

## INCIDENTAL HALIBUT CATCH IN THE SABLEFISH FISHERY NORTH OF POINT CHEHALIS

The 2A Halibut Catch Sharing Plan provides for the following take of halibut in the non-trawl sablefish fishery:

“ If the Area 2A total allowable catch (TAC) is greater than 900,000 pounds (408.2 mt), the primary directed sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis will be allocated the Washington sport allocation that is in excess of 214,110 pounds (97.1 mt), provided a minimum of 10,000 pounds (4.5 mt) is available (i.e., the Washington sport allocation is 224,110 pounds (101.7 mt) or greater). If the amount above 214,110 pounds (97.1 mt) is less than 10,000 pounds (4.5 mt), then the excess will be allocated to the Washington sport subareas according to section (f) of this Plan.”

Following this formula, the TAC in 2001 provided for an allowable halibut harvest of 47,946 pounds in the primary sablefish fishery. In order to equitably distribute this harvest opportunity among the fishing fleet, the Council considered the number of vessels that obtained licenses with IPHC to land halibut in the primary sablefish fishery north of Pt. Chehalis Washington. Each sablefish permit has a seasonal cumulative cap at one of three “tier” levels based upon catch history. Given the extended length of the sablefish season in 2001, it was expected all vessels would be successful in taking their tier allowance. The tier allowances for all vessels licensed with IPHC to land halibut in the sablefish fishery was summed to obtain an estimate of sablefish catch for the season; this catch was then divided by the halibut available to the fishery to obtain a ratio of halibut to sablefish. This ratio expressed in the form of a regulation allowed for the harvest of 80 pounds of halibut for every 1,000 pounds of sablefish. Fishers were also allowed up to two additional halibut per fishing trip to provide some flexibility in complying with the regulation. Additionally, each fisher had a total seasonal limit on halibut catch of 2,850 pounds, 1,300 pounds, and 750 pounds for sablefish tiers 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

The 2001 catch of halibut in the sablefish fishery was 26,945 pounds, only 56% of the amount available to the fishery. The primary reason for this was that only 31 of the 86 vessels that obtained licenses to participate in the fishery actually did so. Even though some non-participation by licensed vessels was anticipated, the large number who didn't fish greatly affected the formula employed to calculate the halibut to sablefish ratio in the adopted regulations.

Since the amount of halibut available to the fishery in 2002 (88,389 pounds) is almost double the amount available in 2001 (and over three times the actual landings), a higher halibut/sablefish ratio should be adopted. Calculating this ratio based upon IPHC licensees wasn't greatly informative in 2001; establishing a 2002 ratio based upon actual fishery performance in 2001 seems more practical. **A limit of 200 pounds of halibut per 1,000 pounds of sablefish** seems much more likely to achieve the harvest target, while retaining some level of precaution for additional fishing effort north of Pt. Chehalis due to increased halibut opportunity. The halibut catch would be monitored inseason and retention prohibited at such time the quota was determined to be achieved. The provision for two additional halibut per trip should remain. The Council may wish to consider a per-trip limit on halibut in addition to the ratio to sablefish in order to spread the landings out through the fishery and provide opportunity for vessels fishing their sablefish tier allowance late in the season during this year's extended primary fishery.

Vessels will still be required to obtain IPHC licenses to land halibut associated with the sablefish fishery. The primary sablefish fishery began in August in 2001 and is scheduled to begin in April of 2002. The IPHC licensing period doesn't conclude until the end of April. It may, therefore, be more feasible to allow retention of halibut in the sablefish fishery beginning in May after the IPHC annual licensing cycle is completed.

PFMC  
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