**Alaska Concerned Halibut Users**

**Halibut Facts**

**FACT: Bycatch has enormous effects on ALL users of halibut - in Alaska**

**and throughout the range of the resource**

* While there are direct consequences of bycatch mortality in specific areas, migratory patterns of halibut from the Bering Sea make it a coastwide issue.
* The impacts of bycatch mortality are distributed throughout the range of Pacific halibut, as fish from the Eastern Bering Sea undertake lifelong migrations to other areas of the stock distribution[[1]](#footnote-1), as far south as California2
* Of juvenile halibut tagged in the Bering Sea, 10-30% were recovered in the Bering Sea, while 70-90% were recovered in the Gulf of Alaska[[2]](#footnote-2) – fish can move to anywhere on the coast
* IPHC analyses has shown an approximate 1:1 relationship in total lost yield due to all sizes of bycatch[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Thus, Bering Sea bycatch affects subsistence, commercial and recreational halibut fishermen – and fishery-dependent communities – in Alaska, Canada, Washington, Oregon and California
* There are currently 2,714 halibut IFQ Holders[[4]](#footnote-4) in the United States – 2,554 are individuals, 160 are companies – and **1,965 of the IFQ holders are Alaskans** who all employ other Alaskans
* There are a total of 1,157 vessels[[5]](#footnote-5) in the halibut IFQ and CDQ fleets: 991 vessels are in the halibut IFQ fishery, 238 vessels are in the CDQ halibut fishery, and 36 vessels fish both IFQ and CDQ
	+ The CDQ fleet is based out of 39 Western Alaska villages
* The directed halibut fishing vessels made IFQ landings in 32 different community ports[[6]](#footnote-6) in 2014
	+ There are 77 distinct registered buyers[[7]](#footnote-7) that purchase halibut in these ports

**FACT: Subsistence halibut fishery[[8]](#footnote-8) provides for thousands of Alaskans**

* In Alaska, residents of 118 rural communities and areas, and members of 123 tribes, are eligible to participate in the federal subsistence fishery
* 4,705 individuals subsistence fished for halibut in 2011. Those individuals harvested an estimated 38,000 halibut, comprising 700,000 pounds

**FACT: Dramatic reallocation of halibut from the directed fisheries**

**to bycatch users has occurred over the last ten years**

**Halibut Bycatch Numbers**

* The current BSAI PSC limit of 4,426 MT (round weight) legally allows up to 7.32 million pounds of halibut (net weight) to be caught and killed as bycatch. Directed fishermen in the BSAI are limited to 3.815 million pounds (net weight) for 2015.
* In the last ten years (2005-2014), the Alaskan groundfish fishery killed and discarded a total of **97.3 million pounds** of halibut[[9]](#footnote-9),10 as bycatch, coastwide in Alaska
	+ 62.6 million pounds of that bycatch was taken in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI)
		- **This is equivalent to 251 million meals**
* The bulk of BSAI bycatch occurs in Area 4CDE[[10]](#footnote-10) in the Bering Sea
	+ In 2014, 79% of BSAI bycatch was taken in Area 4CDE; of the entire coastwide total, 54% was taken in Area 4CDE
* BSAI total bycatch mortality in 2014 was 22% less than in 2005; in contrast, directed fishery landings in the BSAI have been cut by 63% since 2005
* In 2014, **BSAI trawl fisheries killed and discarded seven times more halibut (animals) than the directed fishery** landed in the BSAI.
	+ BSAI trawl bycatch mortality was 5.009 million pounds10 – at an average weight of 4.76 pounds/fish[[11]](#footnote-11), a total of 1,052,000 halibut
		- 871,000 of those halibut came out of Area 4CDE
	+ The directed fishery landed 3.28 million pounds – at an average weight of 22 pounds/fish[[12]](#footnote-12), a total of 149,000 halibut

**FACTS: Directed Halibut Fishery Landings vs. Total Bycatch Mortality**

* In the last ten years, directed halibut fishermen have harvested 69.7 million pounds in the BSAI[[13]](#footnote-13) – just 11% more than the total bycatch mortality of 62.6 million pounds – in the same area and over the same time period
* From 2005 to 2014, directed fishery landings in the BSAI have changed from 52% of total removals13 to just 34%, while total bycatch mortality in the BSAI has increased from 44% of total removals to 60%
* The change in removals is most dramatic in Area 4CDE[[14]](#footnote-14). In the last five years (2010-2014), total removals have decreased by 21%. Directed fishery landings have decreased by 62% - in contrast, bycatch mortality has increased by 14%
	+ In 2014, the directed fishery accounted for 21% of total removals, while bycatch accounted for 77%.

**FACT: Bycatch reductions are not solely an allocation issue**

* The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) has steadily reduced directed halibut catch limits over the last 14 years[[15]](#footnote-15) **as a necessary conservation measure** in response to a declining available halibut resource
* The halibut bycatch PSC limit – or cap – has **not** changed in response to the declining halibut resource, but remains in regulation set 20 years ago at the peak of halibut availability, with the exception of a small regulatory reduction with Amendment 80 implementation, and the limited voluntary reductions by groundfish fleets
* The high percentage of bycatch of young fish in the Bering Sea stops the migration of these juveniles from the Bering Sea to other areas – this dynamic diminishes futurebiocomplexity of the stock.
* No matter who is harvesting halibut, more yield can be obtained by harvesting larger sizes rather than the sizes caught as bycatch. Harvesting of the juvenile fish that make up much of the bycatch reduces the overall yield of that age class of halibut, caught and discarded well before it reaches maximum biomass
* To avoid a **conservation emergency**, halibut bycatch caps must be reduced by percentages commensurate with directed halibut reductions
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3. Stewart et al. 2015. Accounting for and Managing All Pacific Halibut Removals. Int. Pac. Halibut Comm.: 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. NOAA Fisheries. 2015. IFQ Halibut/Sablefish Reports and CDQ Halibut Program Reports, Licenses Issued. Retrieved from <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/ram/daily/ifqqsholder.csv> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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8. Fall, J.A., and Koster, D.S. 2013. Technical Paper No. 378: Subsistence Harvests of Pacific Halibut in Alaska, 2011. Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence: vii-viii. Retrieved from <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/techpap/TP%20378.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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10. NMFS. 2015. Halibut Mortality Estimate. January 8, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Stewart, I.J. 2015. Email communication. March 23, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Forsberg, J.E. 2015. Age distribution of the commercial halibut catch for 2014. Int. Pac. Halibut Comm. Report of Assessment and Research Activities 2014: 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Stewart, I.J. 2015. Overview of data sources for the Pacific halibut stock assessment and related analyses. Int. Pac. Halibut Comm. Report of Assessment and Research Activities 2014: 107,110. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Stewart, I.J. 2015. Halibut removals by area and source 2010-2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Leaman et al. 2015. Considerations Concerning Bycatch Controls and Abundance-based Prohibited Species Catch Limits for Pacific Halibut in the Bering Sea/ Aleutian Islands. Joint NPFMC-IPHC Meeting: 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)