



Halibut/Sablefish Meeting 10/28/2013

A meeting of the Halibut/Sablefish Species Committee was held on October 28, 2013 at the Captain Cook Hotel in Anchorage.

Present: Bob Barnett, Roland Briggs, John Jensen, Jim Kallander, Claire Laukitis, Peggy Parker, Joe Childers and Mark Callahan (teleconference).

Guests: Mary Renfeld (ASMI), Andy Wink & Garret (McDowell Group), Jeff Reynolds (SPC).

The meeting was called to order by Bob Barnett, Chair, who started by reading the ASMI Mission Statement.

IPHC catch limits, provided by Mark Callahan, was distributed and discussed. Quota: going down. Discussion about methodology used in quota (IPHC), size of fish going down. Callahan said that CPUE isn't being used (by IPHC) anymore, reflecting the lower side of the fish. Males aren't recruiting anymore.

Callahan: No more 10/20; its <10 now; 75% under 20 lbs. consistently. Jim Kallander fishes early in the spring, when the fish are very thin due to post-spawn. They are very light then and get heavier during the summer (when they move to better feeding grounds after spawning). Kallander suggests moving to <20 as a grade, which reflects the legal length of the fish, as well as the lower weight. The legality is the length (32 inches), not the weight.

ACTION ITEM: Staff should change specs on printed material to reflect <20 as the smallest grade.

Direction to ASMI? Peggy Parker said that IPHC is doing a table now vs. haggling it out. Based on what we agreed to, there was an 83% chance that the TAC will be lower next year. No early survey data is available. Expect a "draconian" cut next year.

Parker: New for IPHC is "the management strategy evaluation panel." An interesting approach to modeling. For 5 years one part of the model was wrong; it has been found and fixed. The Atlantic Halibut management is far less certain than Pacific -- their biomass is less than half of what they consider the absolute bottom -- no fishing allowed -- yet they are still taking fish. Callahan: And they were MSC certified last year. Question of bycatch on the Atlantic halibut fishery? Callahan will look into it. Parker: they estimate by 2054 they should be up to their minimum.

Kallander: Are we missing 2 commissioners? Parker said yes; they need someone from Alaska. The Dept. of Commerce is having trouble getting people seated. The IPHC is missing an Alaska commissioner; there's also a missing seat re: the US commissioner. Bob Alverson (non-Alaska) and don't know who from Alaska; expect announcements in January. Kallander: Last year the Canadian complement refused to take any cuts in the allocation, so coming into the Council this year with a full complement on the Canadian side while we are missing 2 commissioners puts us at a disadvantage. Suggest bringing it to the Board's attention.

Roland Briggs asked if there were any quality differences between Pacific Halibut and Atlantic Halibut? Both fisheries are MSC certified, although Peggy said the RFM certification is more highly regarded than the MSC certification. Callahan: On the east coast, the east coast fish has an excellent reputation; they also have virtually no chalk. Price will be a bigger issue.

Chalky halibut: Better? Worse? About the same? Preponderance for chalk explodes in August/September/October (when no quantity coming in from the east coast -- is there a connection there?). Iccle uses the pH meter; anything less than 6.4 is not going to be chalk; anything over that will be chalky. Discussion about how to discourage fishing in August/September/October... reduce the price to the fishermen? Felt that this was not an issue for ASMI; it could be an issue for the processors with their fishermen. Briggs: are there other product forms that we could use this fish for? Can't bread it because it doesn't hold breading well. IPHC did an extensive chalk analysis (lactic acid). There are some areas that are known to yield chalky fish -- the advice to the fishermen would be "don't fish there." Kallander: Until there's an economic penalty associated with chalky fish you are not going to stop fishermen fishing there. Parker will check with the IPHC survey data to see if there is any correlation with chalky halibut, so that the chalky grounds could be identified. Kallander: If the data is there, a chart could be made to show the fleet where the chalky grounds are. That would be a passive way to deter fishing on those grounds.

Joe Childers: All of the groundfish fisheries are depending on having stability in the halibut fishery, due to by-catch issues.

Any comments on Sablefish? Have heard the quota on that will go down, as well. Kallander said they the fleet in Cordova said the fishing was as good as it ever was; the later fishing was sparser. Callahan suggested predation by sperm whales; this might be mitigated by moving to a pot fishery. Pot fishing is difficult for smaller boats (takes gear and bigger boats so you can go deep). Discussion about messaging when the resource is down (how to phrase that as sustainable?)

Parker: Does ASMI have any info/flyers on ocean acidification? Claudia Hogue: ASMI's Technical Committee is looking into it (developing talking points and resource people that we can direct inquiries to).

Have the ASMI programs been beneficial to the species you represent?

Parker: Yes; you've keep us center of plate and it's been a huge help.

Callahan: ASMI has done a good job getting the message out, especially in the Asian markets. And, for sablefish, we've seen increases in the domestic market for both fresh and frozen black cod (from 5% to 25-30%).

John Jensen: Love the ASMI resources -- provide recipes with our receipts.

Claire Laukitis: The COOK IT FROZEN! techniques have been very helpful.

Bob Barnett: Is it too good? Should we back it down a bit since the quota might go down?

Kallander: ASMI staff has always been able to move resources around based on the amount of revenues the fishery is generating. Would suggest ASMI continue efforts into emerging markets, such as China. I credit ASMI staff for developing the domestic market for sablefish.

Market for fresh vs. frozen? Callahan: yes; there's better demand for fresh fish. For the big fish (over 60 pounds) these are being frozen. Suggests trying to convince the fishermen not to harvest large fish -- those are the breeders. Parker: There's a discussion in the EU about knowing the plant name where the fish was frozen (so boat name not needed but plant name may be).

Callahan: Mercury content has become a big point of contention between the US and Canada, because of the difference in the allowable levels (1ppm vs. 0.5ppm). This is an issue with Canada and the EU. Briggs: I found out there are different types of testing...perhaps standardization is the answer. Let's ask the Technical

Committee to verify the testing procedures used in Canada so that we use the same methodology. Also suggests providing information on mercury levels in other fish would be helpful.

Laukitis asked if ASMI has info on radiation from Japan's tsunami. Claudia Hogue: The technical committee is reviewing this. Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation has done testing and has not found radiation in Alaska's fish.

Have you received eblasts about RFM Certification? Yes. Flatfish is currently under certification process; hope for findings by the end of the calendar year. Everything else has been certified: salmon, Alaska pollock, cod, black cod, halibut, crab.

Are you familiar with the new ASMI website and Facebook page? Yes to the website; no to Facebook. Bob Barnett commented that the industry site has just been updated and is much more friendly. Laukitis: WAF is great; the Facebook site is good. Suggested 2-minute fishing videos. Suggest program like farm to school on the website, too, so we can get more fish in the school system (the ask is to put info on the website).

Action Item: Jim Kallander suggested ASMI's in-state program address allocation issues within the state by reminding the public that the resource belongs to the public. Commercial fishermen are being painted in a bad light. Commercial fishermen provide a service: they provide the public with access to their resource. Suggests taking a look at a new message through ASMI's in-state, foodservice and retail programs.

Callahan: We have to be careful about the wording; the sport sector is a big part of the tourism industry so we don't want to get in conflict with that.

What recommendations for the communications program? In-state program re: fishermen providing public service: access to public resource.

RECAP:

Technical Committee:

- 1) Testing procedures for mercury content and some context about how it compares to levels in other seafood species.
- 2) Alert Technical Committee to new and difficult standards re: frozen seafood exports (where it is being frozen for the first time, with an exemption being given for vessels).

Board:

- 1) Make the Board aware that the IPHC is missing 2 commissioners for the US delegation.
- 2) Halibut/Sablefish Committee recommends changing the size specifications for halibut from 10/20 to <20.

New messaging re: commercial fishermen should be brought up to all Foodservice, Joint and Retail committees.

Jim Kallander then moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Joe Childers; motion passed.

Meeting adjourned.

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