

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, AP, and SSC Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke
Executive Director



DATE: June 16, 1989

SUBJECT: Halibut management

ACTION REQUIRED

Refine halibut longline IFQ and license limitation options for further development and analysis.

BACKGROUND

The Council has been refining the possible options for halibut limited access systems during its past two meetings. The amendment schedule currently provides for further refinement of the options during the summer with a final analysis beginning in September. In December the alternatives and their analysis will be considered for public review. Final consideration is scheduled for April 1990.

The Fishery Planning Committee's recommended refinements to the alternatives are shown in items C-6(d)(1&2). Their rationale is in item C-6(a)(1). Halibut alternatives are about the same as for sablefish except for management areas and vessel sizes. Public comments are included in item C-6(d)(3).

Decision Points for Halibut Longline IFQ Management System

This document was agreed upon by the Council at their April 14, 1989 meeting in Anchorage. Items which are underlined are comments by the Council. Those items recommended for deletion by the Fishery Planning Committee at its May meeting are marked in gray. Additions or word changes recommended by the Committee are bolded.

I. Scope of Program

- A. Species: Halibut
- B. Gear:
 - 1. Longline only
 - 2. Longline and trawl (account for all mortality)
- C. Areas: IPHC management areas

II. Means of Access Control

- A. Type of IFQ - A percentage of the TAC, possibly defined as a "unit"- the individual allocation varies from year to year with the size of the TAC and it could be expressed as a large number of "units" rather than a small percentage.
- B. Coverage of IFQ
 - 1. Area: IPHC management areas - 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E.
 - 2. Yearly
 - 3. Leave a portion of the fishery open access (Prochoice)
Set a maximum landing per entity in the open portion.
Retain a portion of the TAC for bycatch as is done with sablefish now. This bycatch amount will be removed from the overall TAC before the TAC for licenses is finalized.
No license would be needed to land this bycatch sablefish.
- C. Who initially: "Person" - As defined by the Magnuson Act with the exclusion of non U.S. citizens. Any individual who is a U.S. citizen, any corporation, partnership, association, or other entity (whether or not organized or existing under the laws of any State but being controlled by U.S. citizens), and any Federal, State, or local government or any entity of any such government.
 - 1. Vessel owner(s) except when a qualified lease exists.
 - 2. Person leasing a vessel - qualified or all by a written bareboat contract. Evidence of a qualified lease would include paying the crew shares and supplying the fishing gear.
 - 3. Permit holder(s) - based on State of Alaska permit

III. Initial Allocation

- A. Allocation: by qualification and eligibility.
- B. Eligibility
 - 1. Years - 1984 through 1988.
 - 2. Landings threshold - a higher amount restricts more people but allows a greater share for those eligible.
 - i. Average - average of two best years landings.
 - ii. Best year(s).
 - 3. Duration of participation
 - i. Must be a current participant within the 12 months prior to the final Council action.

- ii. Not necessarily a current participant but number of years participation.
- 4. Investment threshold - recognizes future participation, boats, gear, keel laid, etc.
- i. Qualifying with a history of participation.

C. Basis for how much per entity

- 1. Landings - a matter of record in NMFS files.
 - i. Best year - as above.
 - ii. Average - as above.
 - iii. Stair step - used to reduce appeals, all qualified in a certain range receive the same amount.
 - iv. Different amount of allocation based on initial participation in 1987 and/or 1988.

IV. Transferability

- A. Degree of transferability: Totally transferable - eligible for sale and lease.
- B. Transferable mechanisms
 - 1. Management: Must pass through government - allows government to monitor control but slows down process a bit. Government approval required but transactions may be conducted privately.
 - 2. Types - many other probably possible.
 - i. Reverse checking accounts (coupons) - allows for use of any size amount.
 - ii. New Zealand style - fixed minimum size of IFQs (100 lbs).
 - iii. Other.
 - 3. Grace period - depends on transferability.
 - i. None - restricts fishermen during a good trip or between trips until they can locate IFQs.
 - ii. Set date before the season for transfers to be accomplished, after that transfers allowed during the season by emergency only on a case by case basis.
 - 4. Transfers between areas: None - maintains strict biological controls.

V. Controls on Ownership, must discuss level of "control" or ownership and must define "control". The Council feels some form of control on ownership should be instituted but industry input and data analysis are needed before further decisions.

- A. Limit on "control" by any entity - Not required except as stated in National Standard 4 of the Magnuson Act.
- B. Require proof of ownership or participation to "control" - Same qualifications as used for initial allocation.
- C. Citizenship requirements (reflagging legislation) - either use existing legislation or change it. A legal opinion is requested concerning what can be required under existing legislation and what would be entailed in making the requirements more restrictive.

VI. Duration of harvest rights - depending on transferability.

- A. No specified ending date.
- B. Specified limited duration with reallocation following. Note: deletion of this option was opposed by one member of the Committee.
- C. Allow for review in a specified time (perhaps 5 years) - does not sunset the system but allows for major structural changes if required.

VII. Adjusting amount of IFQs available: Not necessary unless IFQs in absolute weight or for government needs (surveys, etc.)

VIII. Coastal Communities

- A. Initially how community gains access, may require Magnuson Act change.
 - 1. Allocated - includes communities but reduces other participants shares.
 - 2. Allowed for - no initial allocation but allows communities to buy in and be "separate but equal".
- B. Specific regulations
 - 1. Individuals or communities or coastal development organization - who gets them, person, town, corporation, etc.
 - 2. Qualification of ownership right - coastal, proximate, port, etc.
 - 3. Definition of community
 - 4. Use by owner or not - to be used by the entity, leased by it, or both.
 - 5. Special transferability rights - transferable when all others are not, etc.
 - 6. Administrating body - a special body set up to remove local conflicts and provide cohesion.
 - 7. Special duration rights - as with transferability.
 - 8. Amount to be allowed - limits amount totally allocated or allowed to communities.

IX. Administration

- A. Agency: NMFS region - could be contracted to State of Alaska.
- B. Dispute settlements
 - 1. Basis of judgement: Fact - reduces number of appeals.
 - 2. Hearing officer
 - i. Administrative law judge with appeals to the Secretary of Commerce and then the court system - impartial and a federal employee.
 - ii. Appeals board with decision by the NMFS Regional Director and appeals to the Secretary and then the court system - open to question but more knowledgeable of germane issues.
 - iii. Binding arbitration.

The Council recognizes a need to be aware of the following items and may wish to comment on them but the Council and NMFS staffs will deal with the specifics.

- C. Enforcement
 - 1. Nature of right - must be defined (property, lease, harvest, etc) including its use as collateral and the ability of NMFS to censor the right.
 - 2. Ability to accurately account for catch - reporting, observer, and monitoring systems.
 - 3. Adequate enforcement procedures - a new system requires new methods of enforcement (accountants).
 - 4. New regulations - see above.
 - 5. New penalties - see above.
- D. Document trail
 - 1. Time of landing - fish tickets.
 - 2. Processor - secondary form to corroborate fish tickets.
 - 3. Wholesale - allows enforcement to target fish at several levels.
 - 4. Retail - difficult but allows total tracking of fish.

Halibut Limited Access Comments

Mark Hofmann, Anchorage - There should be some sort of limited entry or scaled program, possibly for the amount of gear fished by longline. There is tremendous waste from trawlers discard halibut to longliners setting too much gear and cutting the rest loose. We are on a collision course with disaster. The number of skates or hooks could be limited by vessel size. This may be judged hard to enforce but boats should not be able to use excessive amounts of gear and leave a lot of it on the grounds.

C. Morissette, Homer - The last 24 hour halibut opening - one boat lost, three Maydays, I nearly lost one crewmember, and got no fish. Out of the last five openings, three were a struggle for survival. Until a better solution is found let us catch our quota anytime, or at designated times. This would allow us to fish in decent weather, avoid hassles at the processors, possibly raise the price, deliver better fish, and it would be much less dangerous. (Letter routed from IPHC to Council)

National Fisheries Institute - The Fresh Fish Committee of the NFI strongly supports Council actions which will lead to improvements in overall quality of halibut. Halibut should not be delivered in the round, the main contributor to poor quality. The Council should ensure an increased supply of fresh halibut throughout the year. In sum, the Council should continue to aggressively pursue its goal which states, "provide high quality fresh, frozen or preserved halibut to the consumer throughout the year".

Restaurants Unlimited - Short halibut openings cause considerable problems for everyone from the fishermen to the processors, transports, distributors and end users. This results in uneven quality of fish and an improper representation of this very high quality fish. Bycatch from trawlers combined with cut gear causes significant loss of this valuable resource, as high as 30% by some estimates. Left unchecked, the end result would be a shrinking resource of uneven quality fish, inconsistently available at a high price.

Jack Sulley, Tacoma - It appears we are about to screw up another resource because we don't have enough guts to handle it correctly. We must think of future generations. No one has enough fortitude to step on a few toes.

"Lets get on the band wagon and do something", Anchorage - You must know that the risk is high during the halibut season. Fishermen are beginning to take chances they would not have a few years ago including breaking regulations. Its getting harder to find a crew that is willing to risk their lives. Do something worthwhile like a 48 hour or longer season. (Letter routed from CFEC to IPHC to Council)

"Unhappy Camper", Seward - The fishermen plead for more time to get the job done and a safer fishing season. But of course we know that is not possible with the time limit we now have. We've all been begging for a more reasonable time limit, if not a limit per boat, then give us an extra day. If you want it to be a contest then offer prize money! The way it sits right now, it's who can get their gear in and out of the water first. Plus who can come back into port with their boat and most men still aboard! (Letter routed from CFEC to IPHC to Council)

"Worried Fisherman's Wife", Seward - I've been going out halibut fishing for three years because it is better than sitting home worrying whether my husband will come home or not. I'm not sure which is worse, going out in a 24 hour marathon, listening to the radio and other boats going down due to bad weather, or not being able to pull gear because of bad weather and high seas. The people making the management decisions are only encouraging the fishermen to become outlaws. Just how many lives do we have to lose before someone takes a stand on this issue? If not a limit based on vessel size at least give us a 48 hour opening. (Letter routed from CFEC to IPHC to Council)

San Jose Mercury - news article from May 15.

Tacoma Morning News Tribune - news article from May 31.

FiV. Golithan
Mark D. Hofman
2241 Tasha dr
AnchAK 99502

4/29/89

To who it may concern, NPFMC

I have recently bought a boat 36' and am very concerned about the prospects of being pushed out of the groundfish fisheries. I realize that, a small boat is but a tiny fraction of the picture for groundfish fisheries. When the factory/traw boats have such enormous capacity it puts people like myself into the political shadows. I have been trying to afford a boat for many years, and now I finally have one, and could be virtually put out of business by the big guys, before I even get a chance to fish. With increased by catch of halibut by the ("Player") it will continue to squeeze all but the highly capitalized large boats. I feel that there should be some sort of limited entry or scaled program, possibly for the amount of gear fished by L.Live. also It has become so wasteful from the trawl drags that are brought aboard and then dumped back for lack of target species, to the 45 foot long liner who sets 60 skates or more on a 24 hr halibut opening and can only retrieve 45 skates before deck loading, then cuts loose the rest of his gear to lie on the ocean floor. I feel as though we are on a collision course with disaster. I also am concerned by the threat of the Jap's Korean's ect entering into our 200 mile limit both for Salmon but also whatever else they may be doing. They don't belong in our waters fishing and we need to enforce this!

Thank you M.D. Hofman

RECEIVED
MAY 22 1989

5-16-89

To NPFMC,

I recently wrote you on some of my concerns about bottom fishing. I have an idea on restricting the amount of gear which would slow the catch rate and could possible lengthen the openings. I would propose limiting the # of hooks ~~or # of skates~~ or # of skates (1800)

This would be my proposal

Vessel Class	Length	Skates	Hooks
A	0-20	6 skates	600 hooks
AA	21-25	9 skates	900 hooks
B	26-30	14 skates	1400
C	31-35	19	1900
D	36-40	32	3200
E	41-45	45	4500
F	46-50	53	5300
G	51-55	61	6100
H	56+	66	6600

I realize this may not be the best way to curtail the enormous effort put forth on the halibut openings, it may be judged to hard to enforce. However from my experience ~~that~~ I usually have been ~~is~~ checked by the enforcement officers prior to the openings. Also smaller boats have (often) snap gear in washtubs that can be easily counted and stuck gear is easily counted per bundle. I don't know if this idea ~~is~~ can be usefull or partially usefull to you, but I believe that boats should be able to use excessive amounts of gear and end up leaving alot of it on the grounds.

Thank you
Sincerely
Mark D Hofmann

Mark Hofmann
2241 Tasha dr
Anch AK
99502

Mr. & Mrs. Clem Morisette
4047 Main Street, Apt. #102
Homer, AK 99603
Ph. 907-235-5987



504 - 2 1989

INTERNATIONAL HALIBUT COMMISSION
P.O. Box 95009
Seattle, Wa. 98145-2009

May 20, 1989

INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

To Whom It May Concern:

Again I must protest the 24 hour halibut openings. One boat lost and three May Days on this last one. I nearly lost one crew member, and got no fish.

Out of the last five openings, three were a struggle for survival, with minimul returns.

Until a better solution is found let us ketch our quota anytime, or at designated times. This would allow us to fish in decent weather, avoid hassels at the processors, possibly raise the price, deliver better fish, and be much less dangerous.

It would also give us a better chance to compete with larger boats.

Hoping for a safer solution for the halibut fishermen

I remain

Yours truly

C. Morisette

RECEIVED

MAY 30 1989

I.P.H.C.



RECEIVED
MAY 22 1989

NATIONAL FISHERIES INSTITUTE INC.

2000 M STREET, N.W., STE. 580 ■ WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036-3365 ■ (202) 296-5090

ACTION	ROUTE TO	INITIAL
	Exec. Dir.	
	Admin. Off.	
	Staff Asst. 1	
	Staff Asst. 2	
	Staff Asst. 3	
	Economist	
	Sec. Asst.	
	May 15, 1989	

Mr. John Peterson, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
P.O. Box 103136
Anchorage, AK 99510-3136

Dear Mr. Peterson:

The Fresh Fish Committee of the National Fisheries Institute supports the recent Council action to review and consider options for future halibut management. The Fresh Fish Committee is dedicated to increasing the market availability of high quality fresh fish.

Alaskan halibut has always been a premium product for the fresh fish market. The Fresh Fish Committee strongly supports Council actions which will lead to improvements in overall quality of halibut. To ensure the highest possible quality, we strongly support the Halibut Association of North America's position to prohibit the delivery of round halibut which is the main contributor to poor quality.

We do not wish to comment on what type of management system is needed. We would, however, like to urge the Council to ensure an increased supply of fresh halibut throughout the year. In sum, we request that the Council continue to aggressively pursue its goal which states, "provide high quality fresh, frozen or preserved halibut to the consumer throughout the year."

If there is any information we can provide the Council, please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Nick Vitalich, Jr.
Nick Vitalich, Jr.
Chairman

APR 14 1989



RESTAURANTS UNLIMITED

April 6, 1989

Mr. John Peterson
Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
P.O. Box 103136
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

Dear John:

I am writing to express my continued concern over the management of the Halibut resource. As you know, short openings cause considerable problems for everyone from the fishermen to the processors, transports, distributors and end users. This results in uneven quality of fish and an improper representation of this very high quality fish.

In my interaction with other F. I. S. H. members, I have been exposed to another part of the management process that I feel needs your focus. Information gleaned from the International Halibut Commission leads me to believe that the by-catch from the large factory ships combined with the 5%-10% loss of resource from cutting gear causes significant loss of this valuable resource. Some projections of loss are as high as 30% of the allowable catch. If this goes unchecked, we will undo all the good accomplished in the last five years renewing the resource.

The end result would be a shrinking resource of uneven quality fish, inconsistently available at a high price. This is not what the end user group needs to give a good representation of halibut.

Sincerely,
RESTAURANTS UNLIMITED, INC.

David M. Johnson
Senior Director—Purchasing and Distribution

DMJ/tlc



**RALEIGH,
MANN &
POWELL,
INC.** SINCE 1888

19 Pacific Avenue
Box 1718
Tacoma, Washington 98401-1718

FROM THE
DESK OF JACK SULLEY

6/1/89

Quinn

Re Halibut

~~It appears~~ we are about to
screw up another resource because
we don't have enough guts to
handle it correctly.

Sure some people will be
hurt financially however we must
think of future generations.

We blame Indians, seals,
walrus etc however we are
our own worst enemy.

Basically greed - no one has
enough gratitude to step on a
few toes. I like halibut my
family eats it once a week
but we screw up the ~~tribe~~ *tribe*

Jack Sulley

Dear commissioners

Like so many others I've been mad as hell about the twenty four hour halibut season. It seems each year it gets worse and nothing being done to make it better for the stressed out fisher man.

Is there anyone on the board of commissioners that are solely for the fisher man that are crying for help! Or is it just a job that was appointed to them without means.

You must know the risk is high during the halibut season, that is if you read the paper and what you don't read you can hear it on the radios out at sea, I'm speaking for the small guy out there trying to make a living at halibut fishing, I've been fishing halibut for fifteen years now and I remember the days when I could sit out the weather if need be. Now I go without sleep trying to beat the weather and dead line, so I do have to leave my gear behind and taking chances that I would have never done in the past. It's even getting harder to find a crew that will be willing to risk their lives and putting in twenty four hours of hard work.

I feel that someone should take a long hard look at the overall picture here and do something worthwhile, like giving us forty eight hours or more. I'm beginning to see other fisher men taking chances that I would not have seen a few years ago. Like breaking violations and etc, "And that something that I'm not too proud of." But I can understand why they're doing it, and in cases like that everyone loses.

I've said my piece and can only hope that someone took the time to read my letter and understand what's happening during this god awful 24 hour fishing period.

"Let's get on the band wagon & do something".

Anchorage, Alaska

May 26, 89

RECEIVED

JUN - 5 1989

I.P.H.C.

RECEIVED

MAY 30 1989

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
ENTRY COMMISSION

Dear Commissioner,

Well here we are getting ready for the next big event, "Halibut opening in June!" And of course looking forward to the twenty four hour time limit. I realize all of you must sit on your ass and ignore the fisher men plead for more time to get the job done, and a safer fishing season... but of course we know that's not possible with the time limit we now have.

We've all been begging for a more reasonable time limit, if not a limit per boat, then give us an extra day anything better than what we have at this time. If you want it to be a contest, then offer prize money!! The way its sit at right now, its who can get their gear in and out of the water first, "And thats not what fishery is all about" Plus who can come back into port with there boat and most men still aboard.

unhappy Comper!
Seward, AK.

RECEIVED

MAY 30 1989

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES
ENTRY COMMISSION

To Whom It May Concern,

Hopefully the fishing or halibut commissioners, this is my first time ever to engage an issue, I won't be saying anything that hasn't been said before I'm sure.... But I've been going out halibut fishing now for three years with my husband only because its better then setting home worrying wheather he'll come home or not. And I'm not sure which is worse going out in a twenty four hour marathon, listening to the radio and other boats going down due to bad weather and etc, and not be able to pull gear because of bad weather and high seas. I guess my point is all of us that halibut fish are at risk every time we go out, due to the twenty four hours. Not only is there a great deal of expence and time involved in getting ready for halibut season, theres a great deal of stress put upon the fisher man, we worry about our crew as well as getting the job done before the twenty four hours are up.

"The well fare of everyone is at risk"

I might add on this last opening we observed four boats pulling gear after the season, which of course we couldn't blame them, we feel if everyone would have left there gear in the water that wasn't able to do so before the season closed , there would have been over half the fishing boats coming into port without there gear, and know one likes the idea of leaving there gear behind.

It only adds more expence retrieving it at a later date. My feeling is that you people that sit on the commissioners board only encourage the fiher men to become outlaws. Its an enormous concern to all of us, except the ones that make these damn awful rules.

By all means I'm not against rules or is any one else, but lets face reality here, just how many lifes do we have to lose before someone takes a stand on this issue?

If your not able to give us a limit base on the size of our boats at least consider a forty eight hour period.

So if there is bad weather to deal with atleast we could afford to sit a day out and not take risks plus fisher men wouldn't be pulling gear out after the season is over and having to lose thier boat and be fined because of unfair regulations and the harrassment of the coast guard.

No one wants to break violations!!!

Thank you, for listening,

"Worried Fisher Mens Wife".

Seward, Alaska.
May 21, 1989

RECEIVED

JUN - 5 1989

I.P.H.C.

Halibut boats find profits, problems in 1 wild day at sea

By Michael Zielenziger
Mercury News Seattle Bureau

CORDOVA, Alaska — At high noon today, in beating swells and blasting winds, America's last ocean cowboys will get their single day to stare down the sea and haul in the halibut.

In a frenzied 24-hour marathon of hook-and-line combat, the men who hunt halibut will gamble in raging seas for the biggest share of a \$100 million business — most of it seized in one single, stormy conquest.

"At noon, it's like a race. It's the Kentucky Derby of fishing," said Tony Hellman, a crew member on the 86-foot boat Katherine, as he prepared for today's contest.

On Cordova's docks, fishermen stoically expect at See **HALIBUT**, Back Page

San Jose Mercury. 5/15/89

Ocean cowboys go hellbent for halibut

HALIBUT, from Page 1A

...one boat to go down during the 30-knot winds forecast for the halibut derby. They lose guys every year with halibut. They lose Bob Maxwell, who fishes for salmon instead because "I got two daughters at home. Those guys are a bunch of tough mothers."

"All the boats are laying their gear, and the man with the best set gets the fish," said Hellman, one of six crew members of a boat that brought in nearly 40,000 pounds of fish in last May's derby, enough to mean a \$2,000 payday per person.

"It's really competitive, and it's really fun," he said, "but it doesn't make any sense how they fish it."

As competition for halibut grows more intense every year, the fishermen who work the seas, the marketers who sell the fish and the officials who manage the harvest increasingly agree that the 24-hour season is a wasteful and dangerous method of controlling the catch and a system virtually guaranteed to hurt consumers.

For, unlike salmon, which spawn and die in cycles and therefore must be captured at just the right time, halibut could be harvested nearly year-round. Fishermen, however, cannot agree on how to do it.

"Completely irrational"

"It's the most inefficient resource management in the country," said Donald McCaughan, director of the International Pacific Halibut Council, a joint U.S.-Canadian agency that determines how many fish can be caught each season to protect the resource. "It's just a bad way to fish."

"The whole halibut system is completely irrational," said Jon Rowley, a Seattle-based seafood consultant, who helps grocery stores and restaurants get top-quality products. "It's bad for the fishermen, it's bad for the market, it's bad for the consumers and it creates terrible-quality fish."

With only 24 hours to catch a season's worth of fish, critics say, fishermen have little time to spend icing or cleaning fish before they return to port.

As a result, by the time the fish gets to the processors, some of it has already begun deteriorating, forcing consumers to accept lower-quality fish. The sudden Alaska Airlines, so only a small part of the catch makes it to market fresh.

Besides forcing most of the freshly caught fish to be frozen, say critics — including many fishermen here — the derby risks to make money.

"The current system is a zoo," said Ken Adams, a Cordova fisherman, who won't take part in this year's derby because too many of his crew members are working to fight the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Prince William Sound. "There's a lot of adrenaline in it, sure, but you have to fish no matter what the weather. It's dangerous and it serves no purpose."

A harsh way of life

Derby fishing for halibut is nasty, difficult work. Unlike salmon catchers, who deploy nets to trawl or envelop fish, halibut fishermen lay out miles of lines with dangling sharp steel hooks that can catch an arm or

a face in gusts as they fly off the stern. After the baited hooks have "soaked" in the sea for three or four hours, each line must be brought up, one at a time.

"The slip of a tail of a 200-pound halibut can break your arm," said Russ Belgram, one of Hellman's yellow crew members.

In the race against the clock, fishermen admit, they often bait and set more gear in the water than they can possibly retrieve.

At the noon deadline, they then cut their

At noon, it's like a race. It's the Kentucky Derby of fishing.

— Fisherman Tony Hellman

ropes, leaving streams of "shot gear" adrift in the sea, carrying thousands of pounds of hooked halibut that cannot be retrieved.

"It's an insane way to take fish," said Walker Perera, head of Profish, a Seattle-based processor. "There are still ocean cowboys around who feel that this is the last frontier. They think that anybody should have a right to fish, no matter what it does to the resource and whether or not it makes good economic sense."

Fleet has quadrupled

In the last decade, declines in crab and other fish industries and rising demand for halibut have set off explosive growth in

the halibut fleet. "We've got 4,000 boats out today where we used to have 1,000," said McCaughan of the halibut council.

A permit system limits the salmon catch, but so such restrictions exist in the halibut industry.

The halibut council has decided that 64 million pounds of halibut may be captured this season in the waters of the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea, the vast majority of it in Alaska. Depending on the fishermen's success today, a second 24-hour season may take place sometime in June.

While the council decides how many fish may be captured, the North Pacific Fish Management Commission decides who can fish and for how long.

John Peterson, the commission chairman, said a vast majority of halibut fishermen welcome competition and don't want to see the system changed.

Members of the commission have repeatedly voted down efforts to limit the number of halibut boats, voting 8-3 last month against a proposal to close off ground-fishing to new boats. Limiting the number of boats would only protect "bad fishermen" who would otherwise go broke, Peterson said.

"What's wrong with making a living off of one day's work?" he said. "People go fishing because they make money at it. Critics believe the system should require halibut permits or give fishermen quotas to fill as they choose during a season. This approach would spread out the supply of halibut, improve quality, ensure a steady stream of fresh fish to restaurants and stores and lower prices, they say."

Fishermen could stay in port during stormy weather, knowing they were free to catch their quotas whenever they wanted.

Preparing for the big gamble

On the eve of the halibut derby, Greg Kuman, one of a clan of Russian-Alaskan who fight the heavy seas in small vessels, said, "Halibut fishing is a very big gamble."

"It takes a week to get ready, but you get only 24 hours of fishing time." Kuman, a stout-faced man with a ginger-colored beard, explained as he baited long, sharp hooks with pieces of octopus and abalone.

"If the weather is rough, we still go fishing, whether we want to or not. You stretch out 10 miles of rope and then you have to find it, and whether you find it or not, nobody knows."

Because of the oil spill in Prince William Sound, which has now drifted south-west into open waters, halibut fishermen have been instructed to search carefully for signs of oil on seaweed before they set out their lines.

Test halibut caught by the state have been clean, but fishermen worry that dragging their lines through oil-soaked water could foul an entire catch.

The state has promised a rigorous inspection program to make sure no tainted halibut are processed. With all the worry and rigors of every halibut season, the spill represents yet another roll of the dice for these high-seas, high-stakes players.

Alaska halibut fishery regulations produce a feast-or-famine supply

The spilled oil in Prince William Sound has to be the biggest mess in Alaska. The second biggest mess is the halibut fishery. That we are ever able to dine on fresh halibut of superb quality is a miracle in and of itself and a benefit of living in the Pacific Northwest where the consumers know what a good piece of fish is and reject the rest. In the Midwest they eat the leftovers.



ibut might have been beneficial had such a system been implemented in the early 1980s when first suggested. But nothing was done and the halibut fishery has since experienced so dramatic an increase of vessels that a 50 percent rollback would be needed to achieve a manageable fishery. Not only that, but halibut fishermen today are using sophisticated equipment and fishing techniques

that greatly increase their yields. Last year 74 million pounds of halibut were hauled out of the ocean.

So many boats vie for halibut that seasons now come in 24-hour bursts, called openings. For 24 hours fishermen catch and kill halibut as fast as they can. When the time is up, if fishermen have long line gear in the water, they are supposed to cut it free. If there are halibut on the hooks — and these are fish that weigh between 50 and 200 pounds — they simply die in the water as the gear sinks to the ocean floor. There are those who think that 5 to 10 percent of the annual halibut

Please see Eat Beat, D2

Unlike salmon that run on a biological clock, there is no specific biological reason for the halibut season. But season there is: May to December. It is a feeble attempt to bring order to a fishery that is wildly out of control.

Limiting the number of commercial of fishing licenses for hal-

ibut simply sits in a hold, neither iced nor cleaned. But it all ends up in the marketplace.

The limit on the halibut catch has been reduced this year to 64 million tons, and it will drop down to 48 million tons in the next couple of years. What is currently a wild, dangerous fishery can only get more wild and more deadly.

"Everyone understands the problems," one halibut fisherman told me. "It's the solutions that are sticky. That's where people disagree."

Some say a quota system is the best way, but in a quota system some boats won't be able to afford to even go out and fish. Limiting permits is often suggested, but which ones? Factory ships that ply the waters for bottom fish are currently allowed to take juvenile halibut, at best a dubious practice. Factory ships take 6-7 million pounds of halibut under 10 pounds.

Eat Beat

Continued from D1

catch is lost this way.

Once an opening closes the race is on to fly fresh halibut from Alaska down to the lower 48. For about two weeks you can find prime fresh halibut in the fish markets, and then the quality starts to slide as the refrigerated vans and freezer vessels appear. Eventually the fresh fish gives out and is replaced by frozen halibut. Some of the frozen product can be quite good. And some remarkably bad fish can end up frozen.

So much fish is caught so fast that the catch overloads the facilities for processing and freezing in Alaska. Given the demand during a 24-hour opening, it is likely that Alaska can't produce enough shaved ice in a short time to keep fish cold. So a lot

If those were allowed to grow to adult size they would account for 10 percent of the current catch.

Waste and disorder are the hallmarks of the current system, which is a shame when you consider just how fabulous a fresh halibut steak can be. The last thing on anyone's mind seems to be the consumer.

A group calling itself Finding Intelligent Solutions for Halibut (FISH) has recently incorporated in Seattle. Members include major restaurant owners, supermarket owners, and fish purveyors: the kind of people who know they can build a good business if they can get a good product. Members see lobbying — both here in the Pacific Northwest, in Alaska, and back in Washington — as their primary role.

But consumers shouldn't rely on groups like FISH to speak for them. If you are concerned about the quality of halibut in the marketplace, if you would like to see prime fresh halibut six months out of the year and not just a few weeks, then write

a letter saying just that. Make yourself heard and counted. Here are two addresses where they are listening and counting.

Dennis Brock, chairman, The International Pacific Halibut Commission, P.O. Box 95009, Seattle, Wash., 98145.

Chairman, North Pacific Fishery Management Council, P.O. Box 103136, Anchorage, Alaska, 99510.

When you shop for halibut look for telltale signs, like a gray discoloration around the edges, to warn you away from a less than prime piece of fish. The meat should look firm, not floppy. If you can touch it, press the flesh with a fingertip. It should fill right back in. And a good piece of fish should never smell fishy. Use your senses: eye appeal, smell, and touch.

This recipe is at its best when basil is fresh, tomatoes are ripe, and halibut is unloaded fresh off the plane from Alaska. It's from "Fish on the Grill" by Barbara Grunes and Phyllis Magida (Comtemporary Books, 1986, \$7.95)