

Visitor stakeholder group: Environmental/rural subgroup  
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REVISED: Per Stakeholder Meeting Notes of May 23, certain sections of this report have been revised.

**Questions:** What is the effect of visitor fishing on fish allocations in the Sitka area?

Halibut – In order to understand the impact of visitor fishing on halibut allocations, it is necessary to understand the quota setting process employed by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), which is responsible for all non-allocative aspects of Pacific halibut management.

The IPHC conducts a halibut stock assessment on an annual basis. This involves evaluation of a number of factors (total removals, fishery catch rates, length and weight at age data, etc.) and a complex modeling effort. From this assessment, the IPHC arrives at an exploitable biomass, to which a harvest rate is applied, providing the “constant exploitation yield,” or CEY, which is the amount of fish that can be harvested on a sustainable basis for that year. From the CEY (and this is the important part) is deducted the projected removals as bycatch, sport catch (which includes charter), wastage, and personal use/subsistence. What is left becomes the fishery CEY and ultimately catch limit for the commercial halibut fishery. In other words, increases in bycatch, charter harvest, etc. are all directly deducted from the commercial quota.

In 2003 a guideline harvest level (GHL) for the IPHC 2C and 3A halibut charter fishery was published in the Federal Registry. The GHL was based on the charter fleet’s historic catch plus an additional 25% as a buffer for growth while a long-term management strategy was devised and implemented. The 2C (includes Sitka area) GHL was exceeded by the charter harvest in 2003, 2004, and 2005. The overage for the years, respectively, was 161,000 pounds, 5,000 pounds, and 207,000 pounds. These amounts were deducted from the commercial quota in each of the respective years.

Commercial fishermen have asked that the two fleets be uncoupled such that overages in the charter fleet be incorporated into future biomass calculations but are not directly deducted from the commercial quota. Charter operators have opposed this action. Fishery managers will consider the request later this year. Commercial fishermen and some charter operators support including the charter fleet in the Individual Fishing Quota system under which the commercial fleet operates such that charter fishermen could purchase additional fishing privileges to expand effort beyond the GHL. Other long-term management measures under consideration include a moratorium on new entrants to the charter business (which may provide some stability to existing charter businesses but will not address the re-allocation issue) and an allocation based management strategy.

In an effort to manage the 2C charter harvest to the GHL, retention of fish by charter skippers and crew may be prohibited in 2006, and charter clients may be restricted to a

five fish annual halibut limit by the 2007 season (the annual limit has been recommended by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council but has not yet been approved by the Secretary of Commerce).

*Source: North Pacific Fishery Management Council EA/RIR/IRFA for regulatory amendments to implement GHM measures in the charter halibut fisheries in areas 2C and 3A. Available on Council website.*

According to information provided by ADFG sport fish manager Bob Chadwick for area D (Sitka area) resident harvest of halibut has decreased from 30% (1993) to 9% (2004). Non-resident anglers primarily access halibut resource by charter vessel. According to McDowell study commissioned by Sitka Charter Boat Operators Association, 9 out of 10 charter clients are male and have high household incomes (\$119,000).

*Source: Bob Chadwick, ADFG presentation to Stakeholder group. McDowell Group, January 2005. Sitka Charter Fishing Visitor Profile and Impact Analysis. Prepared for Sitka Charter Boat Operators Association*

After handing out this paper on May 1, Tina McNamee asked me to answer a number of other questions. In the limited time I had left to work on this, I have made an attempt...

1. 2C halibut bycatch (2005)- 340,000 pounds taken in crab fisheries, beam trawl fishery for prawns and starry flounder, state waters sablefish fishery (Clarence and Chatham Strait). 2C stretches from Dixon Entrance to Cape Spencer.
2. 2C halibut wastage (2005)- 280,000 pounds (mostly hooking injuries to undersized fish and sand flea damage). Based on logbook data provided by commercial halibut fishermen.
3. Commercial quota over time (see attached chart)
4. Commercial halibut catch in Sitka area over time- data requested from Fish and Game and IPHC; has recently been provided by IPHC to Fish and Game; will provide when available).
5. Status and trend of halibut resource: Overall, halibut biomass gradually declining from historic all time high levels. 2C biomass estimates increased two years ago in response to IPHC policy change relative to halibut exploitation rates. Various IPHC indexes for 2C and 3A currently somewhat conflicting. Stocks considered healthy. See IPHC annual reports for more specific info.

*Source: IPHC annual report, 2005.*

Key points: The growth in the visitor industry has resulted in a reallocation of sport caught halibut from resident to non-resident fishermen and a gradual erosion of the commercial halibut quota. The North Pacific Council recently committed to managing the charter fleet to remain within its quota until a long-term management strategy is adopted and implemented.

The Sitka Convention and Visitors Bureau's mission is to increase the number of visitors to Sitka. The increase in visitors to Sitka is driving a reallocation of local fishery resources from resident to non-resident fishermen and commercial to charter fisheries.