



PRELIMINARY 2015 HALIBUT CATCH LIMITS

Preliminary 2015 Halibut Catch Limits Released: On December 3rd the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) staff released the “blue line” decision table for the 2015 halibut fishery. The blue line identifies area catch limits consistent with the IPHC target harvest rates.

		Halibut		
		2014	2015	% change
2A	(million lbs.)	0.96	0.75	-21.9%
2B		6.85	5.75	-16.1%
2C	Comm.	3.319	3.4	2.4%
	Charter	0.761	0.79	3.8%
3A	Comm.	7.318	7.81	6.7%
	Charter	1.782	1.89	6.1%
3B		2.84	2.46	-13.4%
4A		0.85	1.35	58.8%
4B		1.14	0.72	-36.8%
4CDE		1.285	0.38	-70.4%

Preliminary halibut catch limits for 2015

Overall IPHC staff consider this year’s stock assessment to be slightly more optimistic than other recent assessments. Halibut growth rates have dropped by 50% over the past two decades, with that decline most prevalent in western areas. As a result, the numbers of halibut has not changed nearly as significantly as the weight of the halibut stock. Although there are theories to explain the decline, cause has not been established.

Bycatch: The real bomb shell dropped by the staff was the 70% reduction in the Area 4CDE directed fishery. This reduction, which follows substantial catch limit reductions in recent years, is largely driven by a 10-12% increase in halibut bycatch. For perspective, while the directed fishery is limited to 370,000 pounds, bycatch is expected to account for 5 MILLION pounds in this area alone. This gross reallocation of the halibut fishery from the historic harvesters all but shuts down the Pribilof Island fisheries and, because halibut migrate to the Southeast, reduces harvest in all other areas.

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DATES TO REMEMBER

Board of Fisheries will meet in Sitka late February/Early March

NPFMC will meet in Sitka in June 2015

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You will find these at Murray Pacific and our office—located on the second floor of the Sitka Sound Science Center.



Stomp on by!

PRELIMINARY HALIBUT CATCH LIMITS CONTINUED

Last week the IPHC reported to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council on the 2015 catch limits and the bycatch crisis. After compelling testimony, Duncan Fields made a motion to lower halibut bycatch caps in the Bering Sea across all sectors. The Council was missing one voting Alaska member this meeting (for medical reasons) and the motion failed 5-5 with all present Alaskan's voting yes. Because the IPHC does not have authority over the trawl fisheries responsible for the vast majority of the bycatch, the IPHC will face the difficult decision in January of imposing major socioeconomic harm on the Bering Sea communities and quota share holders or setting the 4CDE catch limit above the blue line. Subsequent to IPHC action, the Council may reconsider this issue in February.

Lowering the minimum size limit: IPHC commissioners also requested that the staff analyze the impacts of lowering the minimum size of retainable halibut in the directed fishery from 32 to 30 inches. Data indicate this change will reduce by 58% the number of small fish released by the commercial fishery. Although fish under 32 inches are not yet sexually mature and therefore have not yet contributed to the spawning biomass, most of this population is male. IPHC staff will evaluate the resource effects of lowering the size limit in January, which is also when halibut harvesters and processors will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed change.



CATCH UPDATE

CATCH (Catch Accountability Through Compensated Halibut): Even though the Halibut Catch Sharing Plan was implemented in 2014 (after 20 years of relentless effort to end halibut reallocation), a new reallocation scheme is already on the Council's agenda. The CATCH program was developed by SEAGO and the Alaska Charter Association. The concept behind CATCH is to increase the amount of halibut in the charter halibut common pool. As proposed, an organization or “holding entity” would be created to purchase and manage quota. The holding entity would obtain funds from a “loan, grant, or other funding source” and use these funds to purchase quota from commercial fishermen. Proposers seek to transfer over a half million pounds in 2C and close to a million pounds in 3A.

CATCH seeks to accomplish a goal (increasing charter allocation) that has largely been addressed with the Guided Angler Fish program implemented under the CSP in 2014. The critical differences are that the GAF program requires charter operators to individually invest in quota for their businesses whereas the CATCH program funds QS purchase for the charter “common pool” with outside funding. In short, the CATCH program potentially increases the charter allocation without costing the charter fleet any personal investment in QS and, by employing outside funding such as grants or a tax revenue stream, CATCH would increase QS prices. Other concerns with the CATCH program include: increased charter harvest near towns, which would further restrict harvesting opportunities for subsistence and resident sport fishermen; reduced consumer access to halibut; and socioeconomic impacts to processors, support industries and communities.

CATCH likely to be on the NPFMC June agenda!

SABLEFISH SUMMIT

Sablefish summit: On December 1st ALFA hosted a sablefish summit in Sitka. Federal fishery managers provided a presentation and responded to questions about the sablefish stock, Lauren Wild presented information on work to date to address whale depredation on longline hooked sablefish, and ADFG Chatham/Clarence managers discussed and answered questions on the State managed sablefish fisheries. Staff recommendations for federal sablefish quotas call for a .5% reduction in each management area in 2014. Future projections are for a stable or slightly declining stock. The driving factor in the decline is the long-term absence of a strong sablefish year class—over 15 years of average to below average recruitment. On the positive side, the trawl survey and the troll fishery both reported large quantities of small sablefish this year. Hopefully this promising year class will survive strong to recruit to the fishery five years from now.

Sablefish			
	2014	2015	% change
SE (metric tons)	2,837	2,823	-0.5%
WY	1,574	1,567	-0.5%
CG	4,681	4,658	-0.5%
WG	1,480	1,473	-0.5%
BS	1,339	1,333	-0.5%
AI	1,811	1,802	-0.5%

Preliminary sablefish quotas for 2015

Also on the horizon is a reevaluation by federal managers of the sablefish apportionment between management areas. Managers are concerned that the current apportionment allocates too much sablefish quota to the Bering Sea despite relatively low production levels and introduces too much volatility into annual quotas. ALFA will actively participate in the reapportionment review and keep members informed.



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Delta Western— Sea Mart Quality Foods — Sitka Salmon Shares — First Bank Sitka—Sitka Sound Seafoods

Murray Pacific — Petro Marine Services — Precision Boatworks — Channel Club — Serka's Welding & Fabrication

Contributing: ALPS Federal Credit Union — Fishermen's Eye Gallery — City of Port Alexander — White's Inc.

Get Involved!



FCN PROJECTS

- Rockfish bycatch reduction
- Bathymetric mapping
- Whale deterrents
- Fuel Efficiency
- Electronic monitoring

We are always eager to involve more fishermen in ongoing projects.
Call 747-3400 or email: alfastaff@gmail.com

SABLEFISH SUMMIT CONTINUED

Chatham: As Chatham permit holders are aware, the **Chatham Strait** sablefish quota has been steadily reduced over the past 15 years. In 2014 managers announced an additional 23% reduction the week before the fishery opened. Managers are applying a very conservative harvest rate in Chatham but consider this rate justified by declining biomass estimates and declining catches in the survey and commercial fishery. Although changes to the harvest rate are not likely in the short-term, at the summit the department did commit to: 1) annually meeting with Chatham permit holders in February (except during years when the BOF addresses SE groundfish proposals) and 2) annually providing longline survey data to the public by December 31st.

Of note: if the entire Chatham survey was harvested by permit holders, the equal share would increase by 11.4%. Contact ADFG if you are willing to help with the survey.

Sablefish Pots in the Gulf of Alaska: The impacts of whale predation on the sablefish fishery have catalyzed proposals to allow longline pots in the fishery. Because ALFA is concerned about grounds preemption, lost gear, and the safety issues preventing small boats from harvesting sablefish with pots, we have filed comments opposing pot legalization in the Southeast/Yakutat areas. There is a strong push from Kodiak, Seattle, Homer and possibly Petersburg to allow pots, so stopping this amendment will be a heavy lift. Proposals to allow pots in Chatham strait and to expand the use of pots in the Clarence fishery have also been submitted to the Board of Fisheries and will be reviewed by the BOF during their February 27-March 20 meeting in Sitka.

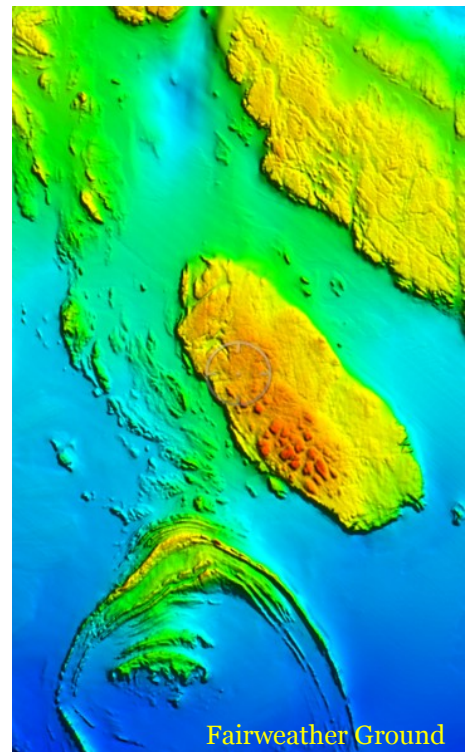
FISHERY CONSERVATION NETWORK PROJECTS

ALFA's Fishery Conservation Network engages fishermen in research and conservation initiatives. FCN members have tackled rockfish bycatch, seafloor mapping, sperm whale predation and deterrents, and fuel efficiency.

ALFA's FCN intern, Beata Fiszler, is enriching seafloor and bycatch maps by compiling fleet bathymetry data, incorporating NOAA/ADFG multi beam bathymetry data, adding stock assessment catch and bycatch data, and from all that creating GIS maps for FCN members.

If you use the Nobeltec Catch program, Beata will help you update your system, install existing ALFA bathy maps, and download your data to incorporate into the new maps. Everyone who contributes data will receive the compiled bathy maps in the spring, so call the ALFA office to make an appointment with Beata (907- 747 -3400).

Not an FCN member? Membership is FREE to ALFA members so call today to sign up!



FISHERIES TRANSITION TEAM

Linda Behnken was selected to serve on the Walker/Mallot Fisheries Transition Team, which met in early December. The Fisheries Team was not allowed to discuss allocation issues, but was instructed to identify priority areas. Top priorities identified by the team were:

1. Fish First – Prevent damage to fish habitat and stocks
2. Develop policies, strategies, management initiatives to return fishery access opportunities to residents of Alaska's fishing communities
3. Fund ADF&G and Fisheries Science
4. Science over politics (includes review and restructure Board of Fisheries and process)
5. Strengthen locally based adaptive fisheries management

This administration is making significant changes in State personnel and is expected to do the same for state policy. Former legislator and North Pacific Fishery Management Council member Sam Cotton has been appointed interim ADFG Commissioner and took the State seat on the Council this month.



CHEDDAR AND SMOKED SALMON FRITTATAS

Ingredients

- 1 (6-to 7-ounce) can smoked salmon, drained
- 12 large eggs
- ½ cup onion, chopped
- ¼ cup green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh dill, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup Cheddar cheese, grated
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- muffin pan
- nonstick cooking spray

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350° F.
2. Whisk the eggs in a large bowl; add the onion, bell pepper, dill and garlic. Stir in the salmon and cheese, season to taste with salt and pepper.
3. Spray the muffin pan and divide the egg mixture evenly.
4. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean.

Makes 12 servings



OBSERVER PROGRAM AND ELECTRONIC MONITORING

The biggest change in the observer program for 2015 is the inclusion of all federal groundfish and halibut vessels over 40 feet in the “trip selection pool.” All vessels in the trip selection pool have to log trips at least 72 hours prior to fishing in the NOAA Observer Declare and Deploy System (ODDS) to determine if an observer has been assigned to their trip. You may log up to three trips at a time and trip start/end dates can be modified. Changes to trips that are not assigned an observer need not be logged, but if an observer has been assigned, the changes must be logged or phoned in to the NOAA observer program.

The other major change is the elimination of the bunk space release that has allowed vessels without a spare bunk to be released from observer coverage. Starting in 2015, releases will only be issued to vessels without adequate life-raft capacity or vessels under 57.5 feet that are selected for three consecutive trips.

Electronic Monitoring: ALFA has worked hard to secure an electronic monitoring (EM) alternative for fixed gear boats but has met resistance from NOAA at every step. In 2015 NOAA will provide EM only to vessel owners who volunteered to carry EM in 2014. We are still hoping to secure additional EM units and vessel time for 2016. However, observer program personnel are lobbying hard for their stereo camera version of EM that requires each vessel carry a sorting table, a discard chute, stereo lights and feed each fish through the chute one at a time, lying flat. Because the chute/table/stereo system is logistically impossible for small boats, ALFA will continue to actively advocate for EM systems compatible with our fleet.

ALFA also continues to object to the current observer deployment strategy that selects based on trips instead of pounds or gear type. Because there are over 500 fixed gear boats in the partial coverage program and these small boats take numerous trips to catch their fish, 75% of the observer time is being spent on



this fleet, which annually harvests approximately 45 million pounds. That leaves 25% of the observer time to cover the 200 trawl vessels that harvest over 300 million pounds. As a result, 50% less trawl catch was observed in 2014 compared to 2013, despite the concerns surrounding salmon and halibut bycatch. Despite these statistics, the only Council member who expresses frustration with the observer program is Duncan Fields. The rest of the Council seems content with NOAA’s prioritization of observer coverage.

REGULATION UPDATES!

During the Sitka Whalefest, NOAA enforcement officer Jerad Cook stopped by the ALFA table to notify longliners of significant regulatory changes and issues:

1. Failure to monitor channel 16: The fine for failing to monitor channel 16 has increased from \$50 to \$1500.
2. Possession of seal bombs now requires licensing under the federal Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearm Law. If you have seal bombs on your boat and are not properly licensed the fines will be significant.
3. If you have an observer on your boat you are required to wake the observer up prior to hauling gear. Officer Cook highly recommends that vessel operators document waking up the observer in their logbook.

OBSERVER Program: Remember all vessels over 40 feet participating in the groundfish and halibut fisheries in 2015 and beyond will be required to log trips in the NOAA Observer Declare and Deploy System at least 72 hours prior to fishing.

DECEMBER COUNCIL MEETING

Permitting Sablefish Pots in the Gulf of Alaska: On December 14th the North Pacific Fishery Management Council voted to advance toward final action an amendment to allow pots in the GOA sablefish fishery. Thanks to a dedicated crew of ALFA members and staff, the amendment now includes an option to consider allowing pots on an area by area basis and to consider different pot limits for areas where pots are allowed. ALFA members Jeff Farvour, Bonnie Millard, Stephen Rhoads and Michael Mayo joined staff members Linda Behnken and Dan Falvey to build a strong record on the potential gear conflicts and socioeconomic impacts of allowing pots anywhere in the GOA and in Southeast in particular.

The amendment also includes options to require pots be moved every 7 days and electronically “marked” at the surface, with details of marking still to be identified. Finally, the amendment currently allows vessel owners hauling pot gear to retain any halibut harvested with that gear provided they have unfished halibut IFQ for that area. Because this last alternative does not preclude targeting halibut with pots and is currently not legal under IPHC regulations, the amendment can be expected to require additional analysis and Council review prior to final action sometime this spring. Watch for an action alert on this issue!

Raising vessel caps: In a surprising reversal of the recent trend toward actions that facilitate QS consolidation, the Council voted **not** to continue with the requested amendment to increase IFQ vessel ownership caps. The Council stated the issue was a solution in search of a problem, since only 7% of the fleet is within 10% of the cap, and dropped the issue from further consideration. Thanks to Jeff Farvour who worked hard on this issue at the AP and stayed to testify at the Council.

NEW ALFA SHIRTS WILL MAKE GREAT GIFTS!

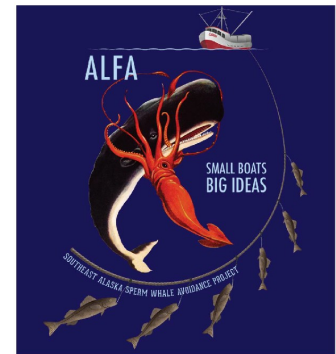
Don't miss out on your chance to purchase some of our new merchandise!



We have ladies style 3/4 length and short sleeved shirts in our classic mermaid design from Steve Lawrie.

We also have a new design we are quite excited about! The wonderfully eclectic band *They Might Be Giants* gave us permission to use the artwork

from their *Apollo 18* album. Nancy Behnken provided the concept design and Kyle Kosma put it all together. This great shirt is available in unisex hoodies, men's T-shirts and women's cut T-shirts. The ALFA logo is on the front left pocket and the design is on the back. Call the office (907-747-3400) to order yours today!



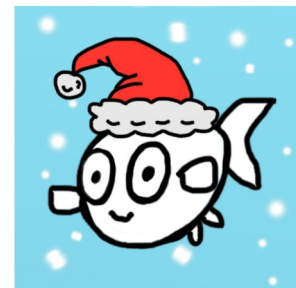
HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM ALFA STAFF!

ALFA Staff:

Linda Behnken—Executive Director
Dan Falvey—Project Coordinator
Brandie Cheatham—Office Manager
Beata Fiszler—Sitka Service Fellow

ALFA Board Members:

Dick Curran, President
Jeff Farvour, VP
Stephen Rhoads, Treasurer
Terry Perensovich, Secretary
Steve Fish
Norm Pillen
Frank Balovich
Richie Davis
Phil Wyman



Best Fishes for the New Year!

MISSION: Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association (ALFA) is a non-profit association of independent commercial longline vessel owners and crewmembers who are committed to continuing the sustainable harvest of sablefish, halibut, and groundfish, while supporting healthy marine ecosystems and strong coastal communities through resource stewardship and participation in federal, state, and local forums.

BRIEF HISTORY: Founded in 1978, ALFA spearheaded efforts to eliminate foreign fishing on sablefish and rockfish stocks during the 70s, supported an aggressive rebuilding schedule for depleted sablefish stocks during the 80s, and lead the battle to eliminate trawling from Southeast Alaska waters during the 90s.

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Alaska Longline
Fishermen's Association
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Sitka, AK 99835

Phone: 907-747-3400
Fax: 907-747-3462
E-mail:
alfastaff@gmail.com

PLEASE
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CALENDAR OF EVENTS



JANUARY

January 26—30
Annual IPHC Meeting.
Vancouver, BC

FEBRUARY

February 28th
Board of Fish
Sitka, AK

JUNE

North Pacific Fishery
Management Council
in Sitka