments by Conference Board members on overall catch limits: Proponents believe the CB catch limit recommendations respond to staff identification of a total FCEY that maintained the fishing intensity, or SPR, at a level close to 2015. Given the overall more favorable stock condition, proponents believe this total FCEY reflects a conservative and risk adverse approach. Spawning biomass and Ebio both are stable or increasing and the declining size at age has leveled off. That said, CB members noted that catch limit recommendations were made based an evaluation by CB members of abundance in each area, rather than in any attempt to remain at or below a certain total FCEY. One Conference Board representative expressed concern that the 2015 SPR (and 2016 recommendation) could represent an F30% fishing intensity, given the confidence interval/range around the estimate. In addition, at the blue line there is a 33% chance that the FCEY in 2017 will decline by 10%, and at the harvest level recommended by the Conference Board there is a >50% chance of FCEY decline of 10% in 2017. Finally, some CB members stated their dissatisfaction with applying different harvest rates across Area 2 while other CB members restated their view that different harvest rates in Area 2 were appropriate.

Motion: It is the intent of the Conference Board that no area be “penalized,” or lose quota relative to the CB recommendations, to benefit another area.

Proponents of the motion believe that if the Commissioners set the total FCEY lower than the total recommended by the Conference Board, reductions to catch limits should be made proportionally across all areas except 4CDE, which is at the blue line. The

alternative perspective is the Commissioners should exercise their judgment in deciding where reductions should be made if the total FCEY was determined to be too high.

Motion passed US 18 yes, 9 no, 10 abstentions and FAILED Canada 1 yes, 27 no, and 1 abstention

Harvest Policy Motion

The Conference Board recommends Commissioners prioritize the task of reviewing and updating the harvest policy and harvest control rule. The Conference Board asks Commissioners to direct staff to work with the Science Advisory Board to develop harvest policy/control rule options to be reviewed and evaluated by the MSAB. This is a priority of the US and Canadian stakeholders who request the assignment of sufficient staff and resources to accomplish this in timely manner (i.e. 1-2 years).

Rationale: Staff has indicated that the harvest policy needs to be reviewed to determine whether existing harvest control rules and blue line harvest rates are appropriate. The Conference Board believes that the management process would benefit from development of an updated harvest policy that is better aligned with recent catch limit decision from the Commission, and believes the evaluation of IPHC harvest policy options by the MSAB should be a Commission priority.

Motion passed unanimously

Bycatch Motion

The Conference Board appreciates the work that IPHC Staff has done to provide a greater understanding of the impacts associated with halibut bycatch, and the need for bycatch reduction measures. We strongly recommend that the IPHC continue with this work and advocate for additional reductions in halibut bycatch in the BSAI and GOA. The CB also supports continued work with the NPFMC to develop abundance-based PSC management approaches that protect the reproductive value of the halibut stock and maintain and improve traditional directed fisheries in the US and Canada. Priorities are: 1) continued improvement in the management of all bycatch fisheries particularly in the GOA; 2) increased observer coverage of the trawl fishery in the GOA; and 3) abundance-based PSC management with a cap in accordance with the National Standard 9 of MSA.

Motion passed unanimously

INDUSTRY REGULATORY PROPOSALS 2016

Lower minimum size limit to 30 inches

Motion: Reduce the minimum size limit from 32” to 30” in Area 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4CDE, but continue to apportion between areas using current exploitable biomass policy (i.e., lowering the minimum size should not change apportionment between regulatory areas). Reassess the minimum size if size-at-age changes in the future.

Rationale: Proponents of the proposal stated that reducing the size limit would significantly reduce wastage as the number of small halibut in Areas 3 and 4 is

considerable. Proponents noted the concerns of the IPHC staff regarding the potential change in selectivity that may occur, but stated their belief that the lower price paid for small fish would deter changes in fishing behavior/selectivity. Proponent stated that the lower size would increase harvest of males and therefore reduce the harvest of females, which should provide additional benefits to the stock overall. Finally, proponents stated that the minimum size was increased from 26 inches to 32 inches when processors could not market small frozen halibut, and that this is less of a consideration with fresh fish.

Those that did not support the proposal were concerned changes in selectivity would not be known due to the lack of adequate monitoring, and believed issues/concerns raised by staff had not yet been addressed. Others were concerned that changing the size limit at this time without proper monitoring would lead to increased mortality of small/juvenile fish, and higher release mortality of fish smaller than 30 inches. The general consensus of those opposed was there were too many uncertainties associated with the proposal and further refinement is required.

Motion passed US section 14 yes, 11 No, 13 abstentions; Canada 3 Yes-18 No-6 Abstentions

IPHC Staff Regulatory Proposals

Retention of tagged halibut regulations: CB **unanimously approved** a motion to extend regulations that allow retention of tagged halibut at any time on any vessel to include the sport, guided sport and personal use fisheries (i.e., exempted from sport bag limits, possession limits, and size limits)

Log regulations for the Alaska commercial fishery- The **US members of the CB unanimously approved** the recommendation to allow the NMFS electronic logbook to be added to the list of IPHC acceptable logbooks. Canadian Conference Board members abstained as they view this as a domestic management issue. US CB members noted that this logbook was developed in consultation with the IPHC and the fishing industry and had industry support.

Government Agency Proposals

Catch sharing plans are included above under catch limit proposals.

Allow longline pot gear as legal commercial halibut gear in the Gulf of Alaska (Areas 2C, 3A, 2B)

Motion: Allow legal sized halibut to be retained in sablefish pots by fishermen with unfished IFQ for that area WITHOUT retention limits for 3 years or until an appropriate maximum bycatch rate is determined.

CB member in support of this motion stated that allowing retention made sense and would reduce waste. Also that existing data was insufficient to establish an appropriate

maximum retainable amount at this time, but that one should be established if necessary to prevent targeting halibut with pots. Opponents noted that the NPFMC regulations to allow pots do not specify type or size of pot, therefore large pots could be used to target halibut, which would cause gear conflicts, gear loss and impacts to small boats that currently fish halibut with longlines.

Motion passed: 18 yes, 5 no, 15 abstentions; Canada abstained as this was seen as a domestic management issue

Industry Regulatory Proposals

Amend IPHC fish ticket reporting requirements for Area 2A tribes- The Conference Board was advised no action by the Commission was necessary on this regulation change so took no action.

Revise commercial logbook requirements- The Conference Board took no action on this proposal. The request to change the regulation relating to IPHC logbook requirements were submitted due to concerns about enforcement actions on vessels targeting sablefish and not encountering or retaining a halibut. After reviewing logbook enforcement actions over the past year, it became apparent that enforcement priorities are appropriately focused on vessels retaining halibut and not filling out an IPHC logbook. No action appears necessary at this time.

Establish a maximum size limit of 60 inches in both the commercial and sport fisheries- The Conference Board reviewed this proposal and took no action after noting staff comments relative to the minimal benefits to the spawning stock of releasing fish over 60 inches, and the risk of injury to halibut and crew of measuring and releasing large halibut.

Discard Mortality Rate Motion: The Conference Board recommends the Commissioners direct staff to re-examine the appropriateness of the 16% discard mortality rate currently assigned to halibut released in the US and Canadian directed halibut fisheries. Proponents believe the actual discard mortality rate on halibut released in the directed fishery is lower than 16%, and noted the pacific cod freezer longline fleet, which hauls gear much faster, has a 10% DMR. The proponent shared information on the increased revenue that would accrue to the directed fishery if the DMR is reduced. Others noted that the current DMR are not well explained or documented and would benefit from review.

Motion passed unanimously

Nunivak Survey Motion: The Conference Board requests that the IPHC consider the feasibility of including in the annual survey additional sites around Nunivak Island using in the standard survey grid pattern. Proponents stated that a commercial fishery near Nunivak Island has developed since the mid-80s and that the existing survey does not adequately assess abundance near this Island. Proponents identified the social

and economic importance of the halibut fishery to the people of Nunivak Island and stated their belief that an expanded survey will result in a high estimated abundance of halibut in this area. The location of additional survey sites were identified by the Nunivak Island Fishermen's Association, who indicated a list of the sites had been provided to the Commissioners.

Motion passed unanimously

The Conference Board also received presentations from Washington Sea Grant on Seabird Avoidance, the MSAB co-chairs on the strategy review process, and from representatives of the Alaska Seafood Cooperative on steps to reduce halibut bycatch in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

Adjourned 4:30 pm

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