

Local Fishermen React to IPHC Halibut Announcement

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Jennifer Canfield/KMXT

The International Pacific Halibut Commission's 2011 interim meeting was last week in Seattle. Left unsettled is what to do about 2012 quotas.

At the heart of the issue is whether the harvest model the commission has been using to set past catches is reliable. The numbers of dead fish just aren't adding up.

The current model asks for a 20 percent cut in the total allowable catch, from 41 million pounds this year to 33 million pounds next year. The newly suggested model- which would factor in mis-estimations from previous years- calls for a 63 percent cut to the fishery, bringing it down to just over 15 million pounds.

Fisherman Dave Kubiak says he saw the potential cuts coming.

-- (Halibut Reax 1 :26 "It really doesn't come ... is gonna be a lot skinnier.

Fisherman Oliver Holm says he'll be less affected by any potential cuts.

-- (Halibut Reax 2 :25 "Fortunately
for me ... won't keep up with the lower quotas.

The council
has a number of options to consider. Among them is adjusting the allowable
bycatch for trawlers, which in the Gulf of Alaska
is currently at 2,300 metric tons. That limit hasn't changed since 1986. If a
cut to the total allowable catch is the answer, fisherman Pete Thompson says all user
groups need to be considered, even trawlers and their bycatch.

-- (Halibut Reax 3 :33 "I
think that needs to be addressed ... al the user groups can be happy.

Another concern is that much of the
bycatch is smaller, sexually immature halibut. A million pounds of smaller
halibut caught as bycatch is more damaging to the fishery than a million pounds
of larger halibut.

The U.S.
North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program is looking at a possible overhaul to
its operations. The restructuring could happen as soon as 2013 if funded this
year.

Kubiak says
observation needs to be implemented consistently across the board.

-- (Halibut Reax 4 :53 "If
you're riding down ...really don't know what it is.")

The IPHC will
further address halibut quotas at its next meeting January 24th
through the 27th in Anchorage.

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