

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****50 CFR Part 300**

[Docket No. 040217059-4059-01; I.D. 021004A]

RIN 0648-AR95

Pacific Halibut Fisheries; Catch Sharing Plan

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Final rule; annual management measures for Pacific halibut fisheries.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), on behalf of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), publishes annual management measures governing the Pacific Halibut fishery which are approved by the Secretary of State. This action is intended to provide public notice of the effectiveness of these IPHC annual management measures and to inform persons subject to them of their restrictions and requirements.

DATES: Effective February 29, 2004.

ADDRESSES: Additional requests for information regarding this action may be obtained by contacting either the International Pacific Halibut Commission, P.O. Box 95009, Seattle, WA 98145-2009, or Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802-1668.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Bubba Cook, 907-586-7425 or e-mail at bubba.cook@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Background**

The IPHC has promulgated regulations governing the Pacific halibut fishery in 2004 under the Convention Between the United States and Canada for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea (Convention), signed at Ottawa, Ontario, on March 2, 1953, as amended by a Protocol Amending the Convention (signed at Washington, DC., on March 29, 1979). The IPHC regulations have been approved by the Secretary of State of the United States under section 4 of the Northern Pacific Halibut Act (Halibut Act, 16 U.S.C. 773-773k). Pursuant to regulations at 50 CFR 300.62, the approved IPHC regulations setting forth the 2004 IPHC annual management measures are published in the **Federal Register** to provide notice of

their effectiveness, and to inform persons subject to the regulations of the restrictions and requirements. These management measures are effective until superseded by the 2005 management measures, which NMFS will publish in the **Federal Register**.

The IPHC held its annual meeting in Juneau, Alaska, on January 19-23, 2004, and adopted regulations for 2004. The substantive changes to the previous IPHC regulations (68 FR 10989, March 7, 2003) include:

1. New commercial fishery opening date of February 29, 2004, in IPHC areas other than Area 2A;
2. Opening dates for the Area 2A commercial directed halibut fishery;
3. Season dates for the Area 2A tribal fishery;
4. Revising the provisions for retention of tagged halibut;
5. Removing the requirement to mark setline or skate marker buoys with the vessel name;
6. Revising the regulation referring to the Prohibited Species Donation Program administered by NMFS to state that a person may "retain, possess, and dispose" of halibut from this program; and
7. Removing an obsolete regulation that made implementation of the Customary and Traditional Fishery Regulations in Alaska contingent on NMFS' publication of regulations governing this fishery.

The IPHC recommended to the governments of Canada and the United States catch limits for 2004 totaling 76,505,000 lbs (34,702,100 kg). The IPHC staff reported on the assessment of the Pacific halibut stock in 2003. Some significant changes occurred in the assessment, including the first separate assessment of the male and female components of the stock. Lower growth rates of halibut in recent years and different growth rates for the sexes prompted the staff to perform the separate assessments to ensure that mortality of the females was not excessive. Staff also undertook the first analytical assessments of Areas 3B, 4A, and 4B. Changes in the rate at which fish, especially males, recruit to the fishery will require additional analyses over the coming year to determine if the existing 32-inch (81.3 cm) size limit is still appropriate. Over the coming year, the Commission staff will continue to investigate a new harvest policy that may result in greater stability in the yield from the fishery and insulate the process of setting catch limits from technological changes in the assessment. A joint industry-Commission working group will address and report on this issue during 2004.

The halibut stock is healthy in the central and southern portions of the range (Areas 3A through 2A) but is believed to have declined in Areas 3B through Area 4, and lower catch limits are required in those areas.

Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for Area 2A

The PFMC develops the Area 2A CSP under authority of the Halibut Act, although the IPHC ultimately approves the CSP and any modifications to it. Section 5 of the Halibut Act (16 U.S.C. 773c) provides the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) with general responsibility to carry out the Convention and to adopt such regulations as may be necessary to implement the purposes and objectives of the Convention and the Halibut Act. The Secretary's authority has been delegated to the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA. Section 5 of the Halibut Act (16 U.S.C. 773c(c)) also authorizes the Regional Fishery Management Council having authority for the geographic area concerned to develop regulations governing the Pacific halibut catch in United States Convention waters that are in addition to, but not in conflict with, regulations of the IPHC. Pursuant to this authority, NMFS requested that the PFMC allocate halibut catches should such allocation be necessary. The PFMC's Area 2A CSP allocates the halibut catch limit for Area 2A among treaty Indian, non-treaty commercial, and non-treaty sport fisheries in and off Washington, Oregon, and California.

This action approves, but does not implement, the CSP for regulatory Area 2A. On February 23, 2004, (69 FR 8162), NMFS published a proposed rule to implement the CSP changes for 2004 and to implement the 2004 Area 2A sport fishing season regulations. The 2004 Area 2A CSP and the Area 2A sport fishing season regulations will be implemented by a final rule separate from this action. Sections 24(4)(b), 24(10), and 25 through 27 are not revised by this action, but will be revised by publication of the separate final rule implementing the Area 2A CSP. These sections primarily address the Area 2A sport fisheries. None of the 2004 changes to the CSP affect either the tribal fisheries or the non-tribal commercial fisheries. Therefore, IPHC management measures for those fisheries are implemented through this final rule.

Annual Halibut Management Measures

The annual management measures that follow for the 2004 Pacific halibut fishery are those adopted by the IPHC and approved by the Secretary of State.

2004 Pacific Halibut Fishery Regulations

Regulations respecting the Convention Between Canada and the United States of America for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the Northern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea

1. Short Title

These regulations may be cited as the Pacific Halibut Fishery Regulations.

2. Application

(1) These Regulations apply to persons and vessels fishing for halibut in, or possessing halibut taken from, the maritime area as defined in Section 3.

(2) Sections 3 to 6 apply generally to all halibut fishing.

(3) Sections 7 to 20 apply to commercial fishing for halibut.

(4) Section 21 applies to tagged halibut caught by any vessel.

(5) Section 22 applies to the United States treaty Indian fishery in subarea 2A-1.

(6) Section 23 applies to customary and traditional fishing in Alaska.

(7) Section 24 applies to sport fishing for halibut.

(8) These Regulations do not apply to fishing operations authorized or conducted by the Commission for research purposes.

3. Interpretation

(1) In these Regulations,

(a) *Authorized officer* means any State, Federal, or Provincial officer authorized to enforce these regulations including, but not limited to, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Alaska Division of Fish and Wildlife Protection (ADFWP), United States Coast Guard (USCG), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and the Oregon State Police (OSP);

(b) *Authorized clearance personnel* means an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor;

(c) *Charter vessel* means a vessel used for hire in sport fishing for halibut, but not including a vessel without a hired operator;

(d) *Commercial fishing* means fishing, other than treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence fishing as referred to in section 22, and customary and traditional fishing as referred to in section 23 and defined by and regulated pursuant to NMFS regulations published at 50 CFR Part 300, the resulting catch of which is sold or

bartered; or is intended to be sold or bartered;

(e) *Commission* means the International Pacific Halibut Commission;

(f) *Daily bag limit* means the maximum number of halibut a person may take in any calendar day from Convention waters;

(g) *Fishing* means the taking, harvesting, or catching of fish, or any activity that can reasonably be expected to result in the taking, harvesting, or catching of fish, including specifically the deployment of any amount or component part of setline gear anywhere in the maritime area;

(h) *Fishing period limit* means the maximum amount of halibut that may be retained and landed by a vessel during one fishing period;

(i) *Land or offload* with respect to halibut, means the removal of halibut from the catching vessel;

(j) *License* means a halibut fishing license issued by the Commission pursuant to section 4;

(k) *Maritime area*, in respect of the fisheries jurisdiction of a Contracting Party, includes without distinction areas within and seaward of the territorial sea and internal waters of that Party;

(l) *Operator*, with respect to any vessel, means the owner and/or the master or other individual on board and in charge of that vessel;

(m) *Overall length* of a vessel means the horizontal distance, rounded to the nearest foot, between the foremost part of the stem and the aftermost part of the stern (excluding bowsprits, rudders, outboard motor brackets, and similar fittings or attachments);

(n) *Person* includes an individual, corporation, firm, or association;

(o) *Regulatory area* means an area referred to in section 6;

(p) *Setline gear* means one or more stationary, buoyed, and anchored lines with hooks attached;

(q) *Sport fishing* means all fishing other than commercial fishing, treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence fishing as referred to in section 22, and customary and traditional fishing as referred to in section 23 and defined in and regulated pursuant to NMFS regulations published in 50 CFR Part 300;

(r) *Tender* means any vessel that buys or obtains fish directly from a catching vessel and transports it to a port of landing or fish processor;

(s) *VMS transmitter* means a NMFS-approved vessel monitoring system transmitter that automatically determines a vessel's position and

transmits it to a NMFS-approved communications service provider.¹

(2) In these Regulations, all bearings are true and all positions are determined by the most recent charts issued by the United States National Ocean Service or the Canadian Hydrographic Service.

(3) In these Regulations, all weights shall be computed on the basis that the heads of the fish are off and their entrails removed.

4. Licensing Vessels for Area 2A

(1) No person shall fish for halibut from a vessel, nor possess halibut on board a vessel, used either for commercial fishing or as a charter vessel in Area 2A, unless the Commission has issued a license valid for fishing in Area 2A in respect of that vessel.

(2) A license issued for a vessel operating in Area 2A shall be valid only for operating either as a charter vessel or a commercial vessel, but not both.

(3) A vessel with a valid Area 2A commercial license cannot be used to sport fish for Pacific halibut in Area 2A.

(4) A license issued for a vessel operating in the commercial fishery in Area 2A shall be valid for one of the following, but not both.

(a) The directed commercial fishery during the fishing periods specified in paragraph (2) of section 8 and the incidental commercial fishery during the sablefish fishery specified in paragraph (3) of section 8; or

(b) The incidental catch fishery during the salmon troll fishery specified in paragraph (4) of section 8.

(5) A license issued in respect of a vessel referred to in paragraph (1) of this section must be carried on board that vessel at all times and the vessel operator shall permit its inspection by any authorized officer.

(6) The Commission shall issue a license in respect of a vessel, without fee, from its office in Seattle, Washington, upon receipt of a completed, written, and signed "Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery" form.

(7) A vessel operating in the directed commercial fishery or the incidental commercial fishery during the sablefish fishery in Area 2A must have its "Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery" form postmarked no later than 11:59 p.m. on April 30, or on the first weekday in May if April 30 is a Saturday or Sunday.

(8) A vessel operating in the incidental commercial fishery during

¹ Call NOAA Enforcement Division, Alaska Region, at 907-586-7225 between the hours of 0800 and 1600 local time for a list of NMFS-approved VMS transmitters and communications service providers.

the salmon troll season in Area 2A must have its "Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery" form postmarked no later than 11:59 p.m. on March 31, or the first weekday in April if March 31 is a Saturday or Sunday.

(9) Application forms may be obtained from any authorized officer or from the Commission.

(10) Information on "Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery" form must be accurate.

(11) The "Application for Vessel License for the Halibut Fishery" form shall be completed and signed by the vessel owner.

(12) Licenses issued under this section shall be valid only during the year in which they are issued.

(13) A new license is required for a vessel that is sold, transferred, renamed, or redocumented.

(14) The license required under this section is in addition to any license, however designated, that is required under the laws of the United States or any of its States.

(15) The United States may suspend, revoke, or modify any license issued under this section under policies and procedures in 15 CFR Part 904.

5. In-Season Actions

(1) The Commission is authorized to establish or modify regulations during the season after determining that such action:

(a) Will not result in exceeding the catch limit established preseason for each regulatory area;

(b) Is consistent with the Convention between the United States of America and Canada for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the Northern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea, and applicable domestic law of either Canada or the United States; and

(c) Is consistent, to the maximum extent practicable, with any domestic catch sharing plans or other domestic allocation programs developed by the United States or Canadian governments.

(2) In-season actions may include, but are not limited to, establishment or modification of the following:

- (a) Closed areas;
- (b) Fishing periods;
- (c) Fishing period limits;
- (d) Gear restrictions;
- (e) Recreational bag limits;
- (f) Size limits; or
- (g) Vessel clearances.

(3) In-season changes will be effective at the time and date specified by the Commission.

(4) The Commission will announce in-season actions under this section by providing notice to major halibut processors; Federal, State, United States

treaty Indian, Provincial fishery officials, and the media.

6. Regulatory Areas

The following areas shall be regulatory areas (see Figure 1) for the purposes of the Convention:

(1) Area 2A includes all waters off the states of California, Oregon, and Washington;

(2) Area 2B includes all waters off British Columbia;

(3) Area 2C includes all waters off Alaska that are east of a line running 340° true from Cape Spencer Light (58°11'54" N. lat., 136°38'24" W. long.) and south and east of a line running 205° true from said light;

(4) Area 3A includes all waters between Area 2C and a line extending from the most northerly point on Cape Aklek (57°41'15" N. lat., 155°35'0" W. long.) to Cape Ikolik (57°17'17" N. lat., 154°47'18" W. long.), then along the Kodiak Island coastline to Cape Trinity (56°44'50" N. lat., 154°08'44" W. long.), then 140° true;

(5) Area 3B includes all waters between Area 3A and a line extending 150° true from Cape Lutke (54°29'00" N. lat., 164°20'00" W. long.) and south of 54°49'00" N. lat. in Isanotski Strait;

(6) Area 4A includes all waters in the Gulf of Alaska west of Area 3B and in the Bering Sea west of the closed area defined in section 10 that are east of 172°00'00" W. long. and south of 56°20'00" N. lat.;

(7) Area 4B includes all waters in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska west of Area 4A and south of 56°20'00" N. lat.;

(8) Area 4C includes all waters in the Bering Sea north of Area 4A and north of the closed area defined in section 10 which are east of 171°00'00" W. long., south of 58°00'00" N. lat., and west of 168°00'00" W. long.;

(9) Area 4D includes all waters in the Bering Sea north of Areas 4A and 4B, north and west of Area 4C, and west of 168°00'00" W. long.;

(10) Area 4E includes all waters in the Bering Sea north and east of the closed area defined in section 10, east of 168°00'00" W. long., and south of 65°34'00" N. lat.

7. Fishing in Regulatory Area 4E and 4D

(1) Section 7 applies only to any person fishing, or vessel that is used to fish for, Area 4E Community Development Quota (CDQ) or Area 4D CDQ halibut provided that the total annual halibut catch of that person or vessel is landed at a port within Area 4E or 4D.

(2) A person may retain halibut taken with setline gear in Area 4E CDQ and

4D CDQ fishery that are smaller than the size limit specified in section 13, provided that no person may sell or barter such halibut.

(3) The manager of a CDQ organization that authorizes persons to harvest halibut in the Area 4E or 4D CDQ fisheries must report to the Commission the total number and weight of undersized halibut taken and retained by such persons pursuant to section 7, paragraph (2). This report, which shall include data and methodology used to collect the data, must be received by the Commission prior to December 1 of the year in which such halibut were harvested.

8. Fishing Periods

(1) The fishing periods for each regulatory area apply where the catch limits specified in section 11 have not been taken.

(2) Each fishing period in the Area 2A directed fishery² shall begin at 0800 hours and terminate at 1800 hours local time on June 23, July 14, July 28, August 11, August 25, September 15, and September 29 unless the Commission specifies otherwise.

(3) Notwithstanding paragraph (7) of section 11, an incidental catch fishery³ is authorized during the sablefish seasons in Area 2A in accordance with regulations promulgated by NMFS.

(4) Notwithstanding paragraph (2), and paragraph (7) of section 11, an incidental catch fishery is authorized during salmon troll seasons in Area 2A in accordance with regulations promulgated by NMFS.

(5) The fishing period in Areas 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E shall begin at 1200 hours local time on February 29 and terminate at 1200 hours local time on November 15, unless the Commission specifies otherwise.

(6) All commercial fishing for halibut in Areas 2A, 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E shall cease at 1200 hours local time on November 15.

9. Closed Periods

(1) No person shall engage in fishing for halibut in any regulatory area other than during the fishing periods set out in section 8 in respect of that area.

(2) No person shall land or otherwise retain halibut caught outside a fishing period applicable to the regulatory area where the halibut was taken.

² The directed fishery is restricted to waters that are south of Point Chehalis, Washington (46°53'18" N. lat.) under regulations promulgated by NMFS and published in the **Federal Register**.

³ The incidental fishery during the directed, fixed gear sablefish season is restricted to waters that are north of Point Chehalis, Washington (46°53'18" N. lat.) under regulations promulgated by NMFS and published in the **Federal Register**.

(3) Subject to paragraphs (7), (8), (9), and (10) of section 19, these Regulations do not prohibit fishing for any species of fish other than halibut during the closed periods.

(4) Notwithstanding paragraph (3), no person shall have halibut in his/her possession while fishing for any other species of fish during the closed periods.

(5) No vessel shall retrieve any halibut fishing gear during a closed period if the vessel has any halibut on board.

(6) A vessel that has no halibut on board may retrieve any halibut fishing gear during the closed period after the operator notifies an authorized officer or representative of the Commission prior to that retrieval.

(7) After retrieval of halibut gear in accordance with paragraph (6), the vessel shall submit to a hold inspection

at the discretion of the authorized officer or representative of the Commission.

(8) No person shall retain any halibut caught on gear retrieved referred to in paragraph (6).

(9) No person shall possess halibut aboard a vessel in a regulatory area during a closed period unless that vessel is in continuous transit to or within a port in which that halibut may be lawfully sold.

10. Closed Area

All waters in the Bering Sea north of 55°00'00" N. lat. in Isanotski Strait that are enclosed by a line from Cape Sarichef Light (54°36'0" N. lat., 164°55'42" W. long.) to a point at 56°20'00" N. lat., 168°30'00" W. long.; thence to a point at 58°21'25" N. latitude, 163°00'00" W. long.; thence to

Strogonof Point (56°53'18" N. lat., 158°50'37" W. long.); and then along the northern coasts of the Alaska Peninsula and Unimak Island to the point of origin at Cape Sarichef Light are closed to halibut fishing and no person shall fish for halibut therein or have halibut in his/her possession while in those waters except in the course of a continuous transit across those waters. All waters in Isanotski Strait between 55°00'00" N. lat. and 54°49'00" N. lat. are closed to halibut fishing.

11. Catch limits

(1) The total allowable catch of halibut to be taken during the halibut fishing periods specified in section 8 shall be limited to the weight expressed in pounds or metric tons shown in the following table:

Regulatory area	Catch Limit	
	Pounds	Metric tons
2A: directed commercial, and incidental commercial during salmon troll fishery	297,029	134.7
2A: incidental commercial during sablefish fishery	70,000	31.7
2B ⁴	13,800,000	6258.5
2C	10,500,000	4,761.9
3A	25,060,000	11,365.1
3B	15,600,000	7,074.8
4A	3,470,000	1,573.7
4B	2,810,000	1,274.4
4C	1,720,000	780.0
4D	1,720,000	780.0
4E	345,000	156.5

(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), regulations pertaining to the division of the Area 2A catch limit between the directed commercial fishery and the incidental catch fishery as described in paragraph (4) of section 8 will be promulgated by NMFS and published in the **Federal Register**.

(3) The Commission shall determine and announce to the public the date on which the catch limit for Area 2A will be taken.

(4) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), Area 2B will close only when all IVQs assigned by DFO are taken, or November 15, whichever is earlier.

(5) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E will each close only when all IFQs and all CDQs issued by NMFS have been taken, or November 15, whichever is earlier:

(6) If the Commission determines that the catch limit specified for Area 2A in paragraph (1) would be exceeded in an unrestricted 10-hour fishing period as specified in paragraph (2) of section 8,

the catch limit for that area shall be considered to have been taken unless fishing period limits are implemented.

(7) When under paragraphs (2), (3), and (6) the Commission has announced a date on which the catch limit for Area 2A will be taken, no person shall fish for halibut in that area after that date for the rest of the year, unless the Commission has announced the reopening of that area for halibut fishing.

(8) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), the total allowable catch of halibut that may be taken in the Area 4E directed commercial fishery is equal to the combined annual catch limits specified for the Area 4D and Area 4E Community Development Quotas. The annual Area 4D CDQ catch limit will decrease by the equivalent amount of halibut CDQ taken in Area 4E in excess of the annual Area 4E CDQ catch limit.

12. Fishing Period Limits

(1) It shall be unlawful for any vessel to retain more halibut than authorized by that vessel's license in any fishing period for which the Commission has announced a fishing period limit.

(2) The operator of any vessel that fishes for halibut during a fishing period when fishing period limits are in effect must, upon commencing an offload of halibut to a commercial fish processor, completely offload all halibut on board said vessel to that processor and ensure that all halibut is weighed and reported on State fish tickets.

(3) The operator of any vessel that fishes for halibut during a fishing period when fishing period limits are in effect must, upon commencing an offload of halibut other than to a commercial fish processor, completely offload all halibut on board said vessel and ensure that all halibut are weighed and reported on State fish tickets.

(4) The provisions of paragraph (3) are not intended to prevent retail over-the-side sales to individual purchasers so long as all the halibut on board is ultimately offloaded and reported.

(5) When fishing period limits are in effect, a vessel's maximum retainable catch will be determined by the Commission based on:

(a) The vessel's overall length in feet and associated length class;

⁴ Area 2B includes combined commercial and sport catch limits which will be allocated by DFO.

- (b) The average performance of all vessels within that class; and
- (c) The remaining catch limit.
- (6) Length classes are shown in the following table:

Overall length (in feet)	Vessel class
1-25	A
26-30	B
31-35	C
36-40	D
41-45	E
46-50	F
51-55	G
56+	H

(7) Fishing period limits in Area 2A apply only to the directed halibut fishery referred to in paragraph (2) of section 8.

13. Size Limits

(1) No person shall take or possess any halibut that

- (a) With the head on, is less than 32 inches (81.3 cm) as measured in a straight line, passing over the pectoral fin from the tip of the lower jaw with the mouth closed, to the extreme end of the middle of the tail, as illustrated in Figure 2; or

- (b) With the head removed, is less than 24 inches (61.0 cm) as measured from the base of the pectoral fin at its most anterior point to the extreme end of the middle of the tail, as illustrated in Figure 2.

(2) No person shall possess on board a vessel a halibut filleted or a halibut that has been mutilated, or otherwise disfigured in any manner that prevents the determination of whether the halibut complies with the size limits specified in this section, except that this paragraph shall not prohibit the possession on board a vessel:

- (a) Of halibut cheeks cut from halibut caught by persons authorized to process the halibut on board in accordance with NMFS regulations published at 50 CFR Part 679; and

- (b) Of fillets from halibut that have been offloaded in accordance with section 17 may be possessed on board the harvesting vessel in the port of landing up to 1800 hours local time on the calendar day following the offload.⁵

(3) No person on board a vessel fishing for, or tendering, halibut caught in Area 2A shall possess any halibut that has had its head removed.

14. Careful Release of Halibut

(1) All halibut that are caught and are not retained shall be immediately

released outboard of the roller and returned to the sea with a minimum of injury by:

- (a) Hook straightening;
- (b) Cutting the gangion near the hook; or
- (c) Carefully removing the hook by twisting it from the halibut with a gaff.

15. Vessel Clearance in Area 4

(1) The operator of any vessel that fishes for halibut in Areas 4A, 4B, 4C, or 4D must obtain a vessel clearance before fishing in any of these areas, and before the landing of any halibut caught in any of these areas, unless specifically exempted in paragraphs (10), (13), (14), (15), (16), or (17).

(2) An operator obtaining a vessel clearance required by paragraph (1) must obtain the clearance in person from the authorized clearance personnel and sign the IPHC form documenting that a clearance was obtained, except that when the clearance is obtained via VHF radio referred to in paragraphs 5, 8, and 9, the authorized clearance personnel must sign the IPHC form documenting that the clearance was obtained.

(3) The vessel clearance required under paragraph (1) prior to fishing in Area 4A may be obtained only at Nazan Bay on Atka Island, Dutch Harbor or Akutan, Alaska, from an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor.

(4) The vessel clearance required under paragraph (1) prior to fishing in Area 4B may only be obtained at Nazan Bay on Atka Island or Adak, Alaska, from an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor.

(5) The vessel clearance required under paragraph (1) prior to fishing in Area 4C or 4D may be obtained only at St. Paul or St. George, Alaska, from an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor by VHF radio and allowing the person contacted to confirm visually the identity of the vessel.

(6) The vessel operator shall specify the specific regulatory area in which fishing will take place.

(7) Before unloading any halibut caught in Area 4A, a vessel operator may obtain the clearance required under paragraph (1) only in Dutch Harbor or Akutan, Alaska, by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor.

(8) Before unloading any halibut caught in Area 4B, a vessel operator may

obtain the clearance required under paragraph (1) only in Nazan Bay on Atka Island or Adak, by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor by VHF radio or in person.

(9) Before unloading any halibut caught in Area 4C or 4D, a vessel operator may obtain the clearance required under paragraph (1) only in St. Paul, St. George, Dutch Harbor, or Akutan, Alaska, either in person or by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor. The clearances obtained in St. Paul or St. George, Alaska, can be obtained by VHF radio and allowing the person contacted to confirm visually the identity of the vessel.

(10) Any vessel operator who complies with the requirements in section 18 for possessing halibut on board a vessel that was caught in more than one regulatory area in Area 4 is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1) of this section, provided that:

- (a) The operator of the vessel obtains a vessel clearance prior to fishing in Area 4 in either Dutch Harbor, Akutan, St. Paul, St. George, Adak, or Nazan Bay on Atka Island by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor. The clearance obtained in St. Paul, St. George, Adak, or Nazan Bay on Atka Island can be obtained by VHF radio and allowing the person contacted to confirm visually the identity of the vessel. This clearance will list the Areas in which the vessel will fish; and

- (b) Before unloading any halibut from Area 4, the vessel operator obtains a vessel clearance from Dutch Harbor, Akutan, St. Paul, St. George, Adak, or Nazan Bay on Atka Island by contacting an authorized officer of the United States, a representative of the Commission, or a designated fish processor. The clearance obtained in St. Paul or St. George can be obtained by VHF radio and allowing the person contacted to confirm visually the identity of the vessel. The clearance obtained in Adak or Nazan Bay on Atka Island can be obtained by VHF radio.

(11) Vessel clearances shall be obtained between 0600 and 1800 hours, local time.

(12) No halibut shall be on board the vessel at the time of the clearances required prior to fishing in Area 4.

(13) Any vessel that is used to fish for halibut only in Area 4A and lands its total annual halibut catch at a port

⁵DFO has more restrictive regulations therefore section 13(2)b does not apply to fish caught in Area 2B or landed in British Columbia.

within Area 4A is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1).

(14) Any vessel that is used to fish for halibut only in Area 4B and lands its total annual halibut catch at a port within Area 4B is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1).

(15) Any vessel that is used to fish for halibut only in Area 4C and lands its total annual halibut catch at a port within Area 4C is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1).

(16) Any vessel that is used to fish for halibut only in Areas 4D or 4E and lands its total annual halibut catch at a port within Areas 4D, 4E, or the closed area defined in section 10, is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1).

(17) Any vessel that carries a transmitting VMS transmitter while fishing for halibut in Area 4A, 4B, 4C, or 4D and until all halibut caught in any of these areas is landed is exempt from the clearance requirements of paragraph (1) of this section, provided that:

(a) The operator of the vessel complies with NMFS' vessel monitoring system regulations published at 50 CFR sections 679.28(f)(3), (4) and (5); and

(b) The operator of the vessel notifies NOAA Fisheries Office for Law Enforcement at 800-304-4846 (select option 1 to speak to an Enforcement Data Clerk) between the hours of 0600 and 0000 (midnight) local time within 72 hours before fishing for halibut in Area 4A, 4B, 4C, or 4D and receives a VMS confirmation number.

16. Logs

(1) The operator of any U.S. vessel fishing for halibut that has an overall length of 26 feet (7.9 meters) or greater shall maintain an accurate log of halibut fishing operations in the Groundfish/IFQ Daily Fishing Longline and Pot Gear Logbook provided by NMFS, or Alaska hook-and-line logbook provided by Petersburg Vessel Owners Association or Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association, or the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) longline-pot logbook, or the logbook provided by IPHC.

(2) The logbook referred to in paragraph (1) must include the following information:

(a) The name of the vessel and the state vessel number (ADF&G or Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife or Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife or California Department of Fish and Game vessel number);

(b) The date(s) upon which the fishing gear is set or retrieved;

(c) The latitude and longitude or loran coordinates or a direction and distance from a point of land for each set or day;

(d) The number of skates deployed or retrieved, and number of skates lost; and

(e) The total weight or number of halibut retained for each set or day.

(3) The logbook referred to in paragraph (1) shall be

(a) Maintained on board the vessel;

(b) Updated not later than 24 hours after midnight local time for each day fished and prior to the offloading or sale of halibut taken during that fishing trip;

(c) Retained for a period of two years by the owner or operator of the vessel;

(d) Open to inspection by an authorized officer or any authorized representative of the Commission upon demand; and

(e) Kept on board the vessel when engaged in halibut fishing, during transits to port of landing, and until the offloading of all halibut is completed.

(4) The log referred to in paragraph (1) does not apply to the incidental halibut fishery during the salmon troll season in Area 2A defined in paragraph (4) of section 8.

(5) The operator of any Canadian vessel fishing for halibut shall maintain an accurate log recorded in the British Columbia Halibut Fishery logbook provide by DFO.

(6) The logbook referred to in paragraph (5) must include the following information:

(a) The name of the vessel and the Department of Fisheries and Ocean's vessel number;

(b) The date(s) upon which the fishing gear is set or retrieved;

(c) The latitude and longitude or loran coordinates or a direction and distance from a point of land for each set or day;

(d) The number of skates deployed or retrieved, and number of skates lost; and

(e) The total weight or number of halibut retained for each set or day.

(7) The logbook referred to in paragraph (5) shall be

(a) Maintained on board the vessel;

(b) Updated not later than 24 hours after midnight local time for each day fished and prior to the offloading or sale of halibut taken during that fishing trip;

(c) Retained for a period of two years by the owner or operator of the vessel;

(d) Open to inspection by an authorized officer or any authorized representative of the Commission upon demand;

(e) Kept on board the vessel when engaged in halibut fishing, during transits to port of landing, and until the offloading of all halibut is completed;

(f) Mailed to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (white copy) within seven days of offloading; and

(g) Mailed to the International Pacific Halibut Commission (yellow copy) within seven days of the final offload if

not collected by an International Pacific Halibut Commission employee.

(8) The poundage of any halibut that is not sold, but is utilized by the vessel operator, his/her crew members, or any other person for personal use, shall be recorded in the vessel's log within 24-hours of offloading.

(9) No person shall make a false entry in a log referred to in this section.

17. Receipt and Possession of Halibut

(1) No person shall receive halibut from a United States vessel that does not have on board the license required by section 4.

(2) No person shall offload halibut from a vessel unless the gills and entrails have been removed prior to offloading.⁶

(3) It shall be the responsibility of a vessel operator who lands halibut to continuously and completely offload at a single offload site all halibut on board the vessel.

(4) A registered buyer (as that term is defined in regulations promulgated by NMFS and codified at 50 CFR Part 679) who receives halibut harvested in IFQ and CDQ fisheries in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E, directly from the vessel operator that harvested such halibut must weigh all the halibut received and record the following information on Federal catch reports: date of offload; name of vessel; vessel number; scale weight obtained at the time of offloading, including the weight (in pounds) of halibut purchased by the registered buyer, the weight (in pounds) of halibut offloaded in excess of the IFQ or CDQ, the weight of halibut (in pounds) retained for personal use or for future sale, and the weight (in pounds) of halibut discarded as unfit for human consumption.

(5) The first recipient, commercial fish processor, or buyer in the United States who purchases or receives halibut directly from the vessel operator that harvested such halibut must weigh and record all halibut received and record the following information on state fish tickets: the date of offload, vessel number, total weight obtained at the time of offload including the weight (in pounds) of halibut purchased, the weight (in pounds) of halibut offloaded in excess of the IFQ, CDQ, or fishing period limits, the weight of halibut (in pounds) retained for personal use or for future sale, and the weight (in pounds) of halibut discarded as unfit for human consumption.

(6) The master or operator of a Canadian vessel that was engaged in

⁶ DFO did not adopt this regulation therefore section 17 paragraph 2 does not apply to fish caught in Area 2B.

halibut fishing must weigh and record all halibut on board said vessel at the time offloading commences and record on Provincial fish tickets or Federal catch reports the date, locality, name of vessel, the name(s) of the person(s) from whom the halibut was purchased; and the scale weight obtained at the time of offloading of all halibut on board the vessel including the pounds purchased; pounds in excess of IVQs; pounds retained for personal use; and pounds discarded as unfit for human consumption.

(7) No person shall make a false entry on a State or Provincial fish ticket or a Federal catch or landing report referred to in paragraphs (4), (5), and (6) of section 17.

(8) A copy of the fish tickets or catch reports referred to in paragraphs (4), (5), and (6) shall be:

(a) retained by the person making them for a period of three years from the date the fish tickets or catch reports are made; and

(b) Open to inspection by an authorized officer or any authorized representative of the Commission.

(9) No person shall possess any halibut taken or retained in contravention of these Regulations.

(10) When halibut are landed to other than a commercial fish processor the records required by paragraph (5) shall be maintained by the operator of the vessel from which that halibut was caught, in compliance with paragraph (8).

(11) It shall be unlawful to enter a Halibut Commission license number on a State fish ticket for any vessel other than the vessel actually used in catching the halibut reported thereon.

18. Fishing Multiple Regulatory Areas

(1) Except as provided in this section, no person shall possess at the same time on board a vessel halibut caught in more than one regulatory area.

(2) Halibut caught in more than one of the Regulatory Areas 2C, 3A, or 3B may be possessed on board a vessel at the same time providing the operator of the vessel:

(a) Has a NMFS-certified observer on board when required by NMFS regulations⁷ published at 50 CFR Section 679.7(f)(4); and

(b) Can identify the regulatory area in which each halibut on board was caught by separating halibut from different areas in the hold, tagging halibut, or by other means.

(3) Halibut caught in more than one of the Regulatory Areas 4A, 4B, 4C, or 4D may be possessed on board a vessel at the same time providing the operator of the vessel:

(a) Has a NMFS-certified observer on board the vessel when halibut caught in different regulatory areas are on board; and

(b) Can identify the regulatory area in which each halibut on board was caught by separating halibut from different areas in the hold, tagging halibut, or by other means.

(4) Halibut caught in Regulatory Areas 4A, 4B, 4C, and 4D may be possessed on board a vessel when in compliance with paragraph (3) and if halibut from Area 4 are on board the vessel, the vessel can have halibut caught in Regulatory Areas 2C, 3A, and 3B on board if in compliance with paragraph (2).

19. Fishing Gear

(1) No person shall fish for halibut using any gear other than hook and line gear.

(2) No person shall possess halibut taken with any gear other than hook and line gear.

(3) No person shall possess halibut while on board a vessel carrying any trawl nets or fishing pots capable of catching halibut, except that in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, or 4E, halibut heads, skin, entrails, bones or fins for use as bait may be possessed on board a vessel carrying pots capable of catching halibut, provided that a receipt documenting purchase or transfer of these halibut parts is on board the vessel.

(4) All setline or skate marker buoys carried on board or used by any United States vessel used for halibut fishing shall be marked with one of the following:

(a) The vessel's state license number; or

(b) The vessel's registration number.

(5) The markings specified in paragraph (4) shall be in characters at least four inches in height and one-half inch in width in a contrasting color visible above the water and shall be maintained in legible condition.

(6) All setline or skate marker buoys carried on board or used by a Canadian vessel used for halibut fishing shall be:

(a) Floating and visible on the surface of the water; and

(b) Legibly marked with the identification plate number of the vessel engaged in commercial fishing from which that setline is being operated.

(7) No person on board a vessel from which setline gear was used to fish for any species of fish anywhere in Area 2A during the 72-hour period immediately

before the opening of a halibut fishing period shall catch or possess halibut anywhere in those waters during that halibut fishing period.

(8) No vessel from which setline gear was used to fish for any species of fish anywhere in Area 2A during the 72-hour period immediately before the opening of a halibut fishing period may be used to catch or possess halibut anywhere in those waters during that halibut fishing period.

(9) No person on board a vessel from which setline gear was used to fish for any species of fish anywhere in Areas 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, or 4E during the 72-hour period immediately before the opening of the halibut fishing season shall catch or possess halibut anywhere in those areas until the vessel has removed all of its setline gear from the water and has either:

(a) Made a landing and completely offloaded its entire catch of other fish; or

(b) Submitted to a hold inspection by an authorized officer.

(10) No vessel from which setline gear was used to fish for any species of fish anywhere in Areas 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, or 4E during the 72-hour period immediately before the opening of the halibut fishing season may be used to catch or possess halibut anywhere in those areas until the vessel has removed all of its setline gear from the water and has either:

(a) Made a landing and completely offloaded its entire catch of other fish; or

(b) Submitted to a hold inspection by an authorized officer.

(11) Notwithstanding any other provision in these regulations, a person may retain, possess, and dispose of halibut taken with trawl gear only as authorized by the Prohibited Species Donation regulations of NMFS.

20. Supervision of Unloading and Weighing

The unloading and weighing of halibut may be subject to the supervision of authorized officers to assure the fulfillment of the provisions of these Regulations.

21. Retention of Tagged Halibut

(1) Nothing contained in these Regulations prohibits any vessel at any time from retaining and landing a halibut that bears a Commission external tag at the time of capture, if the halibut with the tag still attached is reported at the time of landing and made available for examination by a representative of the Commission or by an authorized officer.

⁷ Without an observer, a vessel cannot have on board more halibut than the IFQ for the area that is being fished even if some of the catch occurred earlier in a different area.

(2) After examination and removal of the tag by a representative of the Commission or an authorized officer, the halibut

(a) May be retained for personal use; or

(b) May be sold only if the halibut is caught during commercial halibut fishing and it complies with the other commercial fishing provisions of these regulations.

(3) Externally tagged fish must count against commercial IVQs, CDQs, IFQs, or daily bag or possession limits unless otherwise exempted by state, provincial, or federal regulations.

22. Fishing by United States Treaty Indian Tribes

(1) Halibut fishing in subarea 2A-1 by members of United States treaty Indian tribes located in the State of Washington shall be regulated under regulations promulgated by NMFS and published in the Federal Register.

(2) Subarea 2A-1 includes all waters off the coast of Washington that are north of 46°53'18" N. lat. and east of 125°44'00" W. long., and all inland marine waters of Washington.

(3) Section 13 (size limits), section 14 (careful release of halibut), section 16 (logs), section 17 (receipt and possession of halibut) and section 19 (fishing gear), except paragraphs 7 and 8 of section 19, apply to commercial fishing for halibut in subarea 2A-1 by the treaty Indian tribes.

(4) Commercial fishing for halibut in subarea 2A-1 is permitted with hook and line gear from February 29 through November 15, or until 523,600 lbs (237.5 mt) is taken, whichever occurs first.

(5) Ceremonial and subsistence fishing for halibut in subarea 2A-1 is permitted with hook and line gear from January 1 through December 31, and is estimated to take 19,400 lbs (8.8 mt).

23. Customary and Traditional Fishing in Alaska

(1) Customary and traditional fishing for halibut in Regulatory Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E shall be governed pursuant to regulations promulgated by the National Marine Fisheries Service and published in 50 CFR Part 300.

(2) Customary and traditional fishing is authorized from January 1 through December 31.

24. Sport Fishing for Halibut

(1) No person shall engage in sport fishing for halibut using gear other than

a single line with no more than two hooks attached; or a spear.

(2) In all waters off Alaska: (a) The sport fishing season is from February 1 to December 31;

(b) The daily bag limit is two halibut of any size per day per person.

(3) In all waters off British Columbia: (a) The sport fishing season is from February 1 to December 31;

(b) The daily bag limit is two halibut of any size per day per person.

(4) In all waters off California, Oregon, and Washington:

(a) The total allowable catch of halibut shall be limited to

(i) 272,942 lbs (123.8 mt) in waters off Washington and

(ii) 297,029 lbs (134.7 mt) in waters off California and Oregon;

(b) * * *

(c) The Commission shall determine and announce closing dates to the public for any area in which the catch limits promulgated by NMFS are estimated to have been taken.

(d) When the Commission has determined that a subquota under paragraph (4)(b) of this section is estimated to have been taken, and has announced a date on which the season will close, no person shall sport fish for halibut in that area after that date for the rest of the year, unless a reopening of that area for sport halibut fishing is scheduled in accordance with the Catch Sharing Plan for Area 2A, or announced by the Commission.

(5) Any minimum overall size limit promulgated under IPHC or NMFS regulations shall be measured in a straight line passing over the pectoral fin from the tip of the lower jaw with the mouth closed, to the extreme end of the middle of the tail.

(6) No person shall fillet, mutilate, or otherwise disfigure a halibut in any manner that prevents the determination of minimum size or the number of fish caught, possessed, or landed.

(7) The possession limit for halibut in the waters off the coast of Alaska is two daily bag limits.

(8) The possession limit for halibut in the waters off the coast of British Columbia is three halibut.

(9) The possession limit for halibut in the waters off Washington, Oregon, and California is the same as the daily bag limit.

(10) * * *

(11) Any halibut brought aboard a vessel and not immediately returned to the sea with a minimum of injury will be included in the daily bag limit of the person catching the halibut.

(12) No person shall be in possession of halibut on a vessel while fishing in a closed area.

(13) No halibut caught by sport fishing shall be offered for sale, sold, traded, or bartered.

(14) No halibut caught in sport fishing shall be possessed on board a vessel when other fish or shellfish aboard the said vessel are destined for commercial use, sale, trade, or barter.

(15) The operator of a charter vessel shall be liable for any violations of these regulations committed by a passenger aboard said vessel.

25. Flexible Inseason Management Provisions in Area 2A

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26. Fishery Election in Area 2A

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27. Area 2A Non-Treaty Commercial Fishery Closed Area

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28. Previous Regulations Superseded

These regulations shall supersede all previous regulations of the Commission, and these regulations shall be effective each succeeding year until superseded.

Classification

IPHC Regulations

The provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act (5 U.S.C. 553) requiring prior notice and an opportunity for public comment, and a delay in effective date are inapplicable because this regulation involves a military or foreign affairs function of the United States (5 U.S.C. 553(a)(1)). Further, no other law requires that prior notice and an opportunity for public comment be given for this rule. Because prior notice and an opportunity for public comment are not required to be provided for these portions of this rule by 5 U.S.C. 553, or any other law, the analytical requirements of the Regulatory Flexibility Act, 5 U.S.C. 601 et seq., are not applicable.

List of Subjects in 50 CFR part 300

Fisheries, Fishing, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Treaties.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 773-773k.

Dated: February 23, 2004.

William T. Hogarth,

Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.

BILLING CODE 3510-22-P

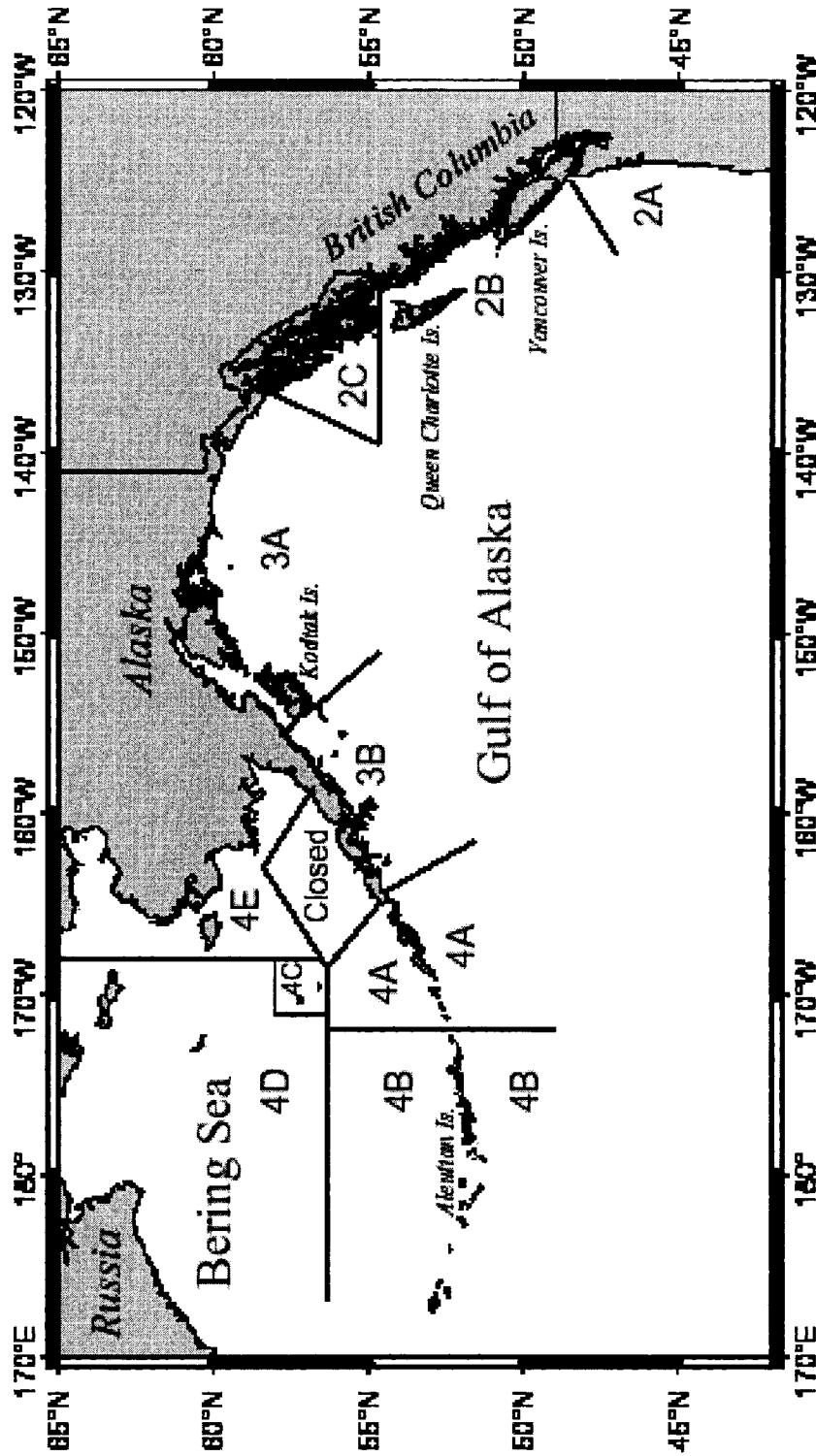


Figure 1. Regulatory areas for the Pacific halibut fishery.

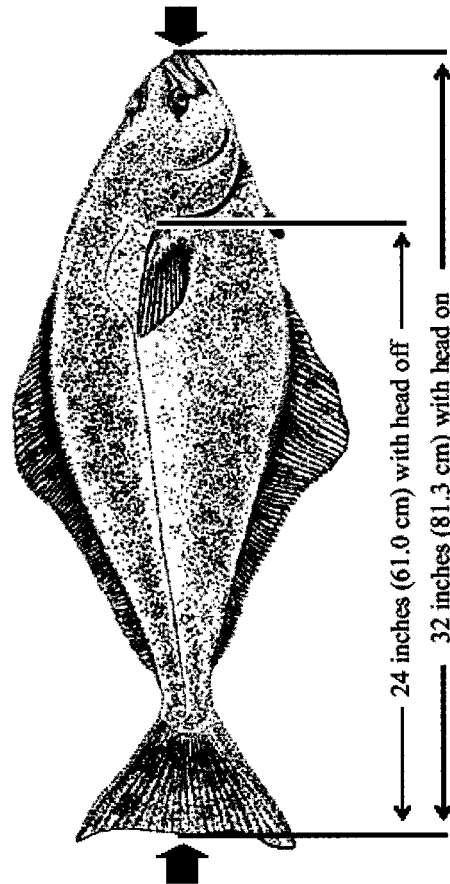


Figure 2. Minimum commercial size.

[FR Doc. 04-4371 Filed 2-26-04; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 031126295-3295-01; I.D. 022304D]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska; Species in the Rock Sole/Flathead Sole/"Other Flatfish" Fishery Category by Vessels Using Trawl Gear in Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS is closing directed fishing for species in the rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery category by vessels using trawl gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI). This action is necessary to prevent exceeding the interim 2004 halibut bycatch allowance specified for the trawl rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" fishery category in the BSAI.

DATES: Effective 1200 hrs, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), February 24, 2004, until superseded by the notice of Final 2004 Harvest Specifications of Groundfish for the BSAI, which will be published in the **Federal Register**.