

# STATE OF ALASKA

## THE LEGISLATURE

1989

Source

HCS SJR 31(Res)

Legislative  
Resolve No.

16



Relating to the bycatch of halibut by domestic fisheries and an on-board 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"; and

WHEREAS the North Pacific Fishery Management Council has established allowable levels of halibut bycatch for domestic fisheries, but it is believed that these levels may be exceeded, particularly by trawlers in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska; and

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 the excessive bycatch mortality of halibut in the groundfish fishery, the International Pacific Halibut Commission recently lowered the catch quota for the 1989 commercial halibut season, which will result in a loss of millions of dollars of income to halibut fishermen, processors, the recreational fishing community, related businesses, and coastal communities; and

WHEREAS the major threats to young halibut are the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska trawl fisheries, although the developing Pacific cod trawl fisheries and, to a lesser extent, the longline fisheries 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 bycatch are 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 in the level of foreign fishing allowed in the Exclusive Economic Zone in the last few years which has led to a substantial increase in the level of nonobserved domestic fisheries and this has resulted in 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 of halibut lies with the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council; and

WHEREAS the International Pacific Halibut Commission has determined that resolution of the halibut bycatch 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 that might cause incidental mortality to halibut in order to guarantee collection of accurate data; 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 in the nonhalibut fisheries in order to fund the program; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature

encourages gear research that will 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.