

S J R

31

STATE OF ALASKA
1989 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL VERSION: S R 31
PUBLISH DATE: _____

FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST: _____

REVISION DATE: _____
TITLE: Relating to the bycatch of halibut by domestic fisheries
SPONSOR: Sen. Eliason
REQUESTOR: Sen. Eliason

AGENCY: _____
BRU: _____
COMPONENTS: _____

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS)

	FY 89	FY 90	FY 91	FY 92	FY 93	FY 94
OPERATING						
PERS. SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND/BUILD.						
GRANTS/CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0
CAPITAL						
REVENUE						


FUNDING: (THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS)

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

POSITIONS:

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

ANALYSIS:

PREPARED BY: Sen. Eliason 

DATE: Feb. 24, 1989

PHONE No.: 465-4916

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
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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Senator Bettye Fahrenkamp, Chairman
Senate Resources Committee

FROM: Senator Dick Eliason *Dick Eliason*

DATE: February 22, 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, which I sponsored, has been referred to the Senate Resources Committee.

The issue of bycatch in the domestic fisheries is the focus of much concern at this time. Halibut bycatch in the domestic fishery will be the subject of discussion at North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meetings in the near future, and for this reason I hope that you will schedule SJR 31 for a hearing by the Senate Resources Committee as soon as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

INCIDENTAL CATCH AND MORTALITY FOR PACIFIC HALIBUT
THROUGH 1988 AND PROJECTIONS FOR 1989

by

Robert J. Trumble

Pacific halibut are caught inadvertently in fisheries targeting on various groundfish and shellfish species, and estimates of this incidental catch indicate the removals are substantial. The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) is supplied with estimates of the incidental catch in foreign and joint venture fisheries by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) through the Observer Program. Estimates of bycatch in other fisheries are generated by IPHC staff from information collected on research surveys or through predictive models. This report provides the current estimates of halibut bycatch, and reviews new bycatch control measures instituted by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC).

Current Estimates of Incidental Mortality

Most halibut that are incidentally caught are injured to some degree during the capture process. However, not all fish which are returned to the sea die, so the incidental mortality is less than the actual catch. The likelihood of a halibut being killed during incidental capture depends upon the fishing operation. Mortality in trawls with long tows, large catches and slow sorting is usually very high, approaching 100 percent. Trawling operations that transfer the trawl contents to a mothership for processing also exhibit mortality rates close to 100 percent, as the sorting process is very slow and the catches are usually large. Mortality in short trawl tows with small catches and quick

sorting has been estimated at 50 percent. Bycatch mortality associated with longline gear is believed to be about 25 percent, as the fish can usually be released with minimal damage to the jaw. However, the recent introduction of crucifiers into the longline fisheries for sablefish (Anoplopoma fimbria) and Pacific cod (Gadus macrocephalus) may result in a higher mortality rate for longline fisheries. Mortality in crab pots is believed to be 100 percent.

Historically, halibut incidental mortality was relatively small until the 1960s, when it increased rapidly due to the sudden influx of foreign fishing vessels off the North American coast (Figure 1). Directed halibut harvest in the Bering Sea by Japan is included. The total incidental mortality peaked in 1962 at about 25 million pounds. Halibut bycatch declined during the 1960s, but increased to about 20 million pounds in the early 1970s. The Bycatch dropped to a 13 million pound level during the late 1970s and early 1980s. By 1986, the incidental mortality declined to 7 million pounds, the lowest level in recent history. However, incidental mortality has increased since 1986, reaching 10.9 million pounds in 1988. By area, the 1988 bycatch mortality is estimated at 1.45 million pounds in Area 2 (Southeast Alaska, British Columbia, and the Pacific coast), 3.51 million pounds in Area 3 (central and western Gulf of Alaska) and 5.95 million pounds in Area 4 (the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands) (Figure 2). Estimates of the incidental mortality for 1979-1988 are shown in Table 1.

The recent increase in incidental mortality has occurred despite a reduction in foreign fishing off Alaska and is attributed to increased mortality by joint venture and fully domestic groundfish fisheries. The objectives of U.S. extended jurisdiction legislation included fully "Americanizing" the groundfish fisheries in U.S. waters. The NPFMC has adopted policies and regulations that encouraged joint ventures between domestic catcher vessels and foreign processors

when U.S. processing capacity was insufficient. As domestic processing increased, both through at-sea processing vessels and shore-side plants, harvest priorities shifted to fully domestic operations. As the mix of foreign, joint venture and fully domestic fishing has changed over the past several years, so has the source of bycatch mortality. Figure 3 shows 1980-1988 bycatch mortality in Alaskan waters attributed to foreign, joint venture and fully domestic groundfish fishing, with projected bycatch mortality for 1989. The NMFS provides estimates of foreign and joint venture bycatch from a comprehensive observer program required by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act. No such requirements apply to the fully domestic fishery, and bycatch estimates are made indirectly rather than with complete observer coverage.

Halibut killed as bycatch are generally sublegal in size. To incorporate the estimates of incidental mortality into the population assessment models used for halibut, the mortality must be converted into "adult equivalents," i.e. the number of pounds of adult halibut that are represented by the estimated mortality of sublegal (juvenile) fish. This process requires examining changes in the population size resulting from fish growth and natural mortality. The weight gain to the population from growth is greater than the weight loss to the population due to natural mortality; therefore, incidental mortality causes a loss in yield that is larger than the actual incidental mortality. The conversion factor used to estimate adult equivalents is 1.58, i.e. one pound of bycatch mortality equals 1.58 pounds of lost adult halibut yield. A review of this methodology is currently underway, with the objective of determining size-specific adult-equivalent adjustment factors. Incidental mortality for 1979-1988 expressed as adult equivalents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Estimated incidental mortality of halibut by regulatory area and year for 1979-1988 and calculated loss in adult equivalents. Estimates are in thousands of pounds (net weight). Estimates for 1988 are through October, 1988 and are considered preliminary.

Year	Area 2A	Area 2B	Area 2C	Area 3A	Area 3B	Area 4	Coast-wide Total	Adult Equiv.
1979	1	1,852	821	5,780	935	5,419	14,808	23,397
1980	1	1,372	520	5,852	1,246	9,235	18,226	28,797
1981	tr	1,188	507	4,720	1,563	6,408	14,386	22,730
1982	tr	867	302	3,797	2,175	4,756	11,897	18,797
1983	1	943	304	2,957	1,935	3,543	9,683	15,299
1984	tr	1,074	302	2,140	1,507	4,692	9,715	15,350
1985	tr	1,139	301	1,001	577	4,207	7,225	11,416
1986	1	1,161	303	836	410	4,472	7,183	11,349
1987	tr	1,150	303	2,241	873	5,253	9,820	15,515
1988 ¹	1	1,150	303	3,390	128	5,945	10,916	17,247

¹Preliminary

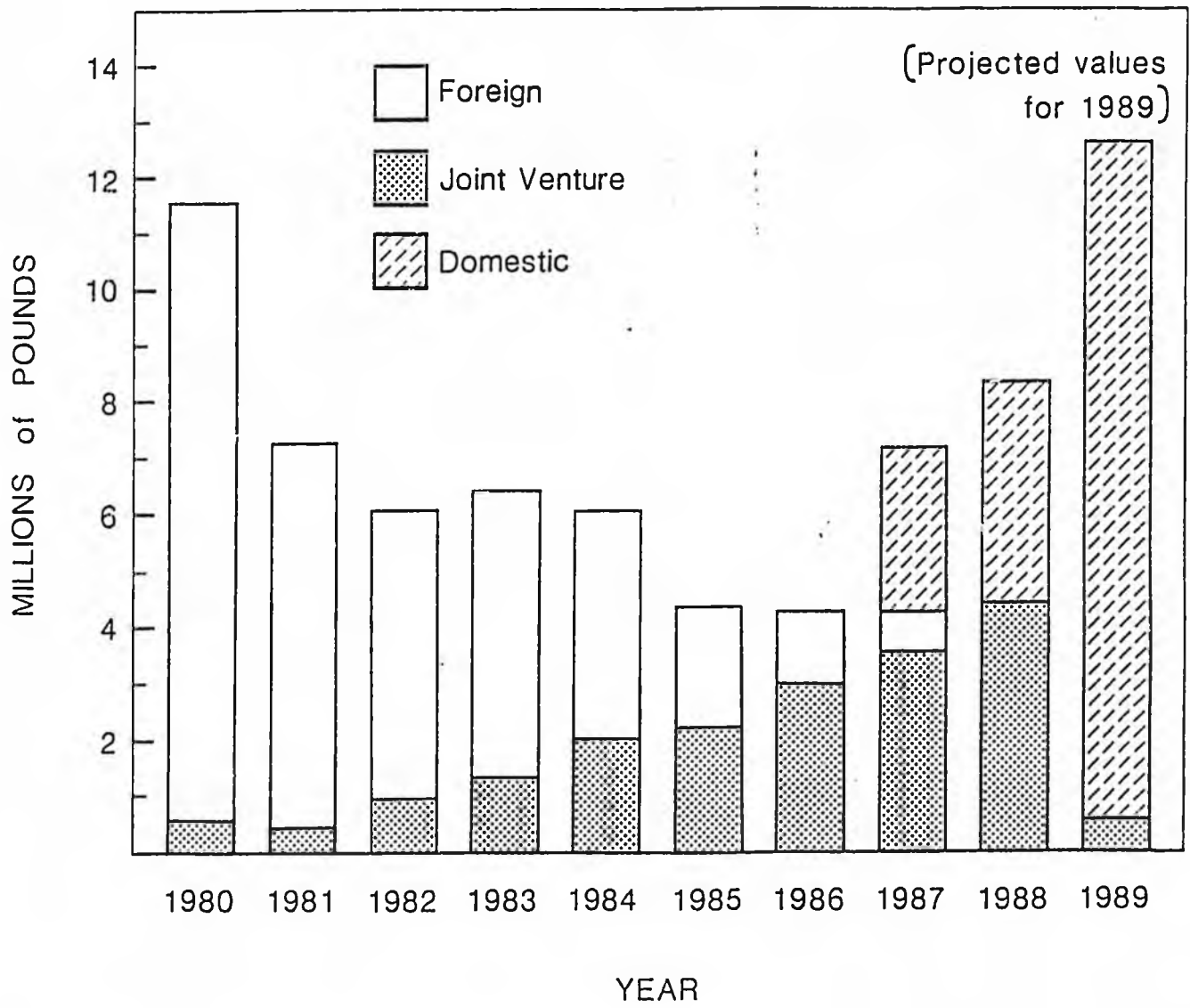


Figure 3. Halibut bycatch mortality in the groundfish fisheries off Alaska, 1980-1989.

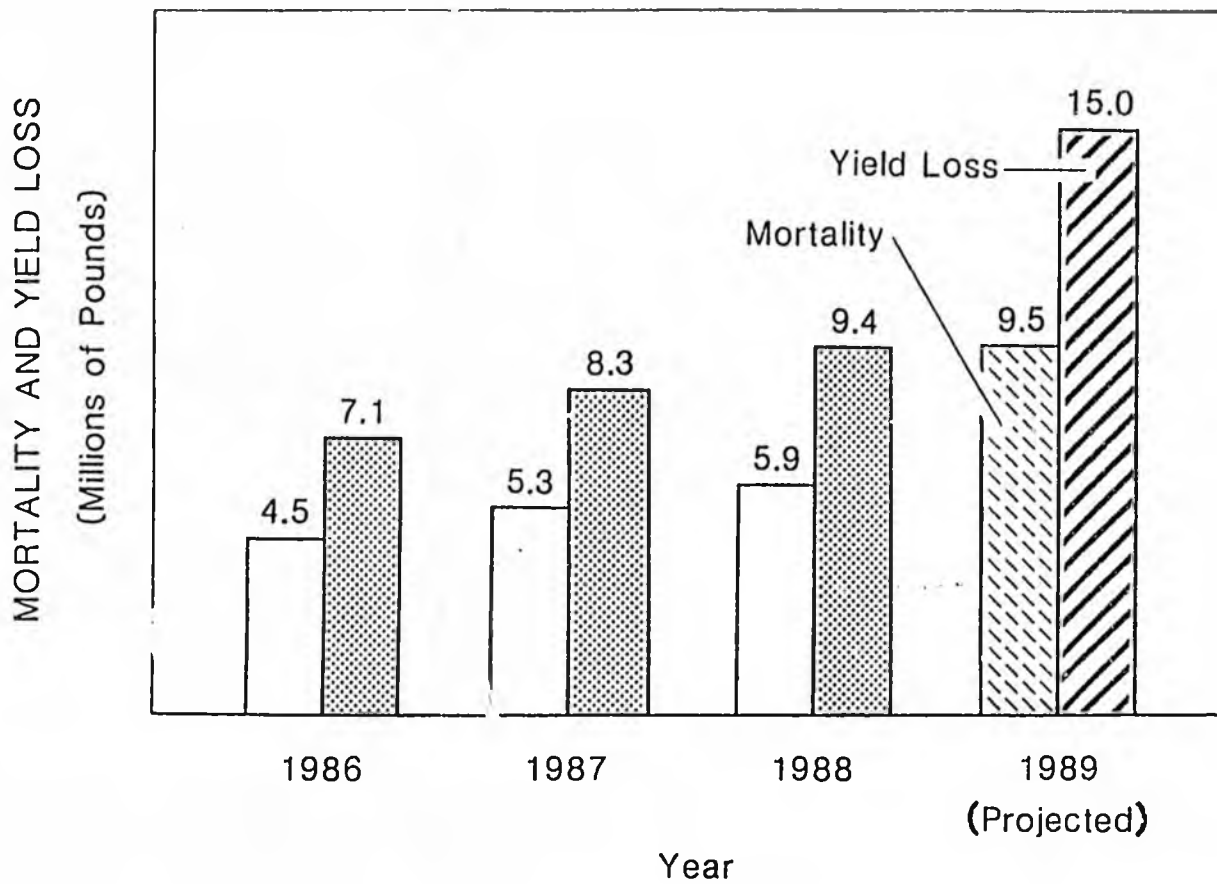


Figure 5. Bering Sea halibut bycatch mortality and yield loss since 1986, with 1989 projections.

BILL: SJR 31

NAME: HCS SJR 31(RES)

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

PRIME SPONSOR: ELIASON

CO-SPONSOR: BINKLEY, ZHAROFF, JONES, KERTTULA, STURGULEWSKI

CURRENT STATUS: LEGIS RESOLVE 16

STATUS DATE: 04/12/89

Selection=>

PF1	PF2	PF3	PF4	PF5	PF6	PF7	PF8	PF9	PF10	PF11	PF12
HELP		EXIT	MENU	TEXT	PRINT	BWD	FWD		FIRST	LAST	QUIT
SJR 31											

Bill/Resolution Floor Action

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Current Status: LEGIS RESOLVE 16

	Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page	Action
1	02/21/89	471	(S) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRAL(S)
2	02/21/89	471	(S) RESOURCES
3	03/07/89	661	(S) RES RPT 4DP
4	03/07/89	661	(S) ZERO FN PUBLISHED (F&G)
5	03/07/89	667	(S) CO-SPONSOR ADDED: STURGULEWSKI
6	03/10/89	727	(S) RULES TO CALENDAR
7	03/10/89	732	(S) READ THE SECOND TIME
8	03/10/89	732	(S) ADVANCED TO THIRD READING UNAN CONSENT
9	03/10/89	732	(S) READ THE THIRD TIME SJR 31
10	03/10/89	733	(S) PASSED Y18 N- X2
11	03/10/89	735	(S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)
12	03/13/89	605	(H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRAL(S)
13	03/13/89	605	(H) RESOURCES
14	04/06/89	904	(H) RES RPT HCS(RES) 6DP
15	04/06/89	904	(H) PREVIOUS SENATE ZERO FN (F&G) 3/7/89
16	04/07/89		(H) RULES TO CALENDAR 4/7/89
17	04/07/89	941	(H) READ THE SECOND TIME
18	04/07/89	941	(H) RES HCS ADOPTED UNAN CONSENT

Selection=>

PF1	PF2	PF3	PF4	PF5	PF6	PF7	PF8	PF9	PF10	PF11	PF12
HELP		EXIT	MENU	TEXT	PRINT	BWD	FWD	CMT/JRNL	FIRST	LAST	QUIT
SJR 31											

Bill/Resolution Floor Action

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Current Status: LEGIS RESOLVE 16

	Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page	Action
1	04/07/89	941	(H) ADVANCED TO THIRD READING UNAN CONSENT
2	04/07/89	941	(H) READ THE THIRD TIME HCS SJR 31(RES)
3	04/07/89	941	(H) PASSED Y36 N- X4
4	04/07/89	944	(H) TRANSMITTED TO (S) AS AMENDED
5	04/08/89	1126	(S) CONCUR AM OF (H) Y16 N- X4
6	04/11/89	1188	(S) 2:40 PM 4/11/89 TRANSMITTED TO GOVERNOR
7	04/14/89	1234	(S) READ BY GOVERNOR 4/12 LEGIS RESOLVE 16

Selection=>

PF1	PF2	PF3	PF4	PF5	PF6	PF7	PF8	PF9	PF10	PF11	PF12
HELP		EXIT	MENU	TEXT	PRINT	BWD	FWD	CMT/JRNL	FIRST	LAST	QUIT

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 Radoševic 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, Radoševic 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.

Radoševic'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 Radoševic says there is no doubt the real figure is much higher.

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

McCaughran is confident the IPHC figure is accurate, but adds that "John Radoševic 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

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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."

Radoševic 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.

Radoševic 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
(A Canadian Fishing Newspaper)