

**S J R**

**31**

Date Referred: March 13, 1989

FURTHER REFERRALS:

Date of Committee Action: 4-4-89

The RESOURCES Committee considered:

SJR 31

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 31

[HALIBUT BYCATCH AND ON-BOARD OBSERVERS]

Relating to the bycatch of halibut by domestic fisheries and an on-board observer program.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- be replaced with HCS SJR 31 (RES) [ the same title
- have attached amendment(s) [ a new title
- do pass
- do not pass
- no recommendation
- individual recommendations
- additional referral to the \_\_\_\_\_ Committee

ADOPTS: \_\_\_\_\_ letter of intent

ATTACHES NEW FISCAL NOTE(S):  
(Dept)

APPROVES PREVIOUS:  
(Date/Dept)

- fiscal impact \_\_\_\_\_
- zero fiscal note \_\_\_\_\_
- zero with analysis \_\_\_\_\_

- fiscal note(?) \_\_\_\_\_
- zero fiscal note(s) 3-7-89
- zero fn/analysis \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNING DO PASS:

\_\_\_\_\_

*Cliff Davidson*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Donny Day*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Bob Halpern*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Bill Hudson*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Gene Sharp*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Matt J. J. J.*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNING:  
(Check approp. column)

	Do Not Pass	No Rec	Amend
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			
_____			

*Cliff Davidson*

Chairman's signature

FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST:

Revision Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Title: Bycatch of halibut and an on-board observer program  
Sponsor: Senator Eliason  
Requestor: Senate Resources

Agency Affected: Dept. of Fish and Game  
BRU: Commercial Fisheries  
Components: \_\_\_\_\_

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 88	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92	FY 93
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	0	0	0	0	0	0

CAPITAL	0	0	0	0	0	0
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REVENUE	0	0	0	0	0	0
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FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND						
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	0	0				
PART-TIME	0	0				
TEMPORARY	0	0	0	0	0	0

ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

Prepared by: Phillip Digby Phone: 465-4210  
Division: Commercial Fisheries Date: 3/3/89

Approved by Commissioner: [Signature] Date: 3.6.89  
Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Distribution: (by preparer):

- Legislative Finance
- Legislative Sponsor
- Requestor
- Office of Management and Budget
- Impacted Agency(ies)

## From the Director's Desk

by Henry Mitchell

Congress needs to review and reauthorize the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act this year. Preliminary indications from some Washington D.C. sources are that the House of Representatives is reluctant to have a full hearing on this important fisheries legislation at the present time. The Senate has not scheduled a hearing as of yet, but it is expected that a one or two day hearing on possible amendments will be held sometime in April.

While the Magnuson Act has served the Alaskan fishing industry well in the years since its adoption in 1976, significant fisheries concerns cannot be addressed or resolved without Congress making positive and crucial changes to this law.

The following items are suggested amendments that would provide a partial solution to many of the fishery concerns of the small boat coastal fishermen of western Alaska.

Congress should amend the act to allow for an extension of the State of Alaska's fisheries jurisdiction from the current three miles to twelve miles. This would allow the State to manage and enforce its fisheries regulations and conservation mandates on those species which are vitally important to coastal fishermen such as herring, crab, and salmon.

The Act should be amended to allow our Coast Guard to board any vessel which is fishing in areas where salmon and herring of United States origin is present. This boarding authority is absolutely necessary to get any control on the high seas piracy that is the current practice of many fishing nations.

The Act should be amended to allow for a coastal community share quota of the bottom fish resource in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska. This would make the development of a coastal bottom-fishery a possibility for the small villages of Alaska who have not shared in the bottomfish bonanza which has benefitted the Seattle fishing interests.

Finally, Congress must require that the North Pacific Council institute a comprehensive observer program to deal with the domestic fishing industry's growing by-catch of salmon, herring, crab and halibut which are caught in their trawls. We had 100 percent observer coverage on the foreign fleets fishing in our waters, so there is no rationale for allowing our own Seattle fleet to fish without observers.

Our fisheries are critical to the survival of villages so it will be necessary for you to convince your elected representatives of the importance of a complete review and adoption of laws consistent with good fisheries management. With your help and guidance, Congress may adopt legislation that would alleviate some of our major concerns. \*

# INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

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ESTABLISHED BY A CONVENTION BETWEEN CANADA  
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

February 22, 1989

Honorable Robert A. Mosbacher  
Secretary of Commerce  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Sir:

The International Pacific Halibut Commission and industry representatives (Conference Board) at their January 24-27, 1989, meetings devoted much attention to the issue of halibut bycatches in the groundfish fisheries of the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. The Commission and Conference Board are convinced that juvenile halibut mortalities in the expanding United States groundfish fisheries promise most serious and widespread impacts to the traditional halibut fisheries if effective mitigating measures are not imposed quickly.

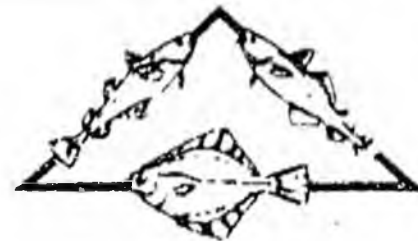
Based on recent observer reports from joint venture operations augmented by some pilot scale observer programs involving U.S. catches/processors, the Commission's scientific staff has concluded that halibut bycatch rates are alarmingly high and the Commission recommended reduced quotas for the traditional halibut fishery to compensate for halibut bycatch mortality. The Commission and Conference Board are very concerned that widespread losses of catch will occur to the halibut fishery in the absence of effective bycatch control. The Commission Staff estimates that bycatch mortality has increased from a recent historical low of 7 million pounds in 1986 to a projected mortality of 15 million pounds in 1989. Halibut bycatches are responsible for most of the quota reduction imposed by the Commission in the 1989 halibut fishery. We believe such bycatch increases are unwarranted, and the Commission requests that a comprehensive conservation program be developed aimed at minimizing the bycatch of halibut in non-halibut fisheries.

The Commission believes that the fully-domestic United States fishery should be able to achieve substantial reductions in bycatch by implementing the same effective conservation measures that were initiated to address this problem when it was being caused by the foreign fleet in the 1960's and 1970's operating in Alaskan waters.



# Alaska Groundfish Data Bank

March 8, 1988



TO: Sen. Fred Zharoff  
Rep. Cliff Davidson  
Members, Senate Resources Committee  
Members, Senate Rules Committee

RE: Senate Joint Resolution No. 31

RECEIVED MAR 10 1988

## AGDB and ADA Support Observers

The members of Alaska Groundfish Data Bank and the Alaska Dragger's Association, some of whom also longline halibut, support the Senate's interest in reducing and accurately documenting incidental halibut mortality.

And as you know, the members of the Data Bank and the Dragger's Association have been in the forefront of lobbying for observer funding, willingly carry observers and have, for many reasons, a great interest in seeing all vessels participate in observer programs.

We also work closely with the Kodiak Longline Vessel Owners Association and the Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association. We have all agreed that observers on all segments of the industry are important and that all segments create unnecessary waste.

## Excluding halibut fishermen from observer programs Incomprehensible

However, SJR 31 appears to ignore this consensus concept by exempting halibut fishermen from any responsibility for incidental halibut mortality and any responsibility for taking observers. This confuses us all.

It is not our intent to advocate placing observers on halibut vessels -- we think the design of data gathering programs should be the prerogative of scientists and we do not feel that prerogative should pre-empted.

We note that in the IPHC 1987 Annual Report, the IPHC estimates 1,040 MT of incidental halibut mortality occurred as the result of the halibut fishery in the Gulf of Alaska. Using IPHC's estimate of 8.15% incidental halibut mortality in the halibut fishery, the 1988 halibut fishery may have caused as much as 1,551 MT of incidental halibut mortality.

The incidental mortality, according to the IPHC, is a combination of halibut killed by gear left on the grounds and the unavoidable mortality on under-sized halibut caught by the gear during the halibut fishery.

The IPHC 1988 Annual Report notes that "estimates of wastage (in the halibut fishery) are imprecise."

SJR 31 Letter - page 2

The trawl fleet operates under a 2,000 MT halibut mortality cap in the Gulf of Alaska and forgoes millions of dollars worth of potential catch in order to stay under the cap as, until this year, the groundfish quotas were set low enough to insure that the halibut mortality cap wasn't reached.

The point is that all gear types and all fisheries except midwater trawls create an incidental halibut mortality. To exclude any one fishery from potentially being involved in an observer program does not address the problem of best and wisest use of the resource.

Trawl halibut bycatch not responsible for current decline in halibut stocks

Further, up until this year most of the groundfish in the Bering Sea was taken by joint ventures and the halibut mortality documented. In the Gulf of Alaska the trawl fleet has carried both state and NPFMO observers and though the data is not as good as the joint venture data, there is some accountability.

Since all bycatch, actual and estimated, has been subtracted from the halibut quotas in past years we feel there has been accountability. Many times during the past three years members of the IPHC have assured us that, when the halibut stocks declined, it would be a natural decline and not the fault of the trawl fleet.

1989 presents serious accountability problems

We all agree that this year there is a serious problem since a large portion of the trawl catch, particularly in the Bering Sea, will be totally unobserved and that this has serious implications for halibut management.

Scientists should determine observer coverage

The scientific community has frequently stated that 100% observer coverage is unnecessary and that the amount of observer coverage necessary for good management data varies among the fisheries.

Certainly putting observers aboard midwater trawlers for the purpose of collecting halibut bycatch data is a waste of money and time.

In view of the high cost of observers (\$4,500/month from ADF&G or \$8,000/month from NMFS) we feel the amount of observer coverage should be "that necessary for accurate data."

Further we feel it should be left to the scientific community to determine the deployment of observers.

Assessment for observer coverage should be on all vessels

We do not object to an assessment for observer coverage -- provided the industry is guaranteed that the assessment will be fully used for the purpose intended, all vessels contribute and

SJR 31 Letter - page 3

all vessels are required to carry observers if requested as part of an ADF&G, NPFMC or IPHC sanctioned program. However, in all our discussions on methods of funding observers we have never contemplated including those vessels involved in the salmon and herring fisheries.

We feel all fisheries are currently suffering from a lack of data and all fisheries will benefit from an observer program and should contribute. No one fishery is somehow better than any other fishery. For many fishermen the halibut fishery is an important part of their yearly income. For the Kodiak processing plants the trawl fisheries are currently providing year round work for the plant workers.

#### Trawl fisheries benefit Alaska

Sometimes the Alaskan trawl industry feels that the rest of Alaska forgets that there is an Alaskan trawl industry benefiting Alaska. In the Central Gulf of Alaska in 1988 78% of the groundfish taken was delivered to shorebased plants and this percentage is expected to increase in 1989.

In the Bering Sea 12.5% of the total Bering Sea groundfish harvest in 1988 was delivered to shorebased plants and that percentage may more than double during 1989.

#### Gear research will benefit all fisheries

In Europe extensive gear research has resulted in significant reduction in the waste of fisheries resources. The same type of research may be able to find ways that reduce halibut bycatch in Alaskan fisheries, both trawl and longline.

This research could be done in Alaskan through the Fisheries Industrial Technology Center and we would certainly appreciate legislative support for gear research.

#### In Conclusion

We hope that before SJR 31 is passed out of legislature it is rewritten to reflect the legislature's concern for wise management of Alaska's resources, accurate data and fair treatment of all fishermen and fisheries.

I have taken the liberty of redrafting SJR 31 as we would like to see it.

Sincerely,

*Al Burch*

486-~~3074~~  
3910

Chris Blackburn, Director  
Alaska Groundfish Data Bank

Al Burch, Executive Director  
Alaska Driggers Association

*Either or both of us are available for teleconference hearings or questions. Thank you.*

SJR 31

As revised by Alaska Groundfish Data Bank  
Additions in italics, omissions in parentheses

Relating to the bycatch of halibut by domestic fisheries and an  
onboard observer program

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

WHEREAS Pacific halibut are caught incidentally and discarded by fisheries targeting other groundfish and shellfish species and this incidental catch is known as "bycatch" or *incidental mortality*; and

WHEREAS the North Pacific Fishery Management Council has established allowable levels of halibut bycatch for domestic fisheries, but (it is believed that these may be exceeded . . .) *good management requires accurate monitoring to assure that the allowable levels are not exceeded,*

WHEREAS the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska are nursery grounds for Pacific halibut stocks; and

WHEREAS the bycatch of young halibut in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska adversely affects stock levels for every commercial and recreational halibut fishery from the Bering Sea to California; and

(WHEREAS, in part, due to excessive . . .) *WHEREAS the halibut stocks appear to be in decline and incidental mortality may if not controlled and accurately documented accelerate the decline;*

*WHEREAS the incidental mortality of halibut from all sources results in the loss of millions to dollars of income to halibut fishermen, processors, the recreational fishing community, related businesses, and coastal communities; and*

*WHEREAS the restraints on non-halibut fisheries intended to reduce the incidental mortality of halibut result in increased operating costs and unharvested groundfish which also represent a loss of millions of dollars to fishermen, processors, related businesses and coastal communities; and*

SJR 31 Rewrite - page 5

WHEREAS the major threats to young halibut are in the Bering Sea (and Gulf . . .) trawl fisheries, although the developing Pacific cod trawl fisheries and, to a lesser extent, the longline fisheries *including the halibut fishery itself*, pose (major) additional potential threats to halibut stocks; and

WHEREAS observers on board fishing vessels greatly improve the collection and reliability of fishery harvest data and improve compliance with allowable catch limits; and

WHEREAS reliable estimates of halibut (are available) were available from the foreign and joint venture fisheries as the consequence of a comprehensive on-board observer program, implemented under the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act; and

WHEREAS this on-board observer program was instrumental in controlling the halibut bycatch problem caused by the foreign and joint venture fisheries; and

WHEREAS (there has been a dramatic decrease . . .) *foreign fishing has been eliminated in the Exclusive Economic Zone and the joint venture fisheries have dramatically decreased there is a substantial increase in the level of nonobserved domestic fisheries (this has resulted in a dramatic . . .) and this raises concerns over the potential for a dramatic increase in the mortality of halibut off Alaska attributable to the domestic groundfish fisheries; and*

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

WHEREAS the State of Alaska opposes the waste of fish and game resources and has enacted laws to prevent the waste of fish and game resources; and

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

WHEREAS responsibility for regulating the (bycatch) *incidental mortality* of halibut lies with the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council for the

SJA 31 Rewrite - page 6

groundfish fisheries and with the International Pacific Halibut Commission for the halibut fishery; and

WHEREAS the International Pacific Halibut Commission has determined that resolution of the halibut (bycatch) *incidental mortality* problem is essential to the continued successful management of the halibut resource and has asked the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to develop an on-board observer program for domestic fishing fleets off Alaska; and

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

BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to implement a comprehensive *mandatory observer* program to place *sufficient* on-board observers on all vessels (participating in a nonhalibut . . .) *which might cause incidental mortality to halibut to guarantee accurate data collection*; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that, if funding for an on-board observer program is not available from any other source, the Alaska State Legislature would support an assessment against (the vessels involved) *all vessels, including halibut vessels, which might cause incidental halibut mortality* in order to fund the program; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature encourages gear research which may reduce the *incidental mortality of halibut in all fisheries*.

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

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE · SENATE

SENATOR RICHARD I. ELIASON

LABOR & COMMERCE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN  
RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
RULES COMMITTEE  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON HIGH SEAS  
SALMON INTERCEPTION  
SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
LEGISLATIVE ETHICS



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Representative Cliff Davidson, Co-Chairman  
Representative Curt Menard, Co-Chairman  
House Resources Committee

FROM: Senator Dick Eliason *Dick Eliason*

DATE: March 16, 1989

RE: SJR 31, relating to the bycatch of halibut by domestic fisheries and an on-board observer program

Senate Joint Resolution 31, relating to the bycatch of halibut by domestic fisheries and an on-board observer program, has been referred to the House Resources Committee for consideration.

I encourage you to review the measure at your earliest convenience, and hope that you will be able to schedule it for consideration by the full Resources Committee very soon. It is my hope that the Legislature will move quickly to add its voice to the growing chorus of objections to the blatant destruction of the halibut resource that is occurring in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska.

Please don't hesitate to contact my office if you or your staff would like further information about the measure. Thank you.

6-0772E  
Utermohle  
4/4/89

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 Feteron, 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.

# U.S. trawlers devastate halibut

U.S. factory ships are destroying the halibut stocks and Canadian fishermen are paying the price with a proposed 50 percent quota reduction over the next three years.

"It is absolutely criminal that these floating processors targeting groundfish are taking millions of pounds of young halibut," said UFAWU business agent John Radosevic Feb. 16. "There is no excuse for this blatant destruction of the halibut resource."

During the International Pacific Halibut Commission held in Vancouver in January, Radosevic walked out, charging the Canadian government representatives refused to stand up to the Americans.

He called for fisheries minister Tom Siddon to reject the IPHC recommendations for the 1989 season and call an emergency meeting of all advisors "to consider Canada's deteriorating position."

He also demanded Siddon relieve the present Canadian halibut commissioners of their posts and replace them with fishermen who will stand up for Canada's rights.

Radosevic's charges of massive over-fishing by U.S. groundfish trawlers in the Bering Sea were echoed by IPHC director Don McCaughran, who was angry at the lack of controls on the vessels.

"We're in a major bloody battle with

those guys," he charged. "There is no question there is a hell of a problem."

The IPHC estimates the processors will take 17 million pounds in 1989 — the entire Canadian quota in 1989 is 10 million — but Radosevic says there is no doubt the real figure is much higher.

"There is almost no observer program so there are no accurate figures of by-catch or the illegal catch of halibut," he said. "U.S. enforcement officers admit the figure could 50 million pounds or more."

McCaughran is confident the IPHC figure is accurate, but adds that "John Radosevic is right — we don't know exactly what's being taken."

The problem goes back three decades when Japanese trawlers were fishing on the halibut nursing grounds. In the late 1950s this practice was banned. The by-catch increased until 1982 when new regulations forced the 150 Japanese vessels hold down their catch of halibut to eight million pounds.

In recent years the U.S. has forced the Japanese out and "Americanized" the fishery with its own fleet of factory trawlers. These ships are back on the nursing grounds and doing nothing to control the by-catch of juvenile halibut.

McCaughran said factory ship owners

See IPHC — page 20

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

are claiming they can't handle regulations because of this attempt to "Americanize" the fishery.

"That's the song and dance they are laying on Washington," he said. "They are trying to act like they have a bunch of fools running the boats."

There are several ways to limit the amount of juvenile halibut the processing fleet is taking including closing the fishing in

the winter time on juvenile spawning grounds.

Another method is to stop fishing so hard on the bottom where the juvenile halibut is schooled.

When the Japanese did this, it saved tremendous amounts of fish, McCaughran said.

But he cautioned the trawler owners are opposed to this type of action.

"They won't do a goddamn thing," he said. "They want no regulations."

Radosevic said the U.S. government has all but said it is willing to sacrifice the halibut fishery to facilitate the U.S. trawl fishery.

The IPHC and the North Pacific Fisheries Council are proposing an emergency regulation be implemented which would set the ceiling at an estimated 13 million pounds, far above the former ceiling of eight million pounds for the Japanese.

The regulation has to be approved by Washington and *Fisherman* sources report lawyers for floating processors are lobbying strongly to quash the regulation if it becomes law.

McCaughran called the regulation a beginning, but agreed there was no good reason for it not to be lowered to eight million pounds.

"It's because they want to Americanize the fishery and you to give them all the breaks they can because they're 'poor stupid Americans,'" he said. "We don't believe this."

But even this regulation will be hard to enforce since there is no proper observer system on the boats. Short of having an observer on almost every vessel, there can be no guarantees on the amount being taken

For the Canadian fishermen, the cutbacks are already being felt. The quota this year has been lowered to 10 million pounds from 12.5 million last year. This is a direct result of the trawl fishery.

"You are paying the price for it," McCaughran said. "They are intercepting juvenile halibut headed for B.C."

But the projected collapse of the stocks has led the commission staff to estimate the reduction in the fishery will reach an estimated 50 percent in the next three years.

Radosevic said the federal government has refused to stand up to the U.S. on this issue and as a result our own halibut fishery is being sacrificed.

"We should be screaming blue murder because everybody agrees U.S. fishing is destroying our halibut," he said.

THE FISHERMAN FEB 17, 1989  
Senator Eliason

# Halibut Quota Cut

## *Ten Million Pounds Lost to Bycatch, Declining Recruitment*

by Kris Freeman

Ten years ago, who'd a thought it? At the annual January meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission, longliners were grousing over a quota of 64.5 million pounds—more than double the 1982 catch. However, the issue was not so much quantity as context. For the first time in years, the IPHC had to deliver bad news. The boom is over. West coast halibut stocks are succumbing to bycatch, as well as declining recruitments, according to reports given by IPHC biologists.

Longliners are also girding up for regulatory battle with the trawlers over bycatch. More than one of the association reps on the Conference Board remembers the lean days of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Japanese trawlers sucked up so much halibut that the longliners were left with only 20 million pounds a year. They fear the same thing may happen again, if trawlers are not given incentives to stay off juvenile halibut. At the same time, wastage and bycatch among the longliners themselves may also threaten the future of the directed longline halibut fishery.

During the last day of its annual meeting, held January 23-27 in Vancouver, B.C., the Commission recommended a total 1989 quota of 64.05 million pounds, compared to almost 74 million pounds in 1988. (The quota must be approved by the U.S. and Canadian governments.) "We're in a decline and we're going to have to bite the bullet," said IPHC Director Donald McCaughran.

What's worse, IPHC biologists say that the cut should have been even larger. The commission overestimated the size of the 1987 halibut biomass by about 10 percent and so allowed too big a catch in 1988. Their updated figures show that stock size peaked in 1986 and has declined an average of five percent each year since. To keep catches in line with the corrected biomass estimates, the 1989 quota should have dropped more than 10 million pounds, says IPHC Assistant Director Stephen Hoag. "But since the stocks are in relatively good shape, we felt it would be a hardship to phase in the reductions all at once," said Hoag. "No sense in biting the big bullet this year and then finding out it's not so bad," added McCaughran.

If future surveys show the same downward trend, the Commission

will recommend equivalent cuts in the next two years which would reduce the longline quota to 55.8 million pounds in 1990 and 47 million pounds in 1991.

### Where'd The Fish Go?

Why are there fewer fish for the longliners? The stocks appear to follow a 20-year cycle with the population of mature fish (8-year-olds) rising and falling in rhythm with factors the Commission has yet to sort out. As of 1986, stocks apparently went over the top and started sliding on the down side of the curve.

At the same time, the domestic bycatch of halibut has soared, from an estimated 2.9 million pounds in 1987 to 4.4 million pounds in 1988 and a possible 12.1 million pounds in 1989. Every pound of juvenile halibut taken by the longliners cuts 1.5 pounds out of the longline quota, under current IPHC formulas.

Whether this bycatch is strictly an allocation issue, as the trawlers contend, or also a conservation issue, as the longliners argue, has yet to be decided. Regardless, it has become a primary driver in the longline quota. And it is now a given that the quota will decline. The only question is, how far and how fast?

McCaughran, noting that the longline quota was only 23 million pounds when he took the job of director in 1978, said that the Commission is "trying to stop the precipitous declines we've had before . . . We have better info now. We'll do everything in our power to level this off."

IPHC is basing its predictions of decreased biomass primarily on declines in three major areas: recruitment of 8-year-olds to the fishery, weight at age for these recruits, and CPUE (Catch Per Unit of Effort).

Recruitment to the fishery peaked at just under 5 million fish in 1985, then dropped to about 3.4 million fish in 1987. (By way of comparison, recruitment was well under 2 million fish in the early 1970s.) Figures for 1988 indicate a slight increase, a potential cause for optimism, but biologists are taking a wait-and-see attitude as the first year figures on recruitment for a particular year-class (or cohort) are always the least accurate. (The data for a year class improves with each year the biologists have to sample and study it. For instance, the biologists have only one year's data on the 1988 recruits, but they have three years data on the 1986 recruits, now about 10-11 years old.)

The average weight at age for mature fish has declined by about 1.5 pounds, from 48 to 46.5 pounds. One possible cause could be a decline in the number of females. Male halibut usually weigh less than female halibut of the same age. If the percentage of male fish increased, the weight of the total biomass would decrease. However, the IPHC doesn't know the sex ratio of males to females in the fish weighed for these particular surveys, as they've only recently established a method to sex halibut without killing them.

CPUE, as averaged throughout the fishery, decreased from 278.4 pounds per skate in 1987 to 281.2 pounds per skate in 1988. Most of the decrease occurred in Area 2 with CPUE in Area 2C dropping to 229.6 from the 1985 level of 354.1. Bycatch also dropped in Area 4. It increased in Area 3B, where the quota was also increased. (Area 3B has been underfished to protect stocks in Area 3A.)

Why is recruitment declining? "It's not exactly clear," said IPHC biologist Patrick Sullivan. "Right now we have two hypotheses." One hypothesis deals with what is called density dependence; i.e. the carrying capacity of the ocean floor. This theory speculates that "recruitment is somehow dependent on the density of the adult stocks." You might logically think, says Sullivan, that if there were lots of adults, there would be lots of recruits. "But under some models the adult population can increase up to the point where it's no longer healthy for the recruits." This can occur with salmon, he said. "If the population gets too high, then there is competition for spawning grounds and spawning could be disrupted.

"The other hypothesis is that the cycle that we see is environmentally induced. In that case, changes in the environment—water temperature, availability of food—can cause changes in the reproduction of stocks. That too, could produce the pattern we're seeing. We don't have enough information to know ...

### Trawl Bite Gets Bigger

"The other thing to note," says Sullivan, "is that bycatch is going up while stocks are going down. If there are no controls, all the fish will go to the trawlers."

Without observer coverage, it's difficult to quantify how much incidental halibut domestic trawlers are raking off the bottom. IPHC biologists set their estimate at approximately the 5,333 mt Bering and Aleutian bycatch cap negotiated at the December 1988 and January 1989 NPFMC meetings. The trawlers had originally asked for 7,000 mt, but also argue that they may well not need all of the 5,333 mt.

That's as much as the Japanese took in 1980, before stricter bycatch limits and 100 percent observer coverage. The lowest incidental take in the history of the Alaska trawl fishery—just over four million pounds—occurred in 1986 when the bulk of the Alaska groundfish catch was taken by joint-venture boats monitored by observers. (The total bycatch by all gear types coastwide that year was closer to 7 million pounds.) Total JV and domestic bycatch increased to about 10.9 million pounds in 1988. By way of comparison, trawl bycatch peaked in 1962 at about 25 million pounds.

## HALIBUT

The longline response to these figures was succinctly summed up by one B.C. rep who testified that "the whole idea of grinding 10 million halibut dinners over the side is unacceptable."

"This decline we're looking at now is nothing compared to what we're going to see in 3-5 years if we allow another group to chip away at our resource," added John Bruce, executive director of the Deep Sea Fisherman's Union.

According to Bruce and other reps, the problem could be contained through gear restrictions and time and area closures, especially in sensitive rearing grounds around Kodiak. "Their (the trawlers') catch rates will go down but we'll have an industry in five years."

"The worst problem is hard-on-bottom trawling for cod," said McCaughran. "Because where you find cod, you'll find halibut. If you make them (the trawlers) uncomfortable, they'll change their gear. And we know if you fish just off the bottom, not on the bottom...bycatch rates will go down."

Domestic factory trawlers also fish near the bottom to catch large pollock for fillets. With the average fillet size decreasing in the Bering Sea (from 3 ounces to just over 2 ounces each) fillet boat skippers are under pressure to find the biggest fish possible. Surimi boats can use the smaller fish found higher in the water column. Therefore, they can fly mid-water gear, which catches very little halibut. This helps surimi boats keep their bycatch down. See "Reducing Bycatch," p. 13.



Well known longliner Cliff Iverson is a veteran of 40 years on the halibut grounds.

### A Trawl Rebuttal

In short, longliners argue that if they have to take cuts to accommodate a declining biomass, so should the trawlers.

Not surprisingly, the trawlers disagree. They see the problem as one of allocation rather than conservation. Under their view of the situation, the halibut are doing just fine; further restrictions would hobble a growing domestic industry; and they've already made concessions. (See side bar, page 12.)

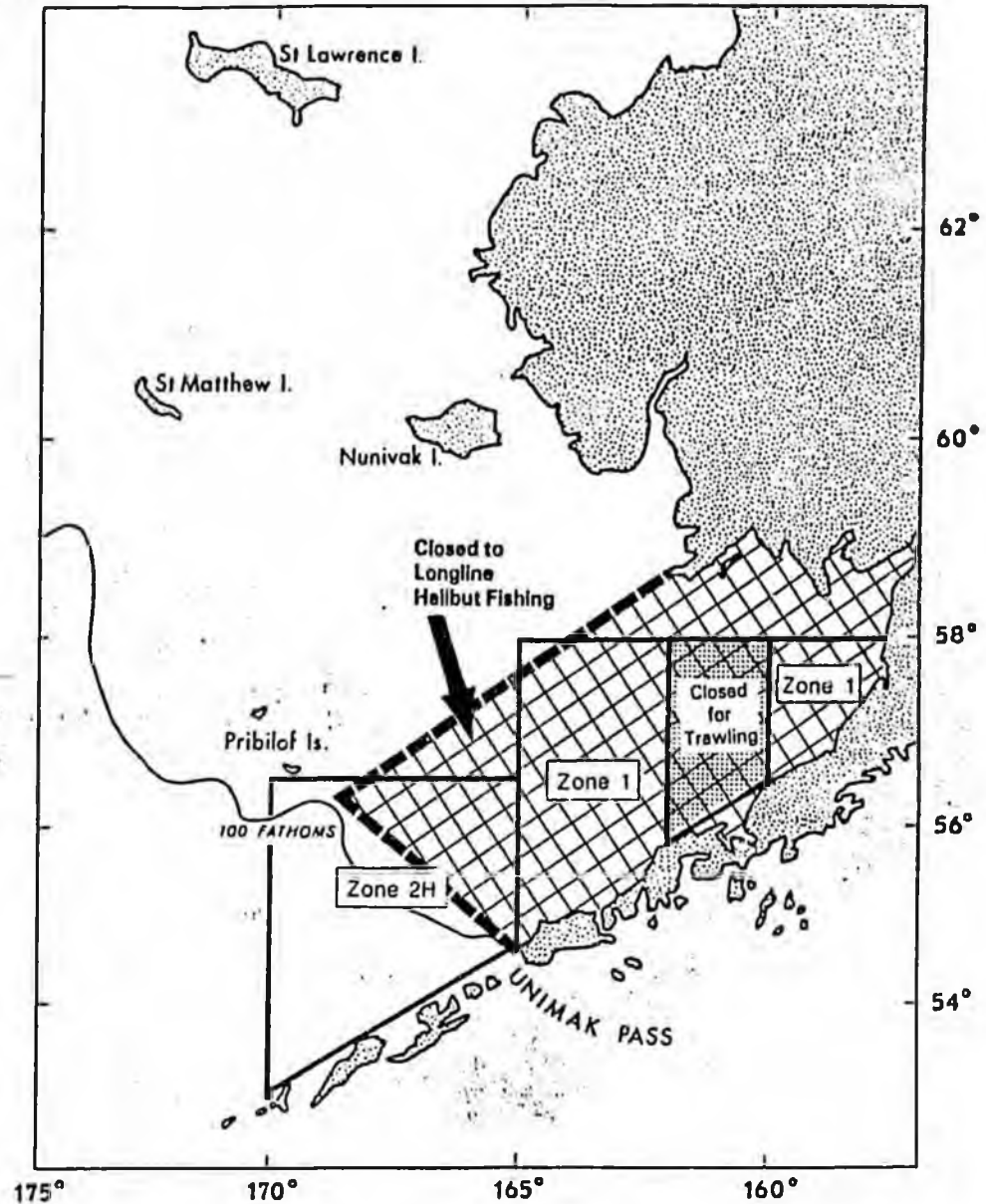
AFTA reps including Bill Orr, general counsel for Golden Age Fisheries, and Wally Pereyra, chairman and CEO of Profish International, argue three main points: environmental factors are more important than fishing pressure in determining biomass; trawl mortality rates are not as high as stated in IPHC stats; and longliners waste tremendous quantities of fish themselves. We'll address the first two points in this story. For the third, see "Bycatch Cuts Both Ways," page 14.

Many trawlers argue that the current decline in biomass has nothing to do with them. For instance, they point to the fact that fish caught in the peak harvest year of 1985 were spawned during the late 1970s when coastwide bycatches by all gear types were very high, ranging from about 15 to 20 million pounds. (However, it's also important to note that the trawl bycatch reductions of the early and mid-1980s may mean a less precipitous quota drop in the early 1990s, according to the IPHC's Sullivan.)

"The major impact on recruitment is the environment. It's not trawl bycatch," says Pereyra. "The indications from trawling operations are that the abundance of juvenile halibut are increasing. These are observations from skippers that have been up there for quite some time and are seeing a high incidence of halibut. The general feeling is that the juvenile halibut are more abundant." (The other possibility, he says, is that the juveniles migrate and the trawlers are simply running across the same stocks in different areas.) "King crab came back during a time of very intense fishing by foreigners on the shelf, for yellowfin sole and pollock," adds Pereyra.

AFTA reps also dispute the IPHC bycatch accounting methods used to fit bycatch into the formula. For instance, the IPHC assumes that bycatch mortality in the Bering Sea runs about 100 percent, because factory trawlers take long tows and the fish are not sorted immediately on deck. Usually, they're dumped in conveyors or bins and sent straight to the factory, says Bob Trumble of the IPHC. "The supposition is that all the halibut are dead," says Pereyra. "I know absolutely for a fact that the people doing the sorting on our decks say that a good percentage of the halibut are viable when they're going over the side." "If these assumptions are wrong, then the effect is to penalize the halibut fishermen (with lower quotas than necessary)," says Orr of Golden Age.

Another point of contention is the 1.5 conversion ratio used to predict what effect the loss of juvenile halibut will have on future quotas. "We've gone round and round on where they get this 1.5 figure," says



*With trawl bycatch expected to more than double this year, longliners are angry that waters closed to them for conservation reasons are open to trawling. The closed longline area is cross-hatched above. Zone 1 is open to trawlers until they reach a bycatch limit, currently set at 4,400 mt.*

Orr. Sullivan says the ratio is an estimate based on "relative production in years when there was no bycatch compared to years when bycatch occurred."

Since lack of observer coverage is a major problem in determining who's right, and federal funds for observers are far short of what's needed, the Conference Board voted to consider a voluntary landing tax of \$.015 per pound to be given to NMFS for observer coverage. (The Conference Board is an advisory panel representing Canadian and U.S. longliners.) The association reps on the board were charged with presenting the proposal to their members. However, after the meeting support for the resolution was fading, at least in B.C. (See "B.C. Revolt," page 16.)

#### Who Gets What's Left?

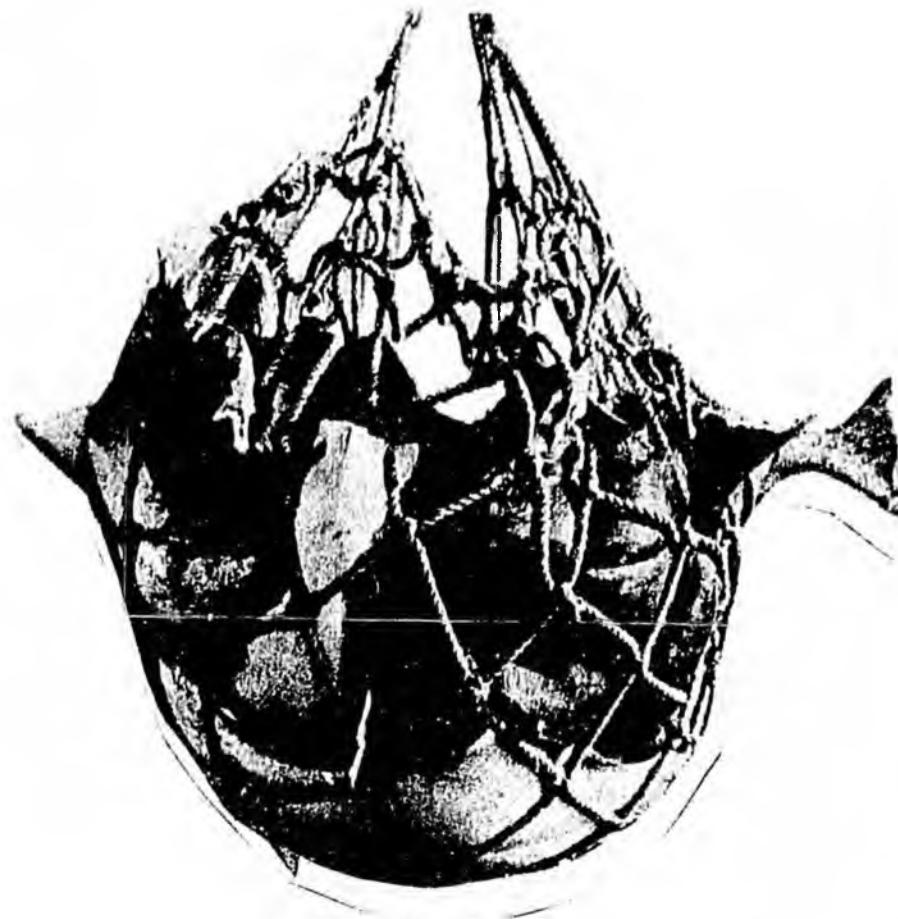
Although trawl bycatch was the major topic at the meeting, no trawlers were present. The Alaska Factory Trawlers Association tried to obtain a seat on the Conference Board, but the motion was defeated by a unanimous B.C. vote and a majority Alaska vote.

The vote was not cast on procedural grounds. As one longliner said, "All it says in my regulations is that an association has to have a secretary and a president." The longliners voted against having an AFTA rep both on gut instinct ("We hate trawlers," said one) and on the idea that giving a trawl group a vote on halibut regulations was only the first step toward giving them a directed allocation.

A discussion with Wally Pereyra, who would have been the AFTA rep, probably would not have allayed their fears. "I think the trawlers have as much right to the halibut as the longliners do," Pereyra said in an interview after the meeting, which he did not attend. "If you look at it in the sense of full utilization of the resource, it's sort of criminal to throw the fish away. If it's alive it makes sense. But if you have a dead fish it doesn't make sense."

Questions of bycatch and biomass may not ever be completely untangled. "It's hard to separate allocation from conservation," says Trumble. "The trawlers say (bycatch) is a matter of allocation and the longliners say it's conservation, but it's really a mixture of both...We'd like to see more economic studies to see what the trade-offs really are," says Trumble, who notes that the IPHC is charged to manage the resource for optimum yield, a measure which includes the economic value of the resource in addition to its size, as opposed to maximum sustainable yield.

What is the optimum use of the resource? And should that be judged by the profit to the fishermen (longliners get more per pound for halibut than trawlers would, but trawlers land higher volume loads) or by the price the consumer must pay in the store? Trumble speculates that "most consumers would rather have a few pounds of halibut in their grocery than a lot of pounds of yellowfin sole in the Soviet Union."



## *To Reduce Or Not to Reduce?* **The Quota Question**

Should quotas be reduced now that the halibut stock is declining? That may seem like an obvious question, but it's not, from the viewpoint of either conservation or allocation.

Surprisingly enough, biologists are not united on this front. A minority school of opinion holds that decreasing quotas doesn't do a declining stock any good. This school of thought assumes that environmental factors have much more to do with stock cycles than fishing pressure does. Therefore, they argue, when stocks are on the decline, fishermen should take what they can, minus the surplus production while it's still available. When the fish are gone, the boats move on until the stocks rebound, if they do.

A more traditional camp of fisheries biologists would urge regulators to reduce fishing pressure on a declining stock. They assume that decreasing the catch of spawners will help the stock recover. (Quota cuts should start before the stock peaks in order to do the most good, but that's another story.) The IPHC is operating on the assumption that in the case of halibut stocks, quota decreases are appropriate.

"Say the stock is going down naturally, due to the change in the temperature of the ocean or something like that," says IPHC biologist Patrick Sullivan. "Then if we fish at the same rate, then we drive it down farther."

He was backed by Gordon Jensen, president of the Petersburg

Vessel Owners Association who fished during the late 1950s and early 1960s when Japanese trawlers were taking 10 to 20 million pounds of halibut a year. "And we went along fishing the same way and bam, no fish. We were down to 50 pounds a skate. Most people just quit," says Jensen. "We're doing the same thing as we did 30 years ago."

At least one longliner thought that might not be a bad idea. "I'd just as soon see the fishery go down to 30 million pounds, where we'd have to get rough on the trawlers," he said. "Then we'd own it again."

Jensen countered that argument during the Wednesday meeting of the Conference Board. "Some fishermen think that if the stocks are driven down, they'll come out good, that they're so much better fishermen than the rest that they'll be the last survivors," he said. "I think that's awful. And I don't think that's legal for the Commission to do."

# Trawlers Trade Shutdown for Bycatch

## HALIBUT

For the first time, trawlers have agreed to a halibut bycatch cap that could halt operations fleet-wide. Once halibut bycatch reaches 5,333 mt the fleet ties up.

The plan, submitted by the NPFMC bycatch committee, was a subject of heated debate during the January annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission held in Vancouver, B.C. Many longliners were unhappy that the plan raised bycatch limits, even though the area closed to trawlers, should those limits be reached, is much larger.

According to Bob Alverson, the most recent plan, negotiated at the December and January NPFMC meetings, is more restrictive than the one discussed at the September 1988 Council meeting. "They [the trawlers] agreed to have a whole Bering Sea shutdown," says Alverson of the Fishing Vessels Owners' Association. "I don't know quite why they agreed to that, but they did."

However, longline representative Tom Casey argued that the plan was not restrictive enough. "We're going to take a cut of 30 million pounds in three years, 10 million next year, 8 million the year after and 9 million the year after that. And the trawl bycatch

keeps going up and up and up," said Casey, who represents the Independent Longliners of Seal Rock, Oregon.

Casey told the Conference Board that longliners are going to have to play "hardball...with the trawlers and their lawyers...I feel that the trawlers are being very selfish about all this." Casey led a motion, passed by the Conference Board, asking the IPHC to push for a lower cap of 3,300 mt of halibut bycatch.

The deal cut at the December and January NPFMC meetings calls for trawlers to move out of Zones 1 and Zones 2H (as modified) when the bycatch of halibut reaches 4,400 mt. A bycatch of 5,333 mt will shut down the entire Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands to trawling. The figure discussed at the September 1988 Council meeting was 3,300 mt for Zones 1 and 2. Therefore the cap for that area has been increased by 1,100 mt. But that September cap did not call for a fleet-wide shutdown. The trawlers had asked for a total cap of 7,000 mt to 10,000 mt.

During the NPFMC negotiations Zone 2H was also reduced in size. The northern part of the Zone has not been a problem, said Alverson, so that area was pared out, as was part of the southwest



NMFS observer Robin Harrison holds a live, trawl-caught juvenile halibut before releasing it.

portion of the area. (The new Zone 2H is shown on the map on page 9.)

The trawlers are likely to fight any efforts to further reduce the cap. "If we have to fish the bottom, we want the bycatch to do it. If you set the cap as though we'd all fish mid-water, it's not going to happen," says Bill Orr of Golden Age Fisheries. "If you want to have more pollock taken mid-water you need a lot more processing capacity so you can take it all [the quota] in the spring. And I don't think the Council wants more processing capacity with this talk of limited entry." □

John van Amerongen

**HALIBUT**

# Reducing Bycatch or How Close is that Trawl To the Bottom?

by Kris Freeman

If domestic factory trawlers do need to fish near the bottom in order to catch pollock big enough to fillet, can they rig their gear to avoid halibut? Gary Loverich of Nor'Eastern Trawl Systems Inc. thinks the answer is yes, but it won't necessarily be easy.

"It's certainly possible to reduce the bycatch of crab. Halibut is a much more difficult problem because it acts like a sole or a cod. There's much less behavioral distinction between species.

"Crab and fish have such different behaviors that you can take advantage of the difference to sort one from the other (i.e., a crab can only scuttle on the bottom as a trawl passes overhead, while halibut can, and will, swim in front of the net).

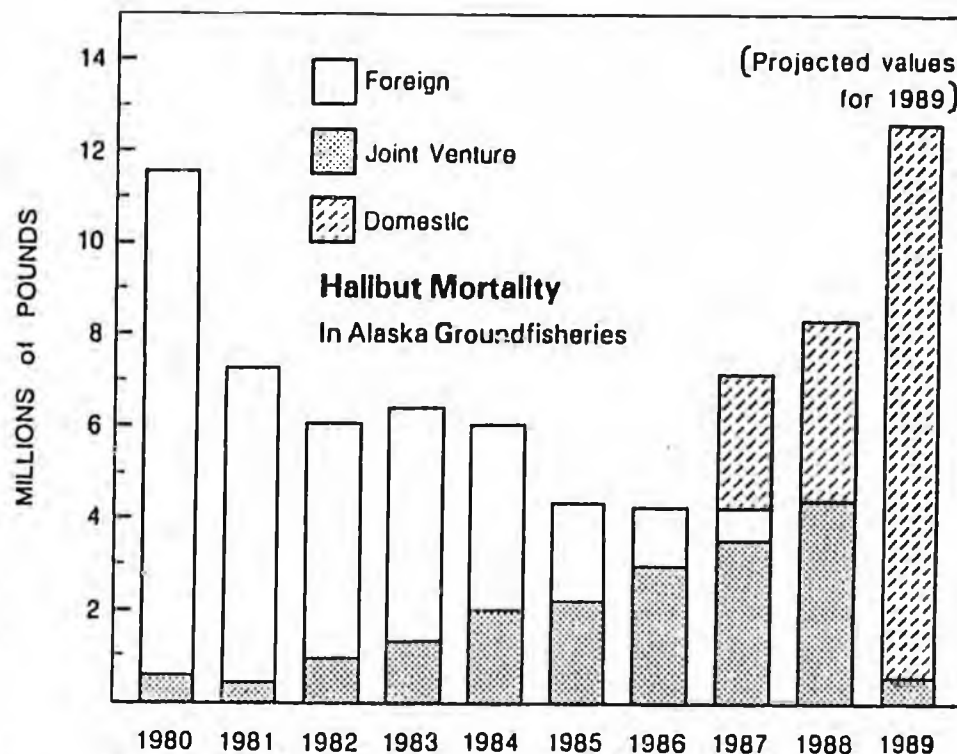
"But halibut act so much like sole that it's difficult to sort them out. It wouldn't be such a problem if the halibut were all big whales because they're such strong swimmers. To avoid them you could perhaps slow down the speed of the trawl. But a juvenile halibut sometimes isn't

much bigger than a yellowfin sole. Juvenile halibut may be stronger swimmers than yellowfin sole, but no one knows for sure.

"In order to eliminate halibut from the catch you have to find the difference in behavior," what distinguishes their swimming patterns from of other fish, says Loverich. That will take research and that means money.

Adding large mesh to the belly of a cod end could well be a good way to reduce halibut bycatch, says Loverich. "Cod, sole and probably small halibut will exit a net with large mesh. Pollock may or may not depending on the season."

"I can tell you for certain that if you use 28-foot mesh you wouldn't catch a cod or a sole or a halibut," says Loverich. Researchers would then have to decrease mesh size, from 15 foot to 10 foot to 5 foot, etc. to find the point where a trawl would begin to catch halibut. "I suspect you could put 16-inch mesh in the belly of a trawl and you could still catch pollock and your catch of halibut would go down. I suspect if you put in 32-inch mesh, it would go way down," says Loverich, adding



that mesh size tests would be relatively easy to conduct. (The belly of a trawl is the bottom panel located just behind the footrope. The mesh in the belly of a pollock trawl is usually 8-inch, although NETS has designed some nets with 12-inch mesh.)

European studies suggest that structures could also be built into the trawl, near the cod end, to reduce halibut bycatch, says Loverich. For instance, flatfish will resist swimming into certain funnel shapes, yet these same structures work very well in catching schooling fish such as hake or pollock. Howev-

er, testing such devices would be expensive.

Loverich predicts that species-specific trawls will become more common. Trawl designers will aim to increase trawl productivity, as they have for the last half century, "but in the next 50 years the real emphasis will be on how to catch one species and not another."

Not all the answers lie in the future. Trawlers can avoid some bottom-dwellers right now by using existing gear, namely semi-pelagic trawls. These are essentially mid-water nets with mid-water doors that can be flown low in the water

column.

"Semi-pelagic nets are always used with a net transducer. This makes it possible to work very close to the bottom, possibly within half a fathom," says Loverich. These nets just touch the bottom, instead of digging into it with heavy doors and roller gear, as hard-on-bottom trawls do. Since these nets can't follow the contour of the sea floor as closely as hard-on-bottom gear, they offer more opportunities for bycatch to escape. When the net passes over a depression, sole, halibut and cod may be able to slip under the foot-rope.

Can pollock escape these nets as well? That depends on the season,

since pollock behavior varies with the spawning cycle. During certain times of the year, especially during the spring, pollock will swim upwards when confronted with a trawl. During other months, they'll dive for the footrope like a cod. Trawlers can take advantage of this behavior to help them target on pollock.

"There's got to be a solution (to the problem of halibut bycatch)," says Loverich. "It might just mean having enough commitment to solve the problem...commitment by both the halibut industry and the drag industry. It's got to be a cooperative venture."

### 1989 Halibut Season

Area	Fishing Periods	Catch Limit (pounds)
2A Commercial	6/27-29; 7/24-26; 8/28-30	274,000
2B	4/25-5/3; *-6/18; *-9/12; *-10/10	10,000,000
2C	5/15-16; 8/12-13; 9/7-8; 10/10-*	9,500,000
3A	5/15-16; 6/12-13; 9/7-8; 10/10-*	31,000,000
3B	5/15-16; 8/12-13; 9/7-8; 10/10-*	8,500,000
4A	5/15-16; 6/12-13; 8/11-12; 9/7-8; 9/21-*; 10/10-*	1,800,000
4B	5/15-17; 5/27-28; 6/3-4; 6/12-14; 6/17-18; 6/24-25; 7/22-23; 7/29-30; 8/9-13; 8/25-26; 9/21-*; 10/10-*	1,900,000
4C	6/12-10/31: 1 day open, 1 day closed	600,000
4D	8/8-8/14; 9/21-*	
4E	5/26-8/11: 2 days open, 1 day closed 8/12-*: continuous	100,000
Total		64,650,000

\*Date to be announced by the Commission.

# HALIBUT

## Bycatch Cuts Both Ways

by Kris Freeman

"We hear the stories of death of immature halibut on crucifiers, and of excess gear left out and discards of halibut by Pacific cod fishermen and black cod fishermen," says trawler rep Bill Orr. "And you begin to wonder if single species management makes sense."

Longliners were indeed counting bycatch among their own numbers during the IPHC annual meeting. The halibut bycatch rate has sometimes approached 50 percent among the few longline processors targeting Pacific cod. The data is sketchy, since observer coverage is minimal on these boats. However, if this fleet expands, it could also swallow up a substantial chunk of the commercial halibut catch.

"If you assume a halibut bycatch rate of only 20 percent, the entire cod quota is so large that (if all the cod were caught by longline) you could take the entire halibut quota as bycatch," says IPHC biologist Robert Trumble. Since multi-species management—for good or bad—does not exist, all these halibut must be tossed over the side.

The actual take by cod longliners is still quite low. "We're very concerned about the potential but really don't have the information that anyone is going after cod in the short term," said Trumble.

However, he wasn't the only one

considering the possibilities. "We think the longliners—ourselves included—have to take control of this cod problem. We have to solve that bycatch problem before we talk to the trawlers when the cod fishery could account for the entire halibut fishery. They (the trawlers) recognize double standards," said Tom Casey of the Independent Longliners of Seal Rock, Oregon. "We must be clean ourselves before we point the finger at them."

Bycatch in the cod fishery could be reduced through seasonal closures and gear restrictions, according to Trumble. "In the summer the cod and halibut inhabit the same area, the shelf. In the winter, however, the halibut move to deep water to spawn. The potential halibut bycatch during a winter cod fishery could be quite low," said Trumble. "Another option we're excited about is fishing for cod in pots with triggers. We understand that fishing with pots can be very clear [as regards halibut]."

There is also the option of letting hook and line fishermen keep halibut. IPHC biologists tried to allow for multi-species management in their management Option 2 for the 1989 halibut fishery, but were voted down by the longliners. Option 1 was "status quo management" with short derby openings. Option 2 was an "extended season...which would allow fishing to occur for at least two weeks each month." Under this

option, halibut could be caught as a bycatch to other fisheries. Trip limits would be used to keep catches under quota. Trip limits might vary from month to month, depending on the amount of fish to be caught and the size of the fleet in a given area. The IPHC report suggested limits ranging from 700 pounds for vessels 0-24 feet to 15,000 pounds for vessels over 56 feet.

Fishermen were unanimous in their disapproval of the option. "Tube" said John Bruce, executive director of the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union. "Some of our boats will go broke," said Linda Kozak, executive director of the Kodiak Longline Vessel Owners Association.

A 15,000-pound trip limit isn't large enough to support a schooner and six-man crew, Bruce said. "They'll just go after P. cod or black cod instead." In addition, he said, the trip limits would increase effort among small boats by giving newcomers a guaranteed shot at the quota.

Option 2 would have allowed fishermen to target multiple species, an idea that has been discussed for years among longliners. "The idea is to target two fisheries and make a living from both," said Trumble.

However, the attraction of multi-species management has apparently faded. "There will be higher mortality if you target two species," said Bruce. "If a fisherman catches more than the trip limits he'll have to discard fish." He added that multi-

ple trip limits spread out over an extended period could be very difficult to enforce. "What does the fish house do when you land with two species in your hold?...And what's to keep a guy from loading up his truck and selling to a restaurant or store?"

Not even the Pacific cod longliners at the meeting, and there were several, spoke in favor of multi-species management, which would allow them to keep incidental catches of halibut. They, like other longliners, worry that if the door is opened to multi-species management in the longline fishery, then the trawlers will demand similar treatment.

On the same lines, the ban on crucifiers, a.k.a. "hook strippers," was also the topic of extended discussion. "I don't believe in smacking the face of a fish against any machine," said one B.C. rep. "You say Area 2B has problems with its stocks. Well, at least we treat our stocks like we want to see them 100 years from now."

continued →

"Crucifiers work fine with a J-hook," said another B.C. rep. "With a circle hook it tears the jaw right out."

"We're in a tough position," said IPHC Director Donald McCaughran. "We don't like hook strippers but we don't like horning, either."

"We're looking for the lesser of two evils," agreed IPHC Assistant Director Stephen Hoag. "It appears that gaffing or horning at the roller might be even rougher on halibut [than crucifiers]."

Bob Alverson of the Fishing Vessel Owner's Association countered that the IPHC didn't face an either/or choice. "Not all boats are horning," said Alverson. "There are a number of boats that still release fish...The regulation against crucifiers is hard to enforce," he admitted. "But ninety-five percent of the fleet is staying away from hook strippers because of the regulations." If crucifiers were legal, the entire fleet would switch over, he said. "Hook strippers increase efficiency by 30-50 percent. If we don't ban them, other boats will be forced to put crucifiers on to compete."

Other fishermen said that allow-

ing the use of hook strippers would send the wrong message at a time when the fleet is working to improve quality and handling. The Conference Board voted to maintain the ban on crucifiers.

Incidentally, the IPHC came in for some criticism of its own when the topic of fish handling and wastage came up. McCaughran opened the public meeting with a showing of the film the Commission produced for the 1988 Halibut Centennial, which McCaughran hopes will be aired on public television. The film contained dramatic shots of crewmen wrestling with halibut and rolling with them in the checker. But these were not necessarily textbook examples of technique, as longliner Bruce Jackson pointed out. "You should show fishermen shaking the fish before it gets to the roller instead of showing the public a halibut going up the chute with a gaff hook in its head," said Jackson, president of the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union.



*Crewman Peter (left) helps owner/operator Danny Graham wrestle a halibut over the rail on longliner 'El Dan' during a 5-day opening off St. Matthews Island.*

# HALIBUT

## B.C. Revolt Canadians Fed Up with U.S. ByCatch

"The International Pacific Halibut Commission has become irrelevant to the stocks," said John Radosevic, business agent of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union of Canada.

"Something radical is necessary and if the Commission is not willing to do that, I'm not prepared to be part of the process," said Radosevic, who has called for a meeting of all B.C. fishing groups to reevaluate their participation in the Halibut Commission. He is also calling for the resignation of the three Canadian IPHC commissioners. "I don't want it to be said down the line that the Union couldn't see what was coming, that it had a part in wiping out the resource."

The problem? Trawl bycatch in U.S. waters. Radosevic said that the actions of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council made it appear as if "the halibut resource was expendable compared to the domestic trawl fleet."

Radosevic said that his position is more radical than that of the other B.C. fishermen's groups. However,

he adds, his group is also the largest.

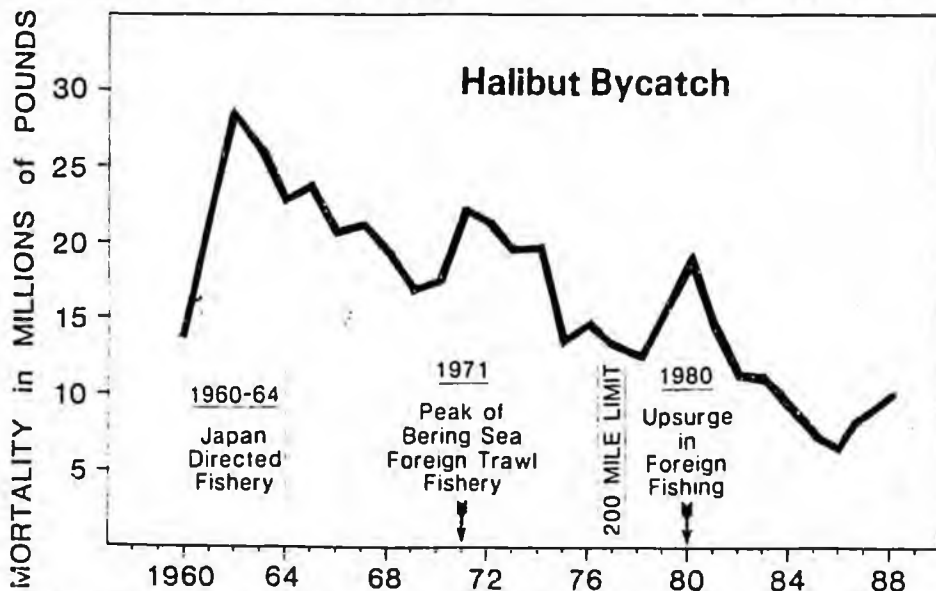
In addition, his concerns, if not his solutions, were shared by the other B.C. fishermen who attended the January IPHC annual meeting. "The U.S. government in its wisdom has decided to take its resource and chew it up and throw it over the side. Should I as a Canadian citizen have to pay for that?" asked John Sanderson of Ocean Triumph Seafoods of Victoria.

B.C. longliners and the IPHC have long argued over the link between Canadian and U.S. halibut stocks, whether juveniles or adults migrate and where they migrate from and to. Regardless, B.C. longliners say they are being forced to pay for wastage that is beyond their control. Bycatch in Area 2B was only 1 million pounds in 1988, yet the 2B quota is being cut by 2.5 million pounds. "Canadian quotas are taking pretty big cuts because of low recruitment. But our recruitment comes from the areas that are being dragged up [the Bering Sea]," said Radosevic.

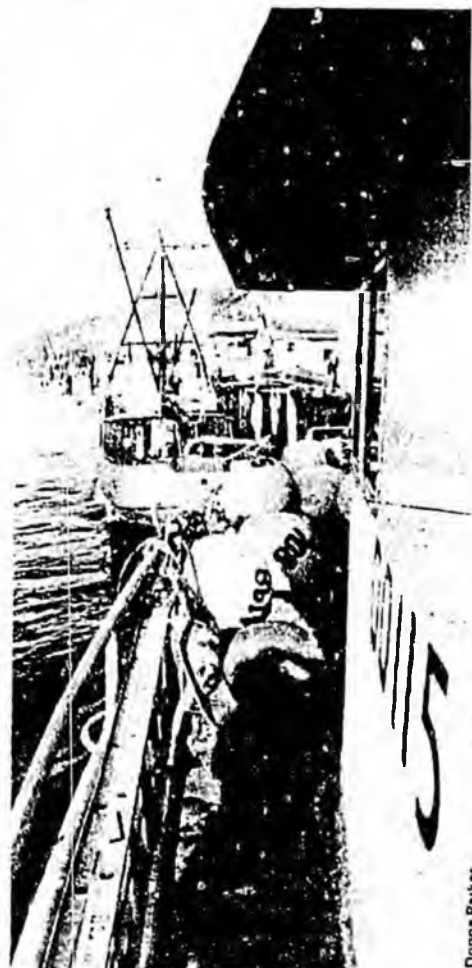
IPHC biologists admitted that they haven't yet figured out the best

way to distribute bycatch reductions among the different areas. B.C. reps suggested that one way around the problem might be to link Areas 2B and 2C the same way areas 3A and 3B are linked. (Because Area 3 has been managed as one unit, stocks in Area 3A have been underfished. They have also increased in size and the 3A quota will be the only one to increase in 1989.) If Area 2 was managed as one unit, reductions for U.S. trawl bycatch could come out of the American quota in 2C instead of the Canadian quota in 2B.

That proposal, as expected, didn't get very far.



This chart shows halibut bycatch from all gear types along the entire West Coast. For the numbers on Alaska trawl bycatch (included with other gear types in the chart above), see the graph on page 13.



Longliners in Kodiak harbor.

Donna Parker

Donna Parker

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During the IPHC annual meeting, Radosevic also questioned IPHC estimates of bycatch, arguing that trawl bycatch actually could be much larger than estimated. "With no observers how can you trust the stats?" he asked.

He also accused U.S. draggers of keeping halibut bycatches. "How do you know the factory trawlers aren't selling juvenile halibut to Japan? Is the Commission aware of a growing market for halibut of illegal size in Japan? Is that figured into the stats? Is there something that can be done to plug the hole? We're satisfied that it (the juvenile halibut) is not coming from Canadian waters."

"I would be astonished if any of that came from U.S. factory trawlers," said Bill Orr of Golden Age Fisheries, in a JOURNAL interview after the meeting. "With the degree of scrutiny and observation, I can't see anyone taking a risk like that with a \$20 million or \$30 million boat. I know our company contract states that keeping halibut, for home canning or anything, is grounds for firing."

U.S. Customs officials have the right to inspect fish being transferred from a factory trawler to a tramper for delivery to Japan, said Orr. Not every box, or even every load is inspected, admits Orr who adds, "I guess it could be done. But I think it would be a lot easier for a Japanese vessel [to fish illegally for halibut]."

Steve Pennoyer, new head of Alaska NMFS, raised another possibility during a question and answer period with the Conference Board. "Small halibut could be coming from the Soviet zone, too," he said.

"The Soviets retain the halibut bycatch in their trawl fisheries. And trawls tend to catch more juvenile halibut since the big halibut are strong enough to swim away from the mouth of the trawl," says Wally Pereyra, chairman and CEO of Profish International. "They [the Soviets] are always doing interesting things to generate hard currency. It's probably more responsible for them to sell it [halibut bycatch] than throw it away."

While the UFAWU members are reevaluating their participation in the IPHC, they are also rethinking their support of a voluntary \$.015 tax to support a NMFS observer program. By the time an observer program is established and data is collected, it will be too late, says Radosevic. "Our throats are being cut and they're offering band-aid solutions."

Perhaps as solace, B.C. longliners were given the first opening of the season for the second year in a row.

## Bid Issue Raised Once Again

Call it "Son of Guild". The idea of paying for halibut before you catch it is making the rounds again. In 1984 former NPFMC executive director Jim Branson proposed ending derby openings through a "Guild System," whereby fishermen would bid for so many pounds of fish, then have ten months to catch it.

At the annual IPHC meeting held January 23-27 in Vancouver, B.C., the idea was raised again by a man who had never heard of Branson's system. He was Mike Reif of Sitka, a contractor and a former forester. He spoke from his paper "Competitive Bid Allocation Plan For Public Commercial Fisheries."

Reif said he represented "John Q. Public" who had been left out of the allocation debate for all species, including halibut. "There is no other resource on this financial scale—

billions of dollars—that doesn't go up for lease or bid," said Reif. "This last summer one red salmon was worth a barrel of oil. We wouldn't give away a barrel of oil."

In his paper Reif argues that fishery management should be funded by fishermen and processors through a bidding system, instead of by funds taken from the general taxpayer. He claims that monopolies could be avoided by requiring that the majority of bids go to small- and medium-sized users. He proposes a 33-33-33 split between small, medium and large boats.

Less than a week later, similar sentiments were printed on the front page of the *Seattle Times* business section as a preface to a report on the cut-off date for groundfish fisheries established by the NPFMC (see story, page 30). In

summarizing the U.S. take of pollock, cod and halibut, veteran fisheries reporter Ross Anderson wrote, "the bottom line is \$2 billion in annual sales to the Seattle-based fishing industry. And it's all ours—a vast, renewable, publicly owned resource, enough to offset part of the federal budget deficit.

"Except it doesn't. Alaska groundfish, like other American fisheries, actually add to the deficit. Each year, the federal government spends about \$5 million to research, manage, allocate and patrol the fishing grounds. Then it all but gives the fish away to anybody who can buy or build a boat equipped for the rugged Bering Sea."

Neither article discussed the fact that other major fishing nations such as Japan, Norway and the USSR heavily subsidize their fishing fleets.

Reif is soliciting the help of fishermen in writing up his proposal and speculates that small-boat fishermen, who he says are the biggest

losers in the current derby management system, might be most interested.

However, support for a bid system is more likely to come from established longliners who have invested heavily in longline vessels, according to John Bruce, executive director of the Deep Sea Fishermen's Union. Bruce says that a bid system might actually discourage part-time, small-boat fishermen by making it more expensive for them to fish. Some probably couldn't afford a per-pound fee in addition to the cost of gear. Historically, support for limited entry and other management schemes to reduce effort has been strong in Petersburg, which is home-port to a fleet of large longliners that range the Bering Sea.

Reif and his group, which have yet to agree on a name, can be reached at P.O. Box 2346, Sitka, AK 99835; (907) 747-6005.

By the way, if you want to tell Anderson what you think of his idea, he's heard it already. He got calls from 30-40 angry fishermen the week after his story came out. □