

POSSIBLE MOTION

I move to approve Resolution 2012-09
first and final reading.

CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

RESOLUTION NO. 2012-09

A RESOLUTION BY THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA URGING THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL TO ADOPT MEASURES THAT REDUCE THE HALIBUT PROHIBITED SPECIES CATCH IN THE GULF OF ALASKA GROUND FISH FISHERIES

WHEREAS, halibut bycatch (prohibited species catch or PSC) limits in the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries have not been significantly changed since 1989; and

WHEREAS, currently there is a halibut bycatch limit of 2,300 metric tons (mt) in the GOA—or just over 5 million pounds; and

WHEREAS, a maximum reduction in the halibut PSC limit of 15 percent is being considered by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council for final action in June 2012 ; and

WHEREAS, exploitable biomass—the portion of the halibut population that is available for harvest—has declined by 58 percent over the past decade; and

WHEREAS, every pound of halibut caught as bycatch results in a direct loss of yield and spawning biomass of the halibut resource; and

WHEREAS, cuts in catch limits have and will continue to have dramatic effects on our fisheries, businesses, economies and communities that depend on the halibut resource; and

WHEREAS, halibut play a key role in the economy of the City and Borough of Sitka;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka, Alaska as follows:

SECTION 1. That the City and Borough of Sitka Assembly urges the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to take meaningful final action now by reducing Gulf of Alaska halibut bycatch by at least 15 percent.

SECTION 2. That copies of this Resolution be provided to Governor Sean Parnell and all members of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

SECTION 3. That this Resolution takes effect immediately upon adoption.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED by the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka, Alaska, on this 22nd day of May, 2012.

Cheryl Westover, Mayor

ATTEST:

Serena Wild
Assistant Clerk

Sitka Fish and Game Advisory Committee
304 Lake Street, Rm 103 Sitka, AK 99835

January 21, 2009

Chairman Olson
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th, Suite 306,
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Chairman Olson,

The Sitka Fish and Game Advisory Committee (SFGAC) is composed of 17 citizens who advise the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and Alaska Boards of Fish & Game on issues relating to state fish and wildlife management. Over the years we have used this forum to comment to numerous Federal, State, Native, and international resource management bodies concerning conservation, research, funding for, and management of wildlife resources in the greater Sitka area. For example, the Sitka Sound Local Area Management Plan (LAMP) implements measures to reduce competition for halibut in Sitka Sound. The Sitka Sound LAMP restricts commercial fishing boats and charter boats from halibut fishing in Sitka Sound to allow personal use fishermen and non-guided sport fishermen greater opportunity to catch halibut in the waters near Sitka. The Sitka Sound LAMP helps maintain a healthy halibut resource. The Sitka Sound Halibut Task Force created the LAMP through a consensus-based process that was lead by the SFGAC. Our membership includes representation of the following user groups: subsistence, conservation, salmon hand troll, hunting, trapping, salmon power troll, seining, fish processing, sport fish, charter, guide, shellfish, longline, and at-large.

We are writing you today to emphasize the importance of the halibut resource to our coastal community and urge you to take action to reduce bycatch in the trawl fisheries in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. Halibut is an important part of our history and is a major economic force in Sitka. Halibut is utilized by subsistence users, local families, commercial fishermen, sport fishermen, and the charter industry and is a large part of the production run through our x processing facilities.

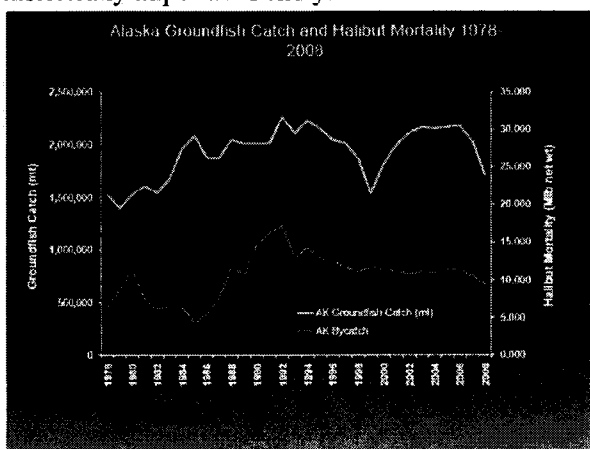
According to a NOAA report (NOAA Fisheries Reducing Bycatch 2005 Report):

Reduction of marine fisheries bycatch is central to several of NOAA Fisheries' governing statutes, including the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). In March 2003, NOAA Fisheries launched its National Bycatch Strategy aimed at building upon previous efforts to address bycatch to forge new ground in the areas of bycatch monitoring and reduction.

We believe the NPFMC has failed in its approach because of a policy that assigns a high bycatch cap to the trawl fleet. The programs that were in place to reduce foreign trawl bycatch were removed with the Americanization of the fishery. Although we know of several successful studies (some federally funded) to develop trawl gear that reduces the bycatch rate of halibut, the current policy of the NPFMC assigns a huge amount of halibut (6,675 mt) for use as trawl bycatch rather than assigning this fish to the directed fisheries for the species. The new halibut migration information shows that trawl bycatch in the Bering Sea has a significant down-stream effect on all other

areas. It also now seems apparent that there is significant unreported trawl bycatch in trawl fisheries that do not have adequate observer coverage. The associated mortality on young fish is negatively impacting the recovery of the halibut stocks and has significant impacts on the coastal communities around the Gulf of Alaska.

Halibut caught in trawl bycatch is predominately immature fish. According to NMFS the halibut discard mortality rate in trawl fisheries in the Gulf and Bering Sea range from 70 percent to 90 percent. According to the IPHC in 2008 1,835 mt of halibut bycatch were taken in the GOA trawl fishery and 2, 483 mt were taken in the BSAI. Although this catch is lower in total tonnage than in the past, the bycatch of halibut has not declined commensurate with declines in target groundfish catch (see figure below from IPHC website). The exploitable halibut stocks in the eastern gulf have been in a steep downward trajectory in recent years and our community cannot understand a policy that places discard and bycatch as a higher priority than the directed fisheries for this historically important fishery.



In Canada they are now managing their trawl bycatch with area-specific Individual Bycatch Quotas (IBQs) and have mandatory observer coverage. Once an IBQ for an area is caught further fishing is prohibited for the year. Bycatch mortality has since been reduced from 1.9 million pounds per year to 0.3 million pounds per year and individual vessels take less than 60% of their IBQ. Clearly the skill and technology exist for trawlers to greatly reduce their halibut bycatch if the management policy goal is to reduce bycatch and discard mortality.

The 2010 IPHC staff recommendations for the commercial halibut quota in area 2C represent a 26% reduction in quota from 2009, on top of 54% reduction between 2007 and 2009. This is the lowest 2C quota since 1984! The GHL for charter fishing is 788,000, the lowest level in their tier.

Our community is depending on the NPFMC to take action to reduce trawl bycatch at your February meeting. In Alaska we have a long history of sustainable fisheries management. It makes no sense to have a fixed trawl cap for halibut. The trawl bycatch of halibut should be set as a rate with the overall level moving up and down with abundance of halibut. The goal should be to reduce trawl bycatch to as low a level as possible to protect the resource and allow the directed halibut fisheries (including the subsistence fishery) to benefit from increases in halibut production.

Sincerely,

Tad Fujioka
Chairman

Cc Phillip Lestenkof US Chairman, Bruce Leaman, Director IPHC
CC Alaska Governor Parnell
CC ADFG Commissioner Lloyd