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## National Report: United States of America

PREPARED BY: NOAA FISHERIES (19 DECEMBER 2023, 11, 16 & 21 JANUARY 2024)

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### PURPOSE

To provide an overview of the fisheries and removals of Pacific halibut during 2023 from the IPHC Convention waters and the national waters of the United States of America.

This document has been updated to provide final estimates of halibut mortality in Alaska groundfish fisheries.

**Contracting party:** United States of America

**Reporting agency:** NOAA Fisheries; Alaska and West Coast Regions

**Contact person:** Kurt Iverson, Fishery Management Specialist; [kurt.iverson@noaa.gov](mailto:kurt.iverson@noaa.gov)

### RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Commission:

- 1) **NOTE** paper IPHC-2024-AM100-NR02 Rev\_3 which provides the Commission with an overview from the NOAA Fisheries of the Pacific halibut fisheries in 2023 in the IPHC Convention waters and the national waters of the United States of America.

## U.S. WEST COAST (OREGON, WASHINGTON, AND CALIFORNIA) – IPHC REGULATORY AREA 2A

### Summary

The 2023 Area 2A Pacific halibut (halibut) catch limit of 1,520,000 pounds was divided among sectors according to the 2023 Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for Area 2A (Table 1). Best estimates of halibut catch for Area 2A indicate a preliminary harvest estimate of 1,350,422 pounds. The non-tribal harvest was 855,489 pounds and the tribal harvest was 494,933 pounds (not including the tribal customary and subsistence (C&S) fishery).

All weights in this report are net weight (gutted, head-off, and without ice and slime), unless otherwise noted.

**Table 1. Area 2A allocations and harvest by sector, 2023.**

			Allocation	Harvest	Percent Harvested
<b>Tribal 35%</b>	C&S		29,500	--	0.0%
	Commercial		502,500	495,161	98.50%
	<b>Tribal Total</b>		<b>532,000</b>	<b>495,161</b>	<b>93.10%</b>
<b>Non- Tribal 65%</b>	<b>Commercial</b>	Directed	257,819	259,226	100.50%
		Incidental to salmon troll	45,497	24,255	53.30%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>303,316</b>	<b>283,481</b>	<b>93.50%</b>
		Incidental to sablefish*	70,000	45,595	65.10%
		<b>Total (with incid. sablefish)</b>	<b>373,316</b>	<b>329,075</b>	<b>88.10%</b>
	<b>Recreational</b>	Washington	281,728	260,023	92.30%
		Oregon	293,436	228,266	77.80%
		California	39,520	36,840	93.20%
		<b>Total</b>	<b>614,684</b>	<b>525,129</b>	<b>85.40%</b>
<b>Non-Tribal Total</b>			<b>988,000</b>	<b>854,204</b>	<b>86.50%</b>
<b>Total</b>			<b>1,520,000</b>	<b>1,349,365</b>	<b>88.80%</b>

\*The incidental commercial sablefish allocation comes from the Washington recreational allocation. The incidental sablefish allocation is not included with the Washington recreational fishery and is shown under the other commercial fisheries.

## Enforcement Overview



NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) protects marine wildlife and habitat by enforcing domestic laws and international treaty requirements implemented to ensure these global resources are available for future generations. The 2023 IPHC Area 2A Enforcement Report summarizes the collective activities of the IPHC Area 2A cooperating federal and state entities. Tribal reports are not provided here.

Enforcement of the commercial, tribal, and recreational Pacific halibut fisheries in International Pacific Halibut Commission Area 2A is an ongoing multi-agency effort performed cooperatively by NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) West Coast Division (WCD), the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Police (WDFW), Oregon State Patrol Fish and Wildlife Division (OSP), California Department of Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Division (CDFW), and Tribal Enforcement.

Tables 3 through 5 present a consolidated summary of IPHC Area 2A Commercial-Directed, Commercial-Incidental and Recreational enforcement statistics for 2023 using available data elements provided by OLE, USCG, WDFW, OSP, and CDFW enforcement partners. Table 3 (page 7) summarizes Effort, Actions and Results data for the directed commercial Pacific halibut fishery south of Point Chehalis, Washington (46°53'30" N). Tables 4 and 5 (pages 8 and 10, respectively) summarize general Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) fisheries enforcement that broadly include the two other fishing sectors that catch Pacific halibut: Commercial-Incidental, and Recreational. Effort data provides a measure of fisheries-related enforcement coverage and capacity. The Actions and Results sections provide an overview of regulatory compliance and enforcement issues of concern associated with the fishing sectors.

## **AREA 2A TRIBAL FISHERIES OVERVIEW**

### **Regulatory framework**

The tribal allocation was set at 35% of the Area 2A FCEY. There were two components of the tribal fishery:

- 1) a commercial fishery, which was managed as an unrestricted fishery, a restricted fishery, and a late season fishery; and
- 2) a ceremonial and subsistence (C&S) fishery

The tribal commercial fishery allocation was set by subtracting the projected C&S fishery projection, which was based on the prior year C&S harvest, from the total tribal allocation.

### **Fishery statistics**

The tribal allocation was 532,000 pounds. The preseason projected C&S harvest was 29,500 pounds and the remaining 502,500 pounds were available to the commercial fishery.

- The unrestricted fishery was open 55 hours for each tribe between March 10 and June 15 and landed 244,933 pounds.
- For tribes that completed their unrestricted fishery by May 31 there were two extra 24-hour openings with a 500 lb trip limit, to be completed between June 1 and July 31. A total of 932 pounds were landed during the extra openings.
- The restricted fishery was open between March 10 and May 31 and landed 84,964 pounds. Each tribe had 122 hours not to be prosecuted over more than 6 calendar days, and fishermen were allowed to land up to 500 lb per day with no more than 1 landing per day.
- The late fishery was open 20 hours for each tribe between June 17 and July 31, with an additional two 24-hour openings between September 1 and October 15, and landed 164,332 pounds. The second opening was limited to 500 pounds per day.
- The total landings for all tribal fisheries was 495,161 pounds, which is 99 percent of the tribal commercial allocation.
- The C&S fishery will continue through December 31 and the tribes will report catch estimates in January 2023.

## AREA 2A NON-TRIBAL COMMERCIAL FISHERIES OVERVIEW

### Regulatory framework

There were three components of the non-tribal commercial fishery:

- 1) a directed longline fishery targeting halibut south of Point Chehalis, WA (46°53.30' N. lat.); and
- 2) an incidental catch fishery during the salmon troll fisheries off Washington, Oregon, and California; and
- 3) an incidental catch fishery during the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis, WA.

The allocations for the directed longline commercial fishery and the incidental catch fishery during salmon troll fisheries were set at 85 percent and 15 percent, respectively, of the non-tribal commercial fishery allocation (30.7% of the non-tribal share). The allocation for the incidental catch fishery during the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis, WA came from the portion of the Washington recreational allocation over 214,110 pounds, with a 10,000-pound minimum and 70,000-pound maximum allocation.

Vessels permitted in the directed commercial fishery were prohibited from landing halibut as incidental catch in the salmon troll fishery and from participating as a charter vessel in the recreational fishery.

### *Closed Areas*

Fishing with salmon troll gear was prohibited in the Salmon Troll Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area (YRCA) off Washington, and an additional “C-shaped” North Coast Recreational YRCA was designated as an area to avoid by salmon troll fishermen (a voluntary closure). Waters south of Cape Falcon, OR (45°46.00 N. lat.) were closed to salmon fishing.

Sablefish fishing north of Point Chehalis, WA was confined to an area seaward of a boundary line approximating the 100-fm depth contour. Fishing was also prohibited in the Washington North Coast Commercial YRCA. The “C-shaped” North Coast Recreational YRCA was designated as an area to avoid by commercial longline sablefish fishermen (a voluntary closure).

The directed commercial fishery was limited to waters south of Point Chehalis, WA (46°53.30' N. lat.) and incidental retention of halibut during the primary sablefish fishery was allowed only in waters north of Point Chehalis, WA.

### *Changes for 2023*

The transition of the directed commercial fishery management from IPHC to NMFS occurred in time for the 2023 fishing season. This was the first year that NMFS issued permits, set fishing periods and fishing period limits, and provided inseason monitoring based on data reported from state agencies.

### Fishery statistics

#### *Directed Fishery Targeting Halibut*

- The allocation was 257,819 pounds.
- The estimated harvest was 259,226 pounds.
- The fishery was open for three 58-hour fishing periods: June 27-29, July 11-13, and August 1-3.
- Catch limits by fishing period, based on vessel length / size class are in Table 2.

**Table 2. 2023 fishing period limits (dressed weight, head-on with ice and slime, in pounds per vessel) by vessel size class.**

<b>Vessel Length</b>	<b>Size Class</b>	<b>Jun 27–29</b>	<b>Jul 11–13</b>	<b>Aug 1–3</b>
0–25	A	2,716	2,716	1,000
26–30	B	2,716	2,716	1,000
31–35	C	2,716	2,716	1,000
36–40	D	4,092	4,092	1,000
41–45	E	4,092	4,092	1,000
46–50	F	5,454	5,454	1,000
51–55	G	5,454	5,454	1,000
56+	H	6,136	6,136	1,000

*Incidental Catch during the Salmon Troll Fishery*

- The allocation was 45,497 pounds.
- The estimated harvest was 24,255 pounds.
- Halibut retention was allowed during salmon troll fisheries, which started on April 1 and was extended on July 1. In waters north of Cape Falcon (45°46.00' N. lat.), halibut retention was allowed until the end of the salmon season on September 30. For waters between Cape Falcon and Humbug Mountain (42°40.50' N. lat.), halibut retention was allowed until the salmon season closure on October 31. Waters south of Humbug Mountain were closed to salmon fishing in 2023.
- The landing limit was one halibut per two Chinook salmon, except that one halibut could be possessed or landed without meeting the ratio requirement, and no more than 35 halibut could be possessed or landed per trip.

*Incidental Catch during the Primary Sablefish Fishery*

- The estimated harvest was 45,595 pounds.
- Halibut retention was allowed during the primary sablefish fishery from the primary sablefish season opening on April 1, until the commercial halibut season closure on December 7.
- The landing limit was 150 pounds of halibut (in dressed weight, meaning eviscerated, head on) for every 1,000 pounds of sablefish (dressed weight), plus up to two additional halibut.

## Commercial Fisheries Compliance with Regulations and Enforcement

Table 3. 2023 IPHC Area 2A Enforcement Statistics – Directed Commercial Fisheries.













2023 IPHC AREA 2A ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS							
<b>COMMERCIAL - DIRECTED</b>							
	USCG D-13	USCG D-11	NOAA OLE	WDFW	OSP	CDFW	
							
<b>EFFORT</b>							<b>CONSOLIDATED EFFORT</b>
<b>AIR PATROLS</b>							
Number of Air Patrols	11	6					17
Air Patrol Hours	16	12					28
<b>VESSEL PATROLS</b>							
Number of USCG Cutter Patrols	2	2					4
USCG Cutter Patrol Hours	210	115					325
Number of Shore-Based Vessel Patrols	5	2	7	2	1	11	28
Shore-Based Vessel Patrol Hours	15	3	49	17	13	38	135
At-Sea Personnel Hours			97	33	13	52	195
Number of Boardings	17		9	11	12	78	127
<b>SHORESIDE PATROLS</b>							
Number of Shoreside Patrols			27		16		43
Shoreside Personnel Hours			245		78		323
Number of Boardings/Contacts			64		92		156
<b>OFFICERS/AGENTS/WARDENS</b>							
Number of Assigned Personnel	73	33	7	8	4	8	133
<b>ACTIONS</b>							<b>CONSOLIDATED ACTIONS</b>
Compliance Assistance			2				2
Written Warnings			13		2		15
Summary Settlements			2				2
Other (list below)							
Verbal Warnings				2			2
Referral to Other Agency/State			3				3
<b>RESULTS (Violations)</b>							<b>CONSOLIDATED RESULTS</b>
Seabird Avoidance Gear			7				7
Overage			5		1		6
Gear Violation			3	1			4
Vessel Marking/Boarding Ladder Issue			3				3
Gear Marking			2				2
Closed Area			1				1
VMS			1				1
Permit/License				1			1

Table 4. 2023 IPHC Area 2A Enforcement Statistics – Commercial-Incidental.

2023 IPHC AREA 2A ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS							
<b><u>COMMERCIAL - INCIDENTAL</u></b>							
	USCG D-13	USCG D-11	NOAA OLE	WDFW	OSP*	CDFW	
							
<b>EFFORT</b>							<b>CONSOLIDATED EFFORT</b>
<b>AIR PATROLS</b>							
Number of Air Patrols	173	183					356
Air Patrol Hours	346	415					761
<b>VESSEL PATROLS</b>							
Number of USCG Cutter Patrols	103	46					149
USCG Cutter Patrol Hours	3192	2458					5650
Number of Shore-Based Vessel Patrols	129	54				11	194
Shore-Based Vessel Patrol Hours	349	110				38	497
At-Sea Personnel Hours						52	52
Number of Boardings	49	0				78	127
<b>SHORESIDE PATROLS</b>							
Number of Shoreside Patrols			1	2			3
Shoreside Personnel Hours			3	10			13
Number of Contacts			1	4			5
<b>OFFICERS/AGENTS/WARDENS</b>							
Number of Assigned Personnel	73	33	6	14		8	134
<b>ACTIONS</b>							<b>CONSOLIDATED ACTIONS</b>
Verbal Warning				1			1
*OSP does not collect commercial incidental statistics.							



## **AREA 2A RECREATIONAL FISHERIES OVERVIEW**

### **Recreational Fishery Regulatory Framework**

The recreational fishery allocation was divided among the three states: Washington, Oregon, and California.

- 1) Washington receives 35.6 percent of the non-tribal allocation, minus the allocation made available for incidental harvest in the primary sablefish fishery;
- 2) Oregon receives 29.7 percent of the non-tribal allocation;
- 3) and California receives four percent of the non-tribal allocation.

State allocations were further divided into subareas and season dates were established preseason for each subarea, with additional dates added inseason for some subareas. Oregon and Washington allocations both contributed to the Columbia River subarea allocation.

#### *Closed Areas*

The "C-shaped" North Coast Recreational YRCA, southwest of Cape Flattery, is closed to recreational halibut fishing.

### **Recreational Fishery Statistics**

#### *Washington*

- The allocation was 281,782 pounds (not including the allocation for the commercial fishery incidental to the primary sablefish fishery).
- The estimated harvest was 261,308 pounds.
- Discard mortality was estimated to be 28 pounds.
- The bag limit was one halibut per person per day.
- Season dates varied by subarea. The earliest open date was April 4 and the last open date was September 30.
- Includes the Washington portion of the Columbia River subarea.

#### *Oregon*







- The allocation was 293,436 pounds.
- The estimated harvest was 228,211 pounds; however, this estimate is preliminary and will be updated when the final value is available.
- Discard mortality will be reported when available.
- The fishery opened with a bag limit of one halibut per person per day, then was increased to two halibut in the Central Coast and Southern Oregon subareas on June 12. The Columbia River subarea bag limit remained at one halibut.
- Season dates varied by subarea. The earliest open date was May 1 and the last open date was October 31.
- Includes the Oregon portion of the Columbia River subarea.

#### *California*

- The allocation was 39,520 pounds.
- The estimated harvest was 36,840 pounds.
- Discard mortality was estimated to be 238 pounds.
- The bag limit was one halibut per person per day.
- There were no subareas and the season opened on May 1 and closed on August 4.

## Recreational Fisheries Compliance with Regulations and Enforcement

Table 5. 2023 IPHC Area 2A Enforcement Statistics – Recreational.

2023 IPHC AREA 2A ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS							
<b><u>RECREATIONAL</u></b>							
	USCG D-13	USCG D-11	NOAA OLE	WDFW	OSP	CDFW	
							
<b>EFFORT</b>							<b>CONSOLIDATED EFFORT</b>
<b>AIR PATROLS</b>							
Number of Air Patrols	148	82					230
Air Patrol Hours	279	183					462
<b>VESSEL PATROLS</b>							
Number of USCG Cutter Patrols	86	20					106
USCG Cutter Patrol Hours	2859	1038					3897
Number of Shore-Based Vessel Patrols	107	19	1	16	7	11	161
Shore-Based Vessel Patrol Hours	297	41	4	97	35	38	512
At-Sea Personnel Hours			8	194	35	52	289
Number of Boardings/Contacts	163	4	5	63	124	78	437
<b>SHORESIDE PATROLS</b>							
Number of Shoreside Patrols			1	33	9	38	81
Shoreside Personnel Hours			2	161	20	81	264
Number of Contacts			1*	1156	68	113	1337
<b>OFFICERS/AGENTS/WARDENS</b>							
Number of Assigned Personnel	73	33	6	14	7	8	141
<b>ACTIONS</b>							<b>CONSOLIDATED ACTIONS</b>
Written Warnings					9		9
Citations				227	9		236
Other (list below)							
Verbal Warnings				65		3	68
<b>RESULTS (Violations)</b>							<b>CONSOLIDATED RESULTS</b>
Overage				18	1		19
Gear Violation				13	1		14
Permit/License				7	4	3	14
Fail to Validate Tag				6	6		12
No Tag					4		4
Closed Season (early/late fishing)				3			3
Logbook/Record Keeping				2			2
Non-Designated Vessel - Charter				2			2
Illegal Harvest					1		1
Possess Groundfish w/Halibut On Board					1		1
Other State Violations - Halibut Fishery Related				242			242
*Charter - Recreational Halibut							

**NON-DIRECTED COMMERCIAL DISCARD MORTALITY OVERVIEW**

Pacific Halibut Bycatch in U.S. West Coast Groundfish Fisheries, 2002 – 2022, is available in a report to the Pacific Fishery Management Council in November 2023 and can be accessed online at: <https://www.pcouncil.org/documents/2023/10/e-1-b-nwfsc-report-1-pacific-halibut-bycatch-for-2002-2022.pdf/>.

## Alaska – IPhC Regulatory Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4CDE

### DIRECTED HALIBUT FISHERIES OVERVIEW

The Pacific Halibut and Sablefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program is the largest catch share program in the U.S., and was implemented for the 1995 fishing season. Participation in the IFQ Program is limited to persons (natural persons or non-individual entities) that hold Quota Share (QS), although there are several very limited provisions for “leasing” of annual IFQ. QS is a transferable permit that was initially issued to persons who owned or leased vessels that made legal commercial fixed-gear landings of Pacific halibut or sablefish in the waters off Alaska during 1988-1990.

Annually, NOAA Fisheries issues eligible QS holders an IFQ fishing permit that authorizes participation in the IFQ fisheries. Persons with IFQ permits may harvest their annual allocation at any time during the eight plus-month IFQ halibut and sablefish seasons. QS are assigned to a specific species (either halibut or sablefish), management area, and vessel class. For halibut, IFQ management areas correspond to the IPhC regulatory areas. Vessel classes assigned to QS are based upon the overall length of the vessel that the qualifying person used for harvesting during the qualifying years. A catch sharing plan allocates the fishery limits among Areas 4C, 4D, and 4E.

Table 6 provides a summary of the 2023 halibut IFQ catch in the respective management areas and vessel classes. Note the table does not include the portion of the catch that was allocated to the Western Alaska Community Development (CDQ) Program.

The CDQ Program was established in 1992 for the purpose of developing the economy in western Alaska. Some 65 coastal communities in western Alaska are organized into six CDQ groups and are allocated shares of allowable harvests in the major Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish and crab fisheries. Among other things, the program provides the opportunity for the CDQ communities to participate and invest in the BSAI fisheries and to support economic and social benefits to the region. CDQ groups are allocated the following percentages of the halibut fishery limits: 20% in Area 4B, 50% in Area 4C, 30% in Area 4D, and 100% in Area 4E.

**Table 6. 2023 Alaska Halibut IFQ and CDQ Catch and Allocations by Area**

IFQ Area	Vessel Class	Vessel Count	Landing Count	Total Catch in Net (H&G) Weight (lb)	IFQ Allocation
2C	A C/P	21	40	67,676	
2C	B > 60'	28	57	131,550	
2C	C 35 – 60'	281	846	2,454,180	
2C	D ≤ 35'	89	324	364,405	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>1,170</b>	<b>3,017,811</b>	<b>3,410,000</b>
3A	A C/P	28	55	188,078	
3A	B > 60'	178	608	2,742,662	
3A	C 35 – 60'	297	1,067	3,786,904	
3A	D ≤ 35'	79	268	441,178	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>1,737</b>	<b>7,158,822</b>	<b>7,840,000</b>
3B	A C/P	17	25	80,604	
3B	B > 60'	105	203	1,582,825	
3B	C 35 – 60'	110	193	1,065,028	
3B	D ≤ 35'	23	28	75,582	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>2,804,039</b>	<b>3,090,000</b>
4A	A C/P	10	16	54,330	
4A	B > 60'	42	98	541,690	
4A	C 35 – 60'	31	66	282,611	
4A	D ≤ 35'	6	20	45,379	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>924,010</b>	<b>1,410,000</b>
4B	A C/P	1	**	**	
4B	B > 60'	14	24	335,103	
4B	C 35 – 60'	3	6	42,081	
4B	D ≤ 35'	1	**	**	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>395,213</b>	<b>976,000</b>
4C/4D	A C/P	3	4	33,985	
4C/4D	B > 60'	19	36	555,883	
4C/4D	C 35 – 60'	7	12	98,208	
4C/4D	D ≤ 35'	5	9	137,616	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>825,692</b>	<b>1,080,000</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>690</b>	<b>3,384</b>	<b>15,125,587</b>	<b>17,706,000</b>

CDQ Area	Total Catch in Net (H&G) Weight (lb)	CDQ Allocation
4B	**	<b>244,000</b>
4C	**	<b>450,000</b>
4D	247,776	<b>270,000</b>
4E	**	<b>220,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>448,675</b>	<b>1,184,000</b>

1) Source: NMFS Alaska Region IFQ System; Data as of 12/20/2023.

2) IFQ from Area 4C may be fished in Area 4D.

3) Total vessel count reflects unique vessels; individual vessels may record IFQ landings from separate vessel categories

4) Summaries flagged as confidential (\*\*) reflect <3 vessels.

## ALASKA RECREATIONAL FISHERIES OVERVIEW

In October 2023, the Department provided final estimates of the 2022 sport halibut removals and preliminary estimates of the 2023 removals for Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, and 4, including information on estimation methods (Bowman et al. 2023). Additional details on estimation methods are available in Webster and Buzzee (2020).

### 2022 Regulations Overview and Final Harvest Estimates; Charter and unguided fishing

The Area 2C charter fishery regulations for 2022 included a one-fish daily bag limit and reverse slot (or “protected slot”) limit that allowed harvest of halibut less than or equal to 40 inches and halibut greater than or equal to 80 inches. The Area 3A charter regulations included a two-fish bag limit with a maximum size of one fish of 28 inches, a limit of one trip per charter vessel per day (on which halibut are harvested), a limit of one trip per Charter Halibut Permit (CHP) per day, a closure of halibut retention on all Wednesdays, and two closed Tuesdays. Charter fishery regulations in the remainder of the state and unguided fishery regulations statewide included a daily bag limit of two fish of any size.

The 2022 Area 2C estimated sport harvest (excluding release mortality) was 150,446 fish, for a yield of 2.000 Mlb (million pounds). The Area 3A estimated sport harvest was 245,503 fish, for a yield of 2.621 Mlb. The final harvest estimates for western Areas were 503 halibut in Area 3B and 281 halibut in Area 4. Applying the Kodiak unguided average weight of 11.04 lb resulted in yield estimates of 0.006 Mlb in Area 3B and 0.003 Mlb in Area 4 (Table 1).

Area 2C charter removals (including release mortality) were estimated to be 0.848 Mlb, approximately 3.4% over the allocation. Area 3A charter removals were estimated to be 1.741 Mlb, approximately 17.5% under the allocation. Areas 3B and 4 do not have separate charter allocations.

Unguided harvest and removal estimates in Area 2C were 67,310 fish and 1.214 Mlb. Unguided harvest and removal estimates in Area 3A were 75,911 fish and 0.907 Mlb.

Additional detail on numbers of fish harvested and released, releases by size category, average weights, and confidence intervals are included in Bowman et al. (2023).

**Table 7. Final estimates of the 2022 sport halibut harvest (numbers of fish), average net weight (pounds), and yield (millions of pounds net weight) in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, and 4. “NA” indicates no estimate is available.**

IPHC Area	Sector	Harvest (no. fish)	Average Net Wt. (lb)	Yield (Mlb)	95% CI for Yield (Mlb)
Area 2C	Charter	83,136	9.74	0.810	0.770-0.849
	Unguided	67,310	17.69	1.191	1.029-1.352
	Total	150,446	13.29	2.000	1.834-2.166
Area 3A	Charter	169,592	10.18	1.727	1.619-1.835
	Unguided	75,911	11.78	0.894	0.785-1.003
	Total	245,503	10.68	2.621	2.467-2.774
Area 3B	Total	503	11.04 <sup>a</sup>	0.006	NA
Area 4	Total	281	11.04 <sup>a</sup>	0.003	NA

<sup>a</sup> – No size data were available from Areas 3B and 4, so the unguided average weight from Kodiak was substituted.

## 2023 Regulations Overview and Preliminary Harvest Estimates: Charter and unguided fishing

The Area 2C charter fishery allocation for 2023 was 0.80 Mlb. Regulations included a one-fish bag limit, a reverse slot limit of less than or equal to 40 inches or greater than or equal to 80 inches, and Monday closures beginning July 24. The Area 3A charter allocation was 1.89 Mlb. Regulations included a two-fish bag limit with a maximum size on one of the fish of 28 inches, a limit of one trip per charter vessel per day and per CHP per day, and a closure to halibut retention on all Wednesdays and nine Tuesdays. Charter fishery regulations in the remainder of the state included a bag limit of two fish of any size. Unguided fishery regulations statewide were a bag limit of two fish of any size.

The preliminary estimates for charter harvest and removal in Area 2C were 83,605 halibut and 0.812 Mlb, respectively, approximately 1.6% over the 2023 allocation. The preliminary estimates of charter harvest and removal in Area 3A were 153,337 fish and 1.556 Mlb, respectively, approximately 17.7% under the allocation. The preliminary harvest estimates for 2023 were 554 halibut in Area 3B and 432 halibut in Area 4. Applying the unguided average weight from Kodiak of 11.36 lb resulted in removal estimates of 0.006 Mlb in Area 3B and 0.005 Mlb in Area 4 (Table 2).

Unguided harvest and removal estimates in Area 2C were 66,373 fish and 1.065 Mlb. Unguided harvest and removal estimates in Area 3A were 86,921 fish and 0.988 Mlb.

Additional detail on numbers of fish harvested and released, releases by size category, average weights, and confidence intervals are included in Bowman et al. (2023).

**Table 8. Preliminary estimates of the 2023 sport halibut harvest (numbers of fish), average net weight (pounds), and yield (millions of pounds net weight) in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, and 4. “NA” indicates no estimate is available.**

IPHC Area	Sector	Harvest (no. fish)	Average Net Wt. (lb)	Yield (Mlb)	95% CI for Yield (Mlb)
Area 2C	Charter	83,605	9.41	0.786	0.763-0.809
	Unguided	66,373	15.83	1.050	0.906-1.195
	Total	149,978	12.25	1.837	1.691-1.983
Area 3A	Charter	153,337	10.09	1.546	1.384-1.709
	Unguided	86,921	11.14	0.968	0.805-1.131
	Total	240,258	10.47	2.515	2.311-2.718
Area 3B	Total	554	11.36 <sup>a</sup>	0.006	NA
Area 4	Total	432	11.36 <sup>a</sup>	0.005	NA

<sup>a</sup> – No size data were available from Areas 3B and 4, so the unguided average weight from Kodiak was substituted.

## Areas 2C and 3A Charter Halibut Management Measure Analyses

In addition to estimating all recreational halibut harvest in Alaska, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game is responsible for analyzing alternative management measures for the charter halibut fisheries in Areas 2C and 3A. This analysis is a key component of the Area 2C and 3A Halibut Catch Sharing Plan, which was implemented in 2014 and is used to determine the allowable charter halibut harvest in those areas. The Catch Sharing Plan also endorses a process through which the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) recommends annual

management measures to the IPHC that are likely to limit charter harvests to their annual catch limits.

Analyses were requested by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council's Charter Halibut Management Committee on 20 October 2023. Results were presented at the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meeting in December. Projected removals in 2024 under status quo regulations are 0.865 Mlb in Area 2C and 1.695 Mlb in Area 3A. Under the suite of management measures recommended by the Council at the December 2023 meeting, removal projections range from 0.669 to 1.868 Mlb for Area 2C and from 1.460 to 2.045 for Area 3A (Bowman, Webster, Carr, and Jevons 2022).

### **Updates to Data Collection and Estimation Methods for Alaska's Recreational Fisheries**

Electronic logbooks became mandatory for charter operators in Southeast Alaska in 2021. Beginning in 2021, harvest reported through mid-October was used for the preliminary charter estimates in Area 2C, noting that in recent years there was no charter harvest reported in Area 2C after October 15. There is no mandate to use eLogbook in most of 3A and most operators still use paper logbooks. Preliminary logbook data are available for trips taken through July 31 in Area 3A and used to project harvest for the year in Area 3A. Starting in 2025, electronic logbooks will be mandatory for all businesses and vessels operating in salt water in Alaskan waters.

Starting in 2022, ADF&G began collecting additional biological data from recreationally caught Pacific halibut in 2C, including age (otoliths) and sex data. In 2023, halibut were sampled for age and sex information in 2C from the ports of Elfin Cove, Ketchikan, and Sitka. Otoliths were shipped to the IPHC at the completion of the season, so age data are not yet available. ADF&G is currently working on methods to estimate the age and sex structure of Pacific halibut caught in recreational fisheries in 2C for 2022 and 2023. Age and sex data continued to be collected in 3A and estimates are provided to the IPHC for the stock assessment.

### **Other Updates**

In March, NOAA approved the Marine Recreational Information Program Alaska Regional Implementation Plan. The plan informs the recreational fishing data collection efforts in Alaska and was developed by members of the Regional Implementation Team with members from ADF&G, IPHC, NPFMC, NMFS, and AKFIN. The plan includes an assessment of regional data collection programs and a list of regional implementation priorities to meet recreational data needs. Regional priorities include support for current data collection programs, statewide harvest survey modernization, development of data storage and assimilation structure and policy, saltwater guide electronic logbook support and outreach, expansion of dockside sampling programs, and improved recreational release mortality data for Pacific halibut and rockfishes.

### **Guided Angler Fish Program- 2023 Summary**

In 2014, NMFS implemented the guided angler fish (GAF) program to authorize limited annual transfers of commercial halibut Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) as GAF to qualified charter halibut permit holders for harvest by charter vessel anglers in Areas 2C and 3A. The GAF program allows qualified charter operators an opportunity for their client anglers to retain up to two halibut of any size per day, and to retain GAF halibut on days that are closed to halibut retention.

Table 6 summarizes IFQ to GAF transfers for 2018 through 2023. From the outset of the program, GAF has been used much more frequently in Area 2C than 3A, and its use in Area 2C has generally increased each year. For example, in Area 2C in 2023, 143,520 pounds of IFQ was transferred as GAF to the charter fishery; this translated into 2,208 harvestable halibut, which is the highest over the 2014-2023 period. Of the number of harvestable fish in 2023, 1,794 (81%) of the Area 2C GAF was taken. This contrasts with Area 3A, where 11,475 pounds of IFQ was



transferred as GAF in 2023, resulting in 743 harvestable fish. However, only 50% (364 fish) of the Area 3A GAF was taken.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 9. Summary of IFQ to GAF transfers 2019-2023**

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	Number of GAF transferred	Number of GAF Harvested (% of amount transferred)	Actual Net Pounds of IFQ Harvested as GAF	Average Length in Inches (range)	Number of GAF Permits Issued	Number of GAF Permit Holders
2019	2C	1,601	1,237 (77%)	75,039	53 (22-83)	341	56
	3A	338	266 (79%)	10,652	46 (25-66)	29	13
	Total	1,939	1,503 (78%)	85,691		370	69
2020	2C	801	764 (95%)	55,061	56 (23-85)	235	48
	3A	92	38 (41%)	2,147	52 (34-64)	15	7
	Total	893	802 (90%)	57,208		250	55
2021	2C	1,312	1,031 (79%)	76,529	57 (29-75)	407	59
	3A	441	128 (29%)	3,446	39 (19-65)	24	8
	Total	1,753	1,159 (66%)	79,976		431	67
2022	2C	1,971	1,548 (79%)	99,962	55 (24-81)	459	67
	3A	499	277 (56%)	6,487	39 (25-70)	29	12
	Total	2,470	1,825 (74%)	106,449		488	79
2023	2C	2,208	1,794 (81%)	109,952	54 (17-83)	560	77
	3A	743	364 (50%)	8,430	39 (22-76)	40	19
	Total	2,951	2,158 (73%)	118,382		600	96

<sup>1</sup> GAF Program Annual reports are available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/guided-angler-fish-gaf-program-annual-reports>.

## **NON-DIRECTED COMMERCIAL FISHERIES OVERVIEW**

### **Current Halibut Non-Directed Catch and Management**

Halibut bycatch mortality in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) and Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries is highly regulated and closely managed by the NPFMC and NMFS through the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for each management area. Through regulations implementing the FMPs, NMFS manages halibut bycatch by: (1) establishing annual halibut prohibited species catch (PSC) limits; (2) apportioning PSC limits to fishery categories and seasons to accommodate halibut PSC needs in specific groundfish fisheries; and, (3) managing groundfish fisheries to prevent PSC from exceeding the established limits.

The FMPs specify that halibut bycatch in groundfish fisheries is managed as PSC. Catch of PSC species must be avoided while fishing for groundfish and PSC species may not be retained unless required under the FMP. Halibut PSC limits are an apportioned, non-retainable amount of halibut provided to a groundfish fishery to provide an upper limit on the bycatch of halibut in a fishery. When a halibut PSC limit is reached in an area, further fishing with specific types of gear or modes of operation is prohibited by those types of operations taking halibut PSC in that area.

Although halibut PSC is taken by vessels using all types of gear (trawl, hook-and-line, pot, and jig gear), halibut PSC primarily occurs in the trawl and hook-and-line (i.e. non-trawl) groundfish fisheries. The NPFMC and NMFS annually establish halibut PSC limits for vessels in the trawl and non-trawl groundfish fisheries in the BSAI and GOA. NMFS manages groundfish fisheries to ensure these limits are not exceeded. The total estimated halibut PSC use for 2022 and 2023 is shown in Table 10.

### **Halibut Bycatch Management Actions in Progress**

#### *BSAI Pacific Cod Trawl Catcher Vessel Cooperative Program*

On August 8, 2023, NMFS issued a final rule to implement a new limited access program for the harvest of Pacific cod in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI). The Pacific Cod Trawl Catcher Vessel Cooperative (PCTC) Program allocates Pacific cod harvest quota shares to qualifying groundfish trawl license holders and to qualifying processors. It requires participants to form cooperatives to harvest the quota in two of the three regulatory Pacific cod trawl seasons. The third trawl season (C season) remains a limited access fishery without assigned quota or mandatory cooperatives, and is open to all trawl catcher vessels with BSAI license endorsements to harvest Pacific cod.

Some benefits of the PCTC program include more efficient coordination of fishing operations, potential to reduce operational expenses, and increased quality and revenue from the product. Cooperatives are responsible for tracking the cooperative quota and prohibited species catch among their vessels. Catch is monitored through required recordkeeping, reporting, and observer monitoring. Participating vessels are required to have 100% fishery observer coverage. The PCTC program also reduces the halibut prohibited species catch limit by 25 percent; there is a 12.5 percent reduction in the halibut PSC limit in each of the first two years of the program.

Fishing under the PCTC Program started on January 20, 2024. More information may be found at: [Amendment 122, PCTC Program](#)

**Table 10: Final Estimates of Non-directed Commercial Fishing Halibut Mortality in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (nearest metric ton) by Area and Gear (Target). Data generated Jan 2, 2024.**

Area	2022 Total		2023 Predicted, 9/27	2023 Actual	Difference, Actual - Predicted
2C	Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	1	1	0	-1
	Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	17	12	2	-10
	Pot	4	4	2	-2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-13</b>
3A	Trawl	231	221	185	-36
	Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	21	25	19	-6
	Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	1	1	1	0
	Pot	19	18	8	-10
	<b>Total</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>265</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>-52</b>
3B	Trawl	116	129	100	-29
	Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	10	11	12	1
	Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	2	2	1	-1
	Pot	7	6	3	-3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>-32</b>
4A	Trawl	230	229	205	-24
	Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	14	14	25	11
	Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	0	0	0	0
	Pot	15	13	6	-7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>-20</b>
4B	Trawl	78	91	94	3
	Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	8	10	0	-10
	Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	0	0	0	0
	Pot	7	7	1	-6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>-13</b>
4CDE	Trawl	1,006	842	862	20
	Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	100	76	90	14
	Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	0	0	0	0
	Pot	1	1	1	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,107</b>	<b>919</b>	<b>953</b>	<b>34</b>
4 – closed	Trawl	751	731	562	-169
	Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	42	29	38	9
	Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	0	0	0	0
	Pot	6	7	2	-5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>799</b>	<b>767</b>	<b>602</b>	<b>-165</b>
All Areas	Trawl	2,412	2,243	2,008	-235
	Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	196	166	184	18
	Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	20	15	4	-11
	Pot	59	56	23	-33
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,687</b>	<b>2,480</b>	<b>2,219</b>	<b>-261</b>
<p><i>Note: Prepared by NMFS Alaska Region.</i>  <i>Table 10 includes estimates of halibut mortality from Federally managed groundfish fisheries and also for the groundfish fisheries managed by the State of Alaska. Halibut mortality is estimated for each gear type and is apportioned by IPHC area..</i></p>					

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## Halibut Bycatch Management Actions in Progress, (cont.)

### *Halibut Abundance Based Management*

In November 2023, NMFS published a final rule to implement regulations that links the Pacific halibut prohibited species catch (PSC) allowance of the BSAI Amendment 80 commercial groundfish trawl fleet to indices of halibut abundance. The Amendment 80 sector is a fleet of nearly 20 trawl catcher-processor vessels in the Bering Sea that target Pacific cod, Pacific Ocean perch, Atka mackerel, and rock, yellowfin, and flathead sole. This fleet is accountable for the majority of the annual halibut prohibited species catch mortality in these fisheries. In recent years, catch limits for the commercial halibut fishery have declined in response to changing halibut stock conditions. Over the same timeframe, limits on the maximum amount of halibut prohibited species catch allowed in the groundfish fisheries have remained constant. The core concept of the action links the Amendment 80 halibut PSC limits to estimated halibut abundance. Each year, halibut biomass estimates derived from results of the most recent IPHC setline survey and the Alaska Fishery Science Center (AFSC) Eastern Bering Sea shelf trawl survey will be applied to a specified set of indexed halibut abundance ranges for each survey. These two indices of halibut abundance form the basis of a two-dimensional lookup table, where each index is placed into breakpoint categories. The intersection of the abundance categories determines the annual halibut PSC limit for the Amendment 80 sector. The range of PSC limits extends from the current limit of 1,745 metric tons (mt) to 35% below the current limit (1,134 mt). The 2024 halibut PSC limit is 1,309 mt.

More information on the halibut abundance based PSC rule is available at: [Amendment 123: BSAI halibut abundance based PSC management](#)

### *Additional Information on Non-directed Commercial Halibut Mortalities*

For additional information on halibut PSC mortality in the Alaska groundfish fisheries, please see the December 2023 NMFS inseason management reports to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council; specifically: slides 46 – 49 of the Bering Sea / Aleutian Islands report<sup>2</sup> and slides 45 – 50 of the Gulf of Alaska report.<sup>3</sup>

For additional information on observer coverage and electronic monitoring of the Federal fisheries off Alaska, please reference The 2024 Annual Deployment Plan for Observers and Electronic Monitoring in the Groundfish and Halibut Fisheries off Alaska<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Available at: [NMFS 2023 Inseason Management Report: Bering Sea / Aleutian Islands](#)

<sup>3</sup> Available at: [NMFS 2023 Inseason Management Report: Gulf of Alaska](#)

<sup>4</sup> The 2024 Annual Deployment Plan for Observers and Electronic Monitoring in the Groundfish and Halibut Fisheries off Alaska is available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/2024-annual-deployment-plan-observers-and-electronic-monitoring-groundfish-and>.

## ALASKA SUBSISTENCE HALIBUT FISHERY OVERVIEW

### *Subsistence Harvests of Pacific Halibut in Alaska, 2022*

Through a grant from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (NA22NMF4370240), the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Subsistence Section conducted a study to estimate the subsistence harvests of Pacific halibut in Alaska in 2022. The full results will appear in a forthcoming technical paper with a planned publication date of October 2024.

To estimate the 2022 harvests, a one-page survey form was mailed to holders of NMFS Subsistence Halibut Registration Certificates (SHARC) in early 2023. ADF&G staff and local contractors also administered surveys in person in three communities: Nightmute and Tununak in western Alaska and Ketchikan in Southeast Alaska. Comprehensive household harvest surveys were conducted in Port Lions, Ouzinkie, Kake, and Unalaska for the 2022 study year; for each community, federal subsistence halibut harvest questions were asked of responding households. After three mailings and community visits, 3,727 of 6,712 potential subsistence halibut fishers (56%) responded. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

An estimated 2,968 individuals subsistence fished for halibut in Alaska in 2022, about 21% lower than the 2020 fishing year and 41% lower than the long-term average since 2003. The estimated subsistence harvest was 20,896 halibut or 401,603 pounds net weight. This harvest estimate continues a generally decreasing trend in estimated harvests and was the lowest harvest estimate since the federal regulations were adopted in 2003 and, as expressed in pounds net weight, was 24% below 2020 harvests and 54% below the previous 14-year average. It remains unclear whether this decrease is due to actual harvest declining or a decrease in participation in the SHARC program or reporting, or some other factor.

Of the 2022 total subsistence halibut harvest, 73% was harvested with setline (stationary) gear (longline or skate) and 27% was harvested with hand-operated gear (handline or rod and reel). A total of 30 hooks was the most common number of hooks set by halibut fishers who used setline gear (43% of fishers). This pattern was similar to other study years.

Also similar to all other years, in 2022, the largest subsistence harvests of halibut occurred in Southeast Alaska (Halibut Regulatory Area 2C), with 63% of the total, followed by Southcentral Alaska (Area 3A) at 30%, and East Bering Sea Coast (Area 4E) and Alaska Peninsula (Area 3B) each at 3%. The remaining areas combined accounted for less than 1% of the state total. The majority harvest in Southeast Alaska (63%) in 2022 was an increase from 2020 estimates of 55% of the statewide total.

Based on data from the International Pacific Halibut Commission and the 2022 study year, subsistence harvests accounted for 1% of the 2022 total Alaska halibut removals.

This study was the third year of inclusion of a new question about whether survey respondents had met their needs for halibut; in 2022, there was nearly an even split between those that reported meeting their needs and those that did not, with 49% and 51% respectively. Lack of effort, lack of equipment, and family or personal reasons were the most-cited reasons for not meeting needs.

The 2022 data collection effort was a success, with acceptable response rates and a reliable estimate of subsistence halibut harvests in Alaska for 2022. However, additional outreach and in-person surveys could not be conducted in Sitka, which has historically been one of the communities with the largest population of SHARC holders and highest subsistence halibut harvests. The lack of outreach in the community is evident in the reduced response rate in 2022 (56% compared to >70% in prior study years). Outreach continues to be necessary to maximize enrollment of fishers in the SHARC program and participation in the voluntary harvest survey. Additional research continues to be needed to understand trends in the fishery. Budget constraints dictate that a survey to estimate subsistence halibut harvests in Alaska in 2023 will not take place.

## NOAA FISHERIES LAW ENFORCEMENT - ALASKA

### NOAA Fisheries Office of Law Enforcement -

#### Alaska Enforcement Division

The NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), Alaska Enforcement Division (AKD) utilizes enforcement officers, special agents, and partnerships with the State of Alaska Wildlife Troopers and the U.S. Coast Guard to enforce federal fishing regulations in Alaska, covering over 1.4 million square miles of ocean, 66,000 miles of Arctic and Subarctic coastline, and 2,690 named islands. Compliance is achieved by providing outreach and education, conducting patrols, monitoring offloads, and investigating violations of civil and criminal marine resource laws, including the Northern Pacific Halibut Act.



In 2023, there were 3,300 Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) halibut permits issued in Alaska and 31 IFQ landing ports. There were 955 charter halibut permits issued, in addition to 104 charter halibut permits issued to Community Quota Entities (CQE), 7 charter halibut permits issued to the Military Welfare/Recreational (MRE) Programs, and 9,500 subsistence halibut permits issued.

#### Patrol and Boardings

In 2023, AKD personnel spent over 4,535 hours conducting patrols to deter potential violations, monitor fishing and other marine activities, detect violations, provide compliance assistance, and provide outreach and education to halibut fishery participants. AKD boarded 741 vessels with 606 of those boardings being related to halibut.

**Table 11. Results of NOAA OLE AKD Vessel Boardings**

	2021	2022	2023
	Vessel Boardings	Vessel Boardings	Vessel Boardings
Subsistence Halibut	14	11	14
Commercial Halibut	334	306	361
Charter Halibut	149	108	169
Sport Halibut	195	97	62
<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>692</u></b>	<b><u>522</u></b>	<b><u>606</u></b>

## Compliance Assistance

In 2023, AKD personnel spent over 713 hours providing outreach and education to marine resource users. The goal of OLE outreach efforts is to ensure the most current and accurate regulatory information is widely distributed and understood.

## Incidents

In 2023, AKD opened 1,526 halibut-related incidents, including outreach, vessel boardings, dockside monitoring, and compliance assistance. Of those incidents, agents and officers identified 227 halibut-related violations, which were resolved by Compliance Assistance, Summary Settlement, Notice of Volition Assessment, or a Written Warning.

**Table 12. NOAA Fisheries OLE Alaska Halibut Violations**

	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Subsistence Halibut	18	6	4
Commercial Halibut	123	287	129
Charter Halibut	133	38	65
Sport Halibut	54	26	10
Commercial Groundfish Involving Halibut	52	22	19
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>380</u></b>	<b><u>354</u></b>	<b><u>303</u><sup>5</sup></b>

\*Not all violations resulted in an enforcement action.

### 2023 Halibut-Related Violations documented by NOAA in Alaska:

Four Subsistence halibut fishing violations; most common violations included:

- Unqualified person applied for a SHARC
- Subsistence halibut with sport-caught halibut
- Subsistence halibut fishing without a SHARC
- Subsistence halibut offered for sale

129 Commercial IFQ/CDQ halibut violations; most common violations included:

- IFQ halibut overages greater than 10%
- Record keeping or reporting violations (Prior Notice of Landing, Landing Report, Logbook, Product Transfer Report, Production Reports)
- Gear marking violations
- Failure to release undersized halibut with a minimum of injury by allowing fish to hit the crucifer, remain on deck for a prolonged period of time, and other mishandling issues (e.g. lifting fish solely by caudal peduncle)
- Hired master and permit holder violations
- Vessel cap overages
- Misreporting IFQ area fished or fishing in an area with no IFQ available

<sup>5</sup> 76 cases are pending an outcome of investigation.

**2023 Halibut-Related Violations documented by NOAA in Alaska (cont.):**

- Fishing without an FFP
- Unreported halibut found after offloads.
- Class D vessel size limit violations (vessels over 36 ft. LOA fishing D class quota).

19 Commercial groundfish violations involving halibut; most common violations included:

- Failure to carefully release halibut or allow halibut to contact a crucifier or hook stripper
- Puncture halibut with a gaff or other device

10 Sport halibut violations; most common violations included:

- Sale or attempted sale of sport-caught halibut
- Exceeding bag and/or possession limits
- Filleting, mutilating or skinning halibut onboard a vessel, other than 2 ventral pieces, 2 dorsal pieces, and 2 cheek pieces, with a patch of skin on each piece, naturally attached
- Sport-caught halibut onboard with commercially caught salmon

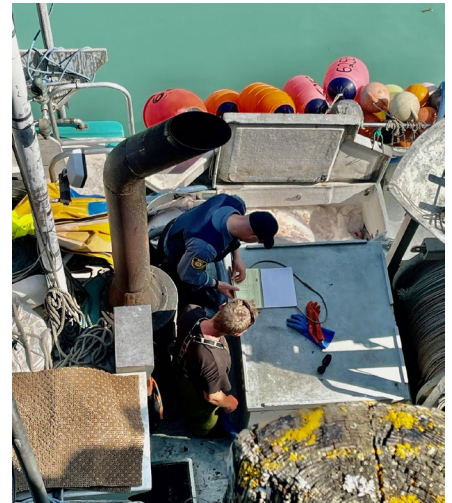
65 Charter halibut fishing violations; most common violations included:

- Failure to report GAF in the required time period or submitting inaccurate information
- Logbook violations
- Fishing on closed days
- Unreported halibut
- Illegal guiding - no Charter Halibut Permit
- Filleting, mutilating or skinning halibut onboard a vessel, other than 2 ventral pieces, 2 dorsal pieces, and 2 cheek pieces, with a patch of skin on each piece, naturally attached
- Exceeding bag limit, possession limit, size limits, or annual limits
- Charter fish without a Charter Halibut Permit
- Could not produce the original Charter Halibut Permit

**2023 Partnerships & Patrols Highlights**

The Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), Alaska Division (AKD) conducts extensive patrols for the purposes of enforcement and education. In addition to daily dockside and vessel patrols, AKD conducted several multi-day patrols. Patrols were often coordinated with partners including U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), Alaska Wildlife Troopers (AWT), and National Park Service (NPS). Partnering with multiple agencies broadens enforcement and outreach opportunities and allows for shared knowledge across agencies.

In March, two Enforcement Officers conducted a 19-day patrol aboard the Alaska Wildlife Trooper large patrol vessel Stimson. The joint patrol covered over 1,570 nautical miles in the Western Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea. Twenty-six commercial fishing vessels were boarded, three processing plants taking halibut deliveries were inspected, and contact was made with multiple deployed observers. The patrol resulted in 57 investigations, with 13 summary settlement offers, and three incidents referred to GCES for civil prosecution.





In April, Enforcement Officers with an Investigative Support Technician conducted an at-sea and remote port operation targeting IFQ vessels between Seward and Cordova. The team conducted one at-sea IFQ boarding with no violations, and three IFQ offloads were monitored; multiple violations were discovered and addressed during the boardings of IFQ vessels in port.

Enforcement Officers participated in a multi-day operation in Southcentral Alaska. The operation was a joint effort between Alaska State Parks, Alaska Wildlife Troopers, the United States Coast Guard, and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Nearly 150 boardings were performed, uncovering 26 violations.



In April, Enforcement Officers with an Investigative Support Technician conducted an at-sea and remote port operation targeting IFQ vessels between Seward and Cordova. The team conducted one at-sea IFQ boarding with no violations, and three IFQ offloads were monitored; multiple violations were discovered and addressed during the boardings of IFQ vessels in port.

In June, an Enforcement Officer conducted a Southeast Alaska Patrol with U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Denman. They conducted nine at-sea boardings of IFQ vessels, Charter Halibut vessels, multiple dockside boardings of IFQ vessels, and fish processing facility inspections.

In July, multiple Enforcement Officers conducted a patrol in Cordova, AK. During this operation, nine vessels were boarded at sea, and 13 vessels were boarded at the dock while offloading, resulting in 22 violations documented. Nine salmon tender vessels were boarded with nine violations discovered. Four vessels had sport-caught halibut with

commercial products destined for sale, and all halibut were mutilated. The team seized all illegal halibut from the tender vessels.

In August, an Enforcement Officer conducted numerous patrols on St. Lawrence Island and held meetings with Yupik, Civic, IRA, NSCDC, and AEWC members on SHARC card, Marine Mammal handicraft, Whaling, and CDQ halibut rules supporting Yupik rights and traditions.

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## UNITED STATES COAST GUARD ENFORCEMENT REPORT – ALASKA REGION

### I. Coast Guard Resources in Alaska

The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) 17<sup>th</sup> District (D17) covers the U.S. waters of Alaska out to 200 nautical miles, and encompasses the IPHC Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E. Resources used for fisheries enforcement include cutters, aircraft, boats from coastal stations, and remote sensing platforms.

#### *Cutters:*

- 418-foot National Security Cutters (NSCs) homeported in California and Hawaii are assigned to patrol D17 waters throughout the year.
- The 282-foot Medium Endurance Cutter USCGC ALEX HALEY homeported in Kodiak regularly patrols the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands.
- Four 225-foot Buoy Tenders conduct law enforcement throughout Alaska and are homeported in Sitka, Cordova, Kodiak, and Homer.
- Three 154-foot Fast Response Cutters (FRCs) homeported in Ketchikan conduct routine law enforcement throughout Southeast and South-Central Alaska.
- Three 110-foot patrol boats conduct routine law enforcement in South-Central Alaska and are homeported in Valdez, Seward, and Homer.
- Two 87-foot Coastal Patrol Boats conduct routine law enforcement patrols in Southeast Alaska and are homeported in Juneau and Petersburg. Additionally, 87-foot Coastal Patrol Boats homeported in Washington make occasional patrols in Southeast Alaska.

#### *Aircraft:*

- Fixed wing and rotary wing aircraft are based out of Air Stations in Kodiak and Sitka. Both conduct routine law enforcement patrols throughout Alaska.
  - Five C-130 fixed wing aircraft
  - Nine MH-60 rotary wing aircraft
  - Four MH-65 rotary wing aircraft

#### *Stations:*

- The three coastal small boat stations operating 29-foot and 45-foot boats are located in Ketchikan, Juneau, and Valdez.
- D17 routinely deploys Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSSTs) to specific locations for safety and law enforcement during periods of high commercial, charter, and recreational fishing activity.

The primary at-sea fisheries enforcement assets are our cutters, ranging in size from the 87-foot patrol boats up to 418-foot NSCs. Patrol boats are limited in sea keeping abilities, and conduct the majority of enforcement inside of 50 nautical miles from shore and along the 100-fathom curve. This role is filled by 154-foot FRCs, 110-foot patrol boats, and 87-foot patrol boats. Patrol boats provide regular law enforcement presence in the commercial, charter, subsistence, and recreational fishing fleets closer to shore. By 2025, D17 anticipates the addition of three more 154-foot FRCs to greatly enhance boarding capabilities.

Beyond 50 nautical miles, we rely on our larger cutters to enforce federal fisheries regulations, with USCGC ALEX HALEY and NSCs from throughout the west coast assigned to patrol Alaskan waters. Additionally, 225-foot Buoy Tenders effectively patrol both offshore and inshore waters.

Small boat stations primarily focus on recreational, subsistence, and charter halibut activity in their local regions. This does not preclude them from boarding larger commercial vessels operating closer to shore.

The USCG routinely conducts fisheries law enforcement flights from Air Stations in Kodiak and Sitka using a variety of fixed wing C-130 aircraft and rotary wing MH60 and MH65 helicopters.

These flights provide sightings of vessels while fishing and in transit. Additionally, queries by the aircraft record target species, permits, and status of catch onboard.

All units involved in fisheries enforcement receive training from the Coast Guard's North Pacific Regional Fisheries Training Center in Kodiak prior to patrolling the region. NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) agents and state fisheries enforcement officers routinely participate in the training. The success of USCG fisheries enforcement operations is enhanced by collaboration with our enforcement partners from NOAA OLE and the state of Alaska, ensuring consistent presence on the fishing grounds and at landing sites.

## II. Halibut Enforcement

In Calendar Year 2023, the USCG distributed its enforcement assets throughout the Alaska IPHC Areas, with boarding numbers listed in Table 2. The USCG's enforcement focus is to protect the resource in accordance with the Fishery Management Plan, to ensure equal economic opportunity for all participants, and to ensure safety of life at sea.

**Table 2. 2021, 2022 & 2023 Geographic Distribution of Boardings on Vessels Targeting Halibut**

IPHC Area	2021 Boardings	2022 Boardings	2023 Boardings
2C	203	413	307
3A	250	112	68
3B	0	0	0
4A	12	1	6
4B	2	1	0
4C	0	0	7
4D	1	0	0
4E	0	0	0
Total	468	527	388

## III. Commercial Halibut Enforcement

D17 law enforcement assets routinely patrolled the fishing grounds, often conducting joint boardings in collaboration with NOAA OLE throughout the season from the Bering Sea to Southeast Alaska. These operations included at-sea boardings, aircraft patrols, and dockside inspections. Joint agency efforts are a regular and important aspect of law enforcement coordination as they enable the broadest contact rate with the fishing fleets in order to ensure compliance with federal regulations while also providing the most accurate and complete picture of fishing activity on the fishing grounds and at catch landing sites.

The lack of a universal requirement for fishing vessels targeting halibut to be equipped with VMS onboard means there is not a centralized means to assess and monitor fishing activity in Areas 2C through 4E. Time intensive patrols by surface and aviation assets are the primary means to identify where vessels are fishing for halibut. The need for patrols is amplified when market forces and/or fair weather conditions cause an increase in fishing activity.

During boardings of the commercial hook and line vessels, USCG enforcement efforts focus on (1) adherence to permit requirements for area and individual quota, (2) safe release of halibut bycatch by other commercial vessels, (3) consistent use of seabird avoidance gear, (4) indicators of high-grading catch, (5) retention of rockfish and Pacific cod, (6) complete offload of catch, and (7) timely compliance with all recordkeeping requirements.

#### IV. Recreational and Charter Halibut Enforcement

Recreational activity most often occurs in Areas 2C, 3A, and 3B in the form of individual sport and charter fishing. Recreational fishing activity is most prevalent from May through September. USCG assets increase fisheries patrols during this time to focus on popular fishing grounds in Southeast Alaska, Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, and the Gulf of Alaska. Recreational and charter vessels comprised 75% of the halibut boardings in D17.

During recreational and charter boardings, the USCG places emphasis on (1) compliance with licensing and charter operation requirements, (2) size limits, (3) daily catch and trip limits, and (4) at-sea processing of halibut.

#### V. Violations and Enforcement Summary

In 2023, USCG assets boarded a total of 388 vessels and detected 15 violations on 12 vessels. The USCG documented these violations and referred them to NOAA OLE or Alaska Wildlife Troopers for final action as appropriate. Table 3 compares at-sea boardings and violations between 2022 and 2023.

**Table 3. 2022 & 2023 Boarding and Violation Summaries by Industry Sector**

2022 Boardings/Violations	2023 Boardings/Violations
Total At-Sea Boardings.....527	Total At-Sea Boardings.....388
Commercial .....75	Commercial .....97
Charter .....110	Charter .....64
Recreational/Subsistence .....342	Recreational/Subsistence .....227
Fisheries Violations.....13	Fisheries Violations.....15
Commercial .....8	Commercial .....12
Charter .....3 (1 vessel)	Charter .....3
Recreational/Subsistence .....2	Recreational/Subsistence .....0
Fisheries Compliance Rates .....97.9%	Fisheries Compliance Rates .....96.9%
Commercial .....89.3%	Commercial .....89.7%
Charter .....99.1%	Charter .....96.9%
Recreational/Subsistence .....99.4%	Recreational/Subsistence .....100%

##### *In Area 2C:*

- One commercial vessel was cited for failing to have an IFQ permit onboard.
- One commercial vessel was cited for not having a valid Federal Fisheries Permit.
- One charter vessel was cited for not having a guided operating license or master's license.

##### *In Area 3A:*

- One commercial vessel was cited for having six packages of illegally retained recreational halibut onboard that was not logged, and the halibut was mutilated so that the number of fish retained could not be determined. The catch was seized and transferred to NOAA OLE.
- Two commercial vessels were cited for improper logbook recordkeeping.
- One commercial vessel was cited for biodegradable panel thread opening being undersized and improper logbook recordkeeping.
- One commercial tender vessel was cited for having 11 packages of illegally retained recreational halibut onboard that was not logged, and the halibut was mutilated so that the number of fish retained could not be determined. The catch was seized and transferred to NOAA OLE.

*In Area 4A:*

- One commercial vessel was cited for biodegradable panel thread opening being under-sized, not retaining rockfish bycatch that was required to be retained, and improper logbook recordkeeping.

*In Area 4C:*

- Two commercial vessels were cited for improper logbook recordkeeping.

The USCG transferred detected violations to NOAA OLE for disposition, and outcomes included compliance assistance, summary settlements, or catch seizures.

In addition to the IPHC violations summarized in Table 2, USCG assets documented 48 safety violations on 30 vessels including insufficient fire extinguishers, expired visual distress signals, and expired hydrostatic releases for survival craft and/or EPIRB. Two recreational vessels' voyages were terminated for safety.

## **VI. Enforcement Plans for 2024**

The USCG continues to pursue increased at-sea boarding opportunities to promote compliance with both safety and fisheries regulations in all IPHC Areas and across all fishery sectors.

The USCG will continue joint pulse operations with NOAA and state partners to focus enforcement efforts across the commercial, charter, subsistence, and sport sectors of the halibut fishery. Additionally, the USCG will continue to examine the practice of unguided/bareboat charters and their effect on boating safety.

The commercial and recreational halibut fisheries in Alaskan waters continue to draw high national and international interest. D17 will continue to actively patrol throughout the season and emphasize joint operations with our federal and state partners, NOAA OLE, and the Alaska Wildlife Troopers.

By sustaining efforts to monitor and patrol areas where halibut fisheries occur, the USCG will strive to continually promote a level playing field for all participants and enhance safety at sea. Our goal is a consistent and targeted enforcement presence applied fairly across all commercial, charter, subsistence, and recreational fleets. This will encourage compliance across fishing fleets to help management efforts sustain the fisheries.

Point of Contact:  
LCDR Jedediah Raskie, USCG  
+1 907-463-2223  
Jedediah.A.Raskie@uscg.mil

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## Contacts

### ***NOAA Fisheries Alaska Regional Office***

Jon Kurland  
Regional Administrator  
Jon.kurland@noaa.gov  
907-586-7221

Kurt Iverson  
Sustainable Fisheries Division  
Fishery Management Specialist  
Kurt.iverson@noaa.gov  
907-586-7210

### ***NOAA Fisheries West Coast Regional Office***

Ryan Wulff  
Assistant Regional Administrator  
Sustainable Fisheries Division  
ryan.wulff@noaa.gov  
916-930-3733

Frank Lockhart  
Sustainable Fisheries Division  
Senior Policy Advisor  
Frank.lockhart@noaa.gov  
206-526-6142

Heather Fitch  
Sustainable Fisheries Division  
Natural Resource Management Specialist  
Heather.Fitch@noaa.gov

Joshua Lindsay  
Sustainable Fisheries Division  
Branch Chief, CPS/Ecosystem/Halibut  
Joshua.lindsay@noaa.gov  
562-980-4034

### ***United States Coast Guard***

District 17  
LCDR Jedediah Raskie, USCG  
907-463-2223  
Jedediah.A.Raskie@uscg.mil

### ***Alaska Department of Fish and Game***

Division of Sport Fish  
Brianna Bowman King  
Fishery Biologist  
brianna.king@alaska.gov  
907-267-2120

### ***NOAA Office for Law Enforcement***

Alaska Enforcement Division  
P.O. Box 21767  
Juneau, AK 99802  
907-586-7225

Subsistence Section  
Caroline Brown  
Statewide Research Director  
caroline.brown@alaska.gov  
907-459-7317

West Coast Enforcement Division  
7600 Sand Point Way Northeast  
Seattle, WA 98115  
206-526-6133

Lauren Sill  
Subsistence Resource Specialist III  
lauren.sill@alaska.gov  
907-465-3617

### **TO REPORT VIOLATIONS:**

Call 1-800-853-1964