

Original sponsors: Eliason, Binkley,
Zharoff, et al.

1 IN THE SENATE BY THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE
2 HOUSE CS FOR SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 31 (Resources)
3 IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA
4 SIXTEENTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION
5 Relating to the bycatch of halibut by
6 domestic fisheries and an on-board
7 observer program.
8 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:
9 WHEREAS Pacific halibut are caught incidentally and discarded by
10 fisheries targeting other groundfish and shellfish species and this inci-
11 dental catch is known as "bycatch"; and
12 WHEREAS the North Pacific Fishery Management Council has established
13 allowable levels of halibut bycatch for domestic fisheries, but it is
14 believed that these levels may be exceeded, particularly by trawlers in the
15 Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska; and
16 WHEREAS the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska are nursery grounds for
17 Pacific halibut stocks; and
18 WHEREAS the bycatch of young halibut in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of
19 Alaska adversely affects stock levels for every commercial and recreational
20 halibut fishery from the Bering Sea to California; and
21 WHEREAS, in part, due to the excessive bycatch mortality of halibut in
22 the groundfish fishery, the International Pacific Halibut Commission re-
23 cently lowered the catch quota for the 1989 commercial halibut season,
24 which will result in a loss of millions of dollars of income to halibut
25 fishermen, processors, the recreational fishing community, related busi-
26 nesses, and coastal communities; and
27 WHEREAS the major threats to young halibut are the Bering Sea and Gulf
28 of Alaska trawl fisheries, although the developing Pacific cod trawl fish-
29 eries and, to a lesser extent, the longline fisheries pose major additional

1 potential threats to halibut stocks; and

2 WHEREAS observers on board fishing vessels greatly improve the col-
3 lection and reliability of fishery harvest data and improve compliance with
4 allowable catch limits; and

5 WHEREAS reliable estimates of halibut bycatch are available from the
6 foreign and joint venture fisheries as the consequence of a comprehensive
7 on-board observer program, implemented under the Magnuson Fishery Conserva-
8 tion and Management Act; and

9 WHEREAS this on-board observer program was instrumental in controlling
10 the halibut bycatch problem caused by the foreign and joint venture fisher-
11 ies; and

12 WHEREAS there has been a dramatic decrease in the level of foreign
13 fishing allowed in the Exclusive Economic Zone in the last few years which
14 has led to a substantial increase in the level of nonobserved domestic
15 fisheries and this has resulted in a dramatic increase in the mortality of
16 halibut off Alaska attributable to the domestic groundfish fisheries; and

17 WHEREAS on-board observers are not required in the vast majority of
18 domestic groundfish fisheries off Alaska; and

19 WHEREAS the State of Alaska opposes the waste of fish and game re-
20 sources and has enacted laws to prevent the waste of fish and game re-
21 sources; and

22 WHEREAS the Alaska State Legislature must object, as a matter of
23 principle, to the waste of excessive numbers of young halibut that are
24 being caught, killed, and discarded in the domestic Bering Sea and Gulf of
25 Alaska groundfish fisheries; and

26 WHEREAS responsibility for regulating the bycatch of halibut lies with
27 the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and the North Pacific Fishery Management
28 Council; and

29 WHEREAS the International Pacific Halibut Commission has determined

1 that resolution of the halibut bycatch problem is essential to the con-
2 tinued successful management of the halibut resource and has asked the
3 North Pacific Fishery Management Council to develop an on-board observer
4 program for domestic fishing fleets off Alaska; and

5 WHEREAS the North Pacific Fishery Management Council has requested the
6 U.S. Secretary of Commerce to implement an on-board observer program and to
7 provide the necessary funding for the program;

8 BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests
9 the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and the North Pacific Fishery Management
10 Council to implement a comprehensive mandatory observer program to place
11 sufficient on-board observers on all vessels that might cause incidental
12 mortality to halibut in order to guarantee collection of accurate data; and
13 be it

14 FURTHER RESOLVED that, if funding for an on-board observer program is
15 not available from any other source, the Alaska State Legislature would
16 support an assessment against the vessels involved in the nonhalibut fish-
17 eries in order to fund the program; and be it

18 FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature encourages gear
19 research that will reduce the incidental mortality of halibut in all fish-
20 eries.

21 COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Robert A.
22 Mosbacher, U.S. Secretary of Commerce; the Honorable John Peterson, Chair-
23 man of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council; and to the Honorable
24 Ted Stevens and the Honorable Frank Murkowski, U.S. Senators, and the
25 Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation
26 in Congress.