

The Wheel Watch

a newsletter of the

Fishing Vessel Owners' Association
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Dear Longliner and Sustaining Sponsors:

This newsletter will bring you up-to-date on events before the North Pacific Management Council, the Pacific Council, IPHC, in Washington, D.C., and markets.

****North Pacific Council****

There were some important issues that will affect the halibut/sablefish IFQ fisheries. The actions taken at the October NPFMC meeting which took place in Anchorage are as follows:

1. During the approval of the preliminary 2016 harvest limits in the Bering Sea, Duncan Fields made the following motion.

“It is the Council’s intent to review the BSAI species specification setting in December recognizing shared responsibility with the IPHC to maintain a viable commercial halibut fishery in Areas 4CDE for sustained participation of St. Paul and other western Alaska communities. Further, it is the Council’s intent to continue to minimize bycatch by assessing the adequacy of the AM 80 cooperatives bycatch savings agreement(s) as well as actual bycatch savings up to the December specifications setting as the council determines final species specifications for the 2016 season.”

This announcement sets up a possible reallocation of the Total Allowable Catch of those species in the Bering Sea that have high bycatch rates of halibut and salmon. It should put additional pressure on certain trawl fleets to reduce their halibut bycatch for the remainder of the 2014 season. The potential here is to possibly not approve all of the yellowfin sole or rock sole TAC’s to be harvested in 2016 in order to further limit the bycatch of juvenile halibut.

2. **2016 Observer Coverage.** The Council approved a change in the coverage of the “trip selection” groups. This would be catcher vessels from 40 feet in length and larger, both fixed gear and trawl. In 2016, the probability of you getting picked for coverage will be 14.9% for fixed gear longline and pot gear. This is down from 24%. I know Hans on the Expatriate will not believe this as he got 4 observers in a row in 2014 and 2015. The catcher vessel trawl fleet will see their possibility of coverage go from 24% to 29%.
3. **Canyons.** The Council has been studying the importance of the “Pribilof Canyon, the “Mushroom Ground” and “Zhemchug Canyon” in the Bering Sea as possible no fishing areas. There was the possibility that in order to protect Bering Sea coral from 100 fathoms to 300 fathoms along the shelf edge, this habitat zone could be designated a “no fish” zone. The Council chose to take no further action on this agenda item on the motion of Bill Tweit. His motion in part is as follows:

“Scientific evidence does not suggest there is a risk to the deep-sea corals present in the Pribilof and Zhemchug canyons and adjacent slope areas under current management. This conclusion is based on both the coral abundance model developed by NOAA fisheries and the recent stereo camera survey. The evidence shows low occurrence and density of deep-corals, lack of substrate to support corals, and low vulnerability of existing deep-sea corals in these areas to fishery impacts.”

4. **Update on Sports/Charter Harvest.** Below are the sports and charter catches of halibut. The charter vessels have been constrained in their harvest for the past 4 years due to the restrictions enacted by the NPFMC.

5. **Gulf of Alaska Rationalization.** The Council has three options. The first option is an IFQ format of directed catch and prohibited species. Option two is an IFQ of PSC species and the third option is a permit system with IFQ of PSC species. All options require 100% observer coverage and have reductions in halibut PSC levels. This issue has been on the agenda before and failed due to the politics of fish allocations.

Year	Charter			Non-Charter			Total Sport Harvest		
	No. Fish	Avg. Wt. (lb net)	Yield (M lb)	No. Fish	Avg. Wt. (lb net)	Yield (M lb)	No. Fish	Avg. Wt. (lb net)	Yield (M lb)
2007	109,835	17.46	1.918	68,498	16.51	1.131	178,333	17.10	3.049
2008	102,965	19.42	1.999	66,296	19.08	1.265	169,261	19.28	3.264
2009	53,602	23.31	1.249	65,549	17.29	1.133	119,151	20.00	2.383
2010	41,202	26.36	1.086	52,896	16.72	0.885	94,098	20.94	1.971
2011	36,545	9.40	0.344	42,202	16.24	0.685	78,747	13.07	1.029
2012	42,436	14.27	0.605	54,696	17.87	0.977	97,132	16.30	1.583
2013	52,675	14.47	0.762	78,078	17.43	1.361	130,753	16.24	2.123
2014	65,036	12.04	0.783	69,060	16.95	1.170	134,096	14.57	1.954

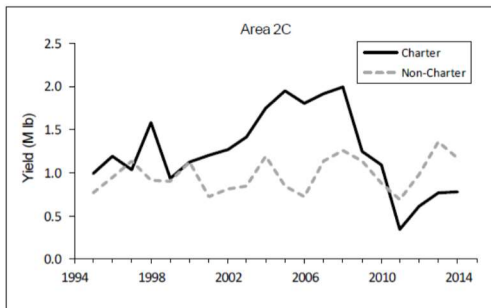


Figure 1.1. Charter and non-charter halibut harvest, average weight, and yield (M lb) in Area 2C since 1995.

Year	Charter			Non-Charter			Total Sport Harvest		
	No. Fish	Avg. Wt. (lb net)	Yield (M lb)	No. Fish	Avg. Wt. (lb net)	Yield (M lb)	No. Fish	Avg. Wt. (lb net)	Yield (M lb)
2007	236,133	16.95	4.002	166,338	13.71	2.281	402,471	15.61	6.283
2008	198,108	17.05	3.378	145,286	13.37	1.942	343,394	15.49	5.320
2009	167,599	16.31	2.734	150,205	13.47	2.023	317,804	14.97	4.758
2010	177,460	15.20	2.698	124,088	12.79	1.587	301,548	14.21	4.285
2011	184,293	15.16	2.793	128,464	12.57	1.615	312,757	14.09	4.408
2012	173,582	13.16	2.284	113,359	11.83	1.341	286,941	12.64	3.626
2013	199,248	12.62	2.514	121,568	11.94	1.452	320,816	12.36	3.966
2014	174,351	11.65	2.032	127,125	12.06	1.533	301,476	11.82	3.565

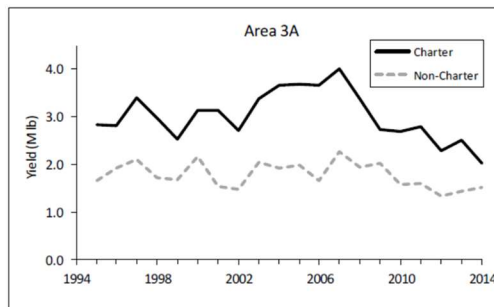
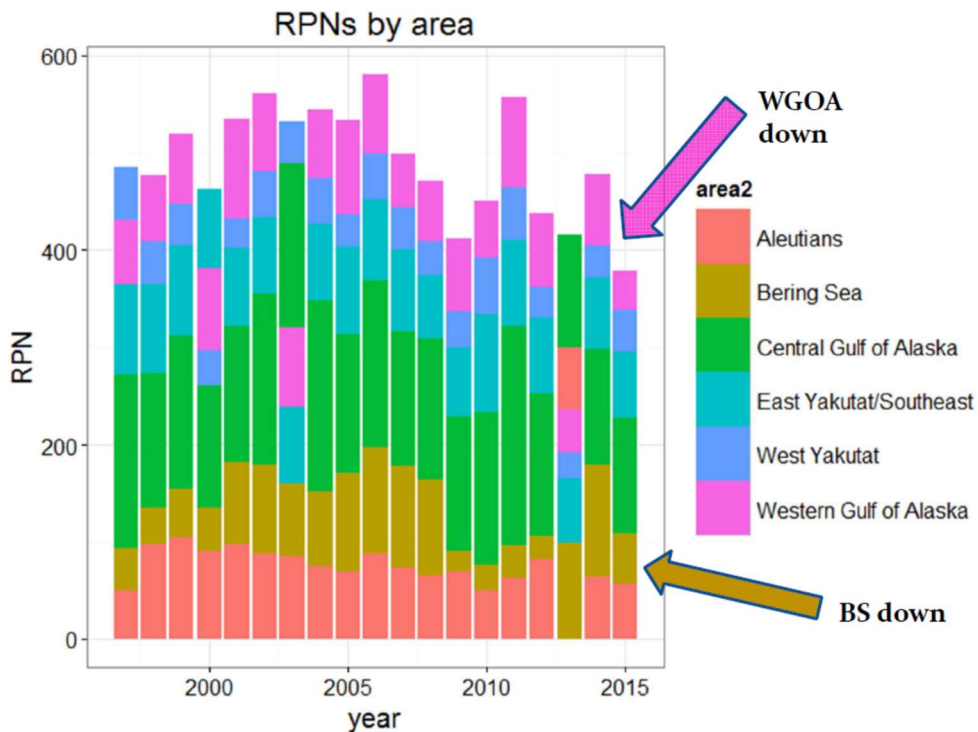


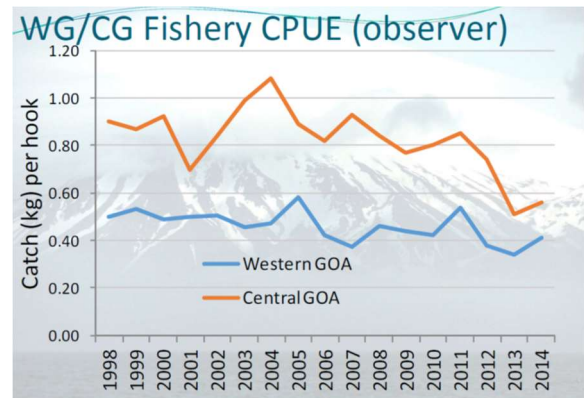
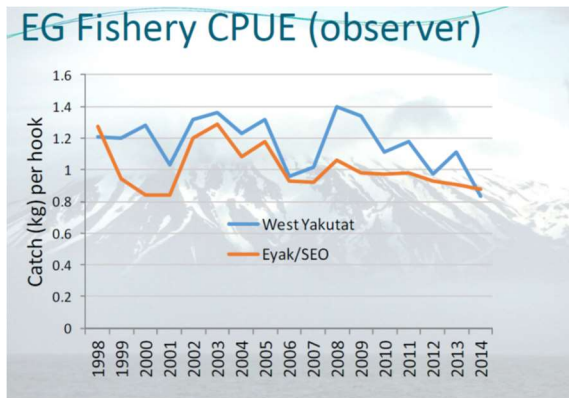
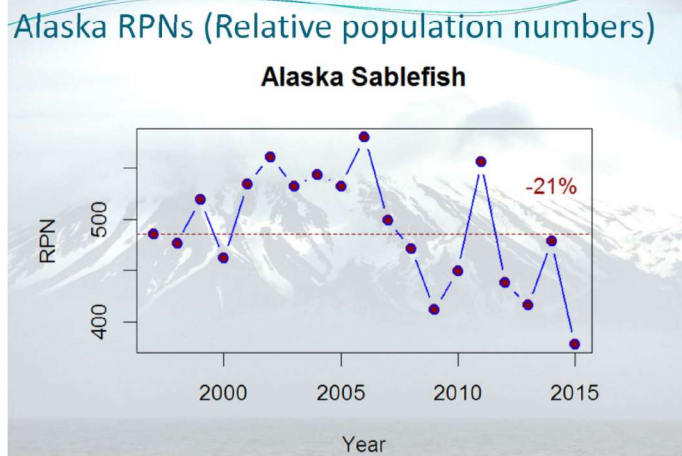
Figure 1.2. Charter and non-charter halibut harvest, average weight, and yield (M lb) in Area 3A since 1995.

The following graphics are preliminary reports from the NMFS Sablefish Assessment folks in Juneau. The Relative Population Numbers (RPNs) for this year's survey showed considerable reductions in the Western Gulf and Bering Sea compared to 2014. RPNs were down overall 21%. The fishery CPUE numbers are always a year behind. From 2014, the fleet saw an increase in their CPUE in the Central Gulf and Western Gulf over 2013 and decreasing trends in East Yakutat/SEO and West Yakutat. The 2015 fleet CPUE numbers will not be available until 2016.

The assessment authors, Dana Hanselman and Chris Lunsford have been looking at tagging results of sablefish and the fish move considerably from year to year making old assumptions of apportionment obsolete. We can expect a different apportionment rationale between regulatory areas for 2017. They will likely treat all areas the same for 2016 with an across the board reduction as they did for this year. The Plan Team meeting is set for November 16-20, 2015, to discuss 2016 harvest levels. This will be over at NMFS, Sand Point. You will need your passport if you want to attend due to new security rules for entering NMFS/NOAA. Sablefish will be up on Monday morning, 11/16/15. I would like some of you to attend.

The news on new-year classes includes the following for 2014. Lots of one-year olds in surface trawl surveys and fishermen reporting YOY's (young of the year) in coho bellies for 2015, about 8 inches long. Sports fishermen reporting YOY's all over and in coho and pomfret stomachs. There is hope. So possibly two good year classes coming soon. Note below this year's survey numbers were considerably down in the western Gulf, Bering Sea.





****Pacific Council****

Sablefish rule. Includes registering LE trawl and fixed gear permits to a vessel at the same time (joint registration), sablefish endorsed LE fixed gear ownership issues, electronic fish tickets; (Proposed rule – fall of 2015; Final rule winter 2015. Effective April 1, 2016.)

Opening date for sablefish. In June 2016, the Council will consider allowing the limited entry fixed gear permits to begin fishing January 1st, the same as all other sablefish, harvestable quotas.

Harvest Levels of Sablefish. The PFMC, at their November 13-18, 2015 meeting in California, will set 2017 and 2018 preliminary harvest numbers for sablefish.

	Allowable Biological Catch	Allowable Catch Limit
2016	7121 Mt	5241 Mt
2017	7350 Mt	6240 Mt
2018	7604 Mt	6456 Mt

The PFMC will likely set the ACL somewhat less than the numbers above for 2017 and 2018, but still allow some increases. The 2012 year class is beginning to show up in good numbers on the north coast. The scientists will likely move some fish from south of Conception to the northern area as the trawl surveys suggest a shift in the resource towards the north. The final amount could result in an additional 5 to 8 percent increase for 2017 and 2018 for vessels fishing north of Conception.

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). There are 34 existing bottom trawl EFH areas set aside off the lower coast. The Council is considering eliminating some and expanding others. The Council will not be looking to restrict longline or pot gear.

****IPHC****

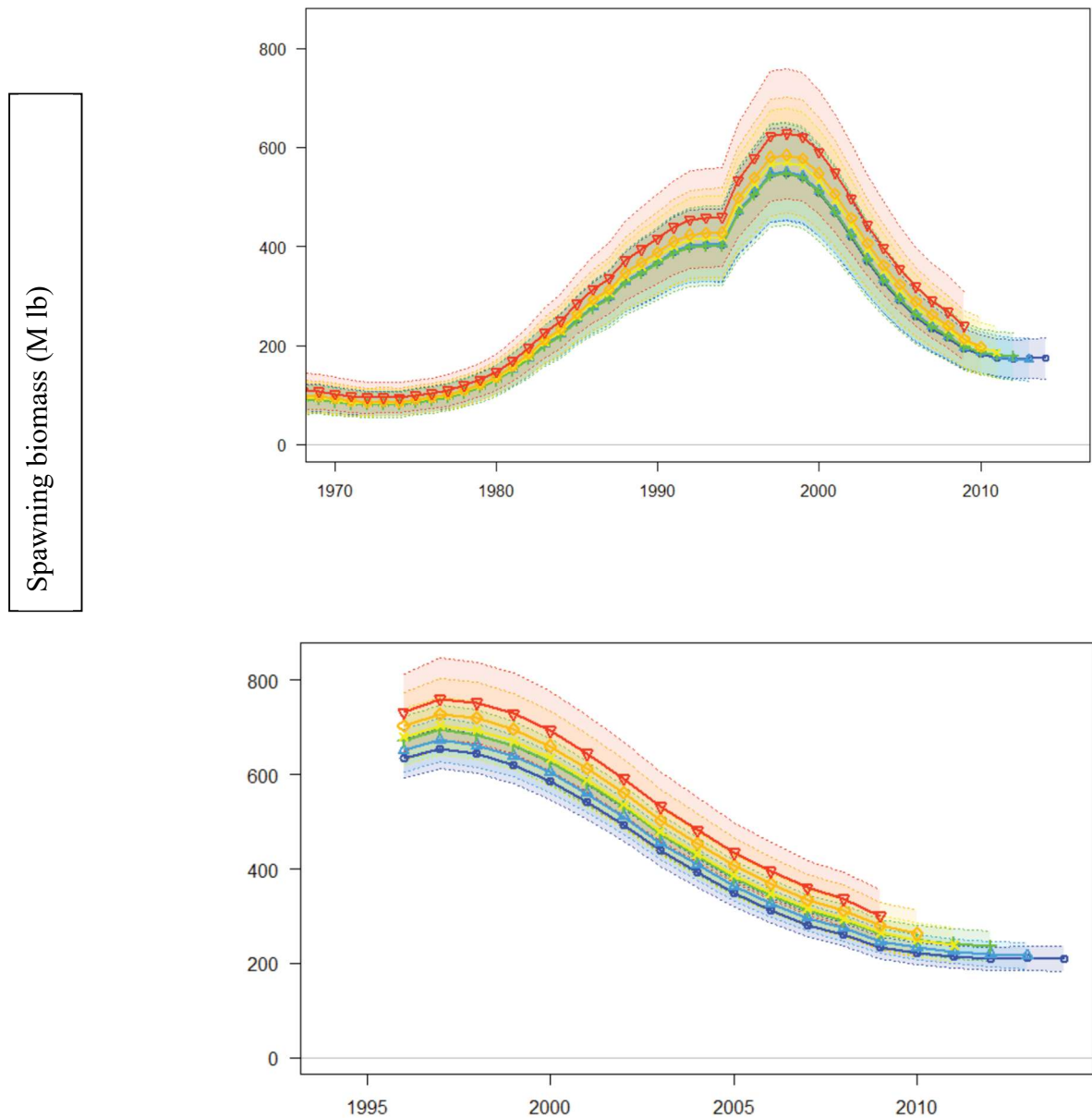


Figure 11. Results of the retrospective analysis on spawning biomass estimates using the coastwide long (upper panel) and coastwide short (lower panel) time-series models and sequentially removing one year of data for five years. Dashed lines and shaded regions indicate within-model 95% uncertainty intervals.

Year	Spawning Biomass	Fishing Intensity (F_{xx} %)	Exploitable Biomass
2010	197.8	27%	186.4
2011	195.3	31%	175.6
2012	197.2	35%	169.2
2013	203.9	38%	168.8
2014	208.5	43%	169.7
2015	215.1	NA	180.6

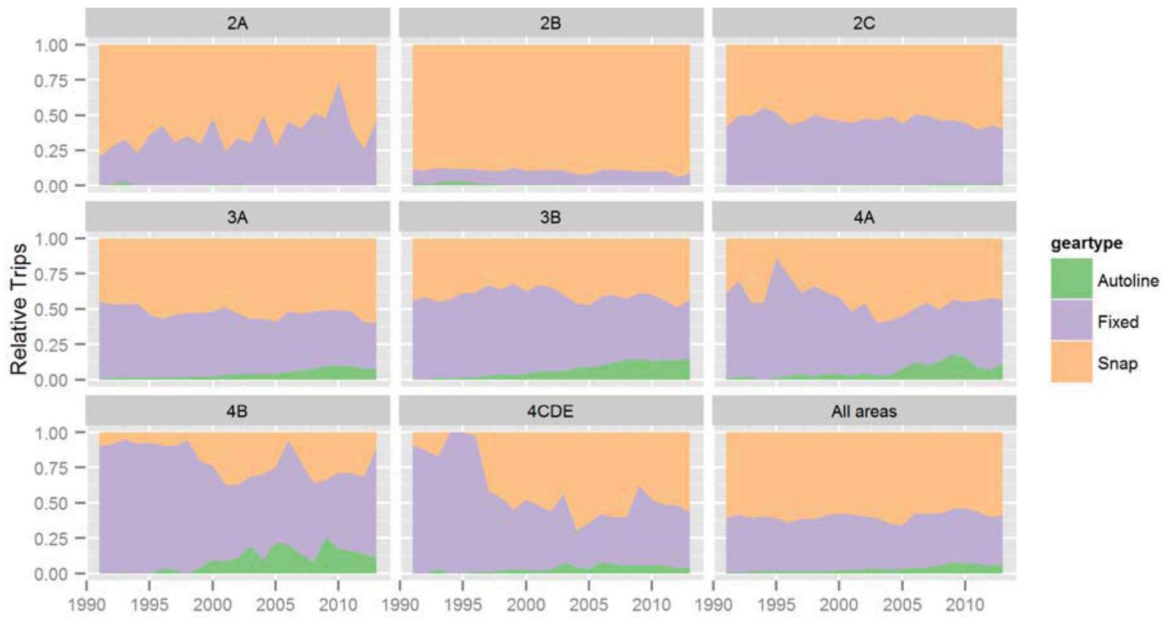


Figure 4. Proportions of the total number of halibut fishing trips associated with logbook records by gear type.

****Second Watch****

Enforcement. The USCG does many at-sea boardings. This year, boardings on FVOA vessels, **without infractions**, include: Golden Pacific, Alrita, Sunward, Vansee, Woniya, Gulf Maiden, Haida Warrior and Falcon. Congratulations!

Labeling. Efforts to require labeling of genetically modified salmon, should the Food and Drug Administration approve their sale to the public, is back on board in Congress. An amendment introduced by Senator Lisa Murkowski, R-AK, would require such labeling if the sale of the so called “Frankenfish” were allowed to U.S. consumers. This was unanimously approved in her committee.

Coast Guard Shoreside Exams. FVOA received a clarification of a recent USCG letter regarding new exam policy. If you transit or fish outside 3 miles, you will need a shoreside USCG safety exam. The exam is good for five (5) years **unless** you take a federal observer. In this case you must have the exam every **two (2) years**.

VMS. If you are interested in a free VMS and fish the lower coast, email Dayna Matthews at dayna.matthews@noaa.gov or Doug Colpo at DColpo@psmfc.org.

Coast Guard Bill | Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (VIDA)

(House)

H.R. 1987, the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015, was introduced on April 23, 2015 and passed out of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure on April 30, 2015. The House passed the bill on May 18, 2015, by voice vote. The White House has not issued a statement of administration policy on the measure.

H.R. 980, the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act, was introduced by Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) on February 13, 2015. The bill was referred to the House Committee on Transportation – Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation and is awaiting consideration. We are told by Committee staff that Rep. Hunter is just waiting for the Senate to act on VIDA before he tries to move it in the House.

(Senate)

S.1611, the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2015, was introduced in the Senate on June 18, 2015 and reported favorably out of the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation with an amendment in the nature of a substitute on June 25, 2015. The Senate VIDA bill, **S. 373**, was introduced by Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) on February 4, 2015 and was added to the Coast Guard Authorization Act by amendment during the June markup.

The Coast Guard bill has since stalled in the Senate due to the inclusion of VIDA. Senate Democrats, specifically Senator Boxer, are opposed to the inclusion of VIDA in the Coast Guard bill. According to Senate Commerce Committee staff, the Coast Guard bill usually passes the Senate by unanimous consent, but if VIDA is left in, they could see the process taking a week or two of floor time. Staff went on to say they may take VIDA out of the bill in order to get it passed this year.

Markets

Halibut. With 93% of the halibut caught, the price has stabilized at very solid prices. Late landings in Bellingham by FVOA vessel were <20 - \$7.40; 20-40 - \$7.70; 40 ups - \$8.00. Prices in early September out of Seward were <20 - \$6.30; 20-40 - \$7.10; and 40 ups - \$7.25.

Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings For Fishing Year 2015

Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	TAC		Percent Landed
				Allocation Pounds	Remaining Pounds	
2C	Halibut	1,184	3,418,252	3,679,000	260,748	93
3A	Halibut	1,420	7,372,572	7,790,000	417,428	95
3B	Halibut	326	2,456,814	2,650,000	193,186	93
4A	Halibut	158	1,204,945	1,390,000	185,055	87
4B	Halibut	97	777,599	912,000	134,401	85
4C/4D	Halibut	93	632,198	715,920	83,722	88
	Total	3,278	15,862,380	17,136,920	1,274,540	93

Sablefish. The lower harvest levels for sablefish in British Columbia and Alaska have resulted in stable strong prices throughout the 2015 season. Prices in mid-July in Sand Point were competitive at 1-2 lbs. - \$3.00; 2-3 lbs. - \$3.60; 3-4 lbs. - \$4.60; 4-5 lbs. - \$5.35; 5-7 lbs. - \$6.80; and 7 ups - \$8.00. Prices in Bellingham for the lower coast in October were at Under 3's - \$4.00; 3-4's - \$4.65; 4-5's - \$5.25; 5-7's - \$7.05; 7 ups - \$8.10.

Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocations and Landings For Fishing Year 2015

Area	Species	Vessel Landings	Total Catch Pounds	TAC		Percent Landed
				Allocation Pounds	Remaining Pounds	
AI	Sablefish	63	658,652	2,383,173	1,724,521	28
BS	Sablefish	75	291,062	1,177,256	886,194	25
CG	Sablefish	537	7,326,324	8,214,340	888,016	89
SE	Sablefish	546	5,532,516	5,912,737	380,221	94
WG	Sablefish	161	1,667,349	2,599,223	931,874	64
WY	Sablefish	224	3,220,344	3,282,649	62,305	98
	Total	1,606	18,696,247	23,569,378	4,873,131	79

Calendar of Events

Nov. 14-19, 2015 Advisory Bodies may begin Fri. 11/13	PFMC Meeting	Hyatt Regency Orange Co. Garden Grove, CA
Nov. 16-17, 2015	Plan Team Meeting	Alaska Fishery Science Center
Nov. 26-27, 2015	Thanksgiving Holiday	Office closed
Dec. 1-2, 2015	IPHC Interim Meeting	TBA
Dec. 7-15, 2015	NPFMC Meeting	Hilton Hotel Anchorage, AK
December 24-25, 2015	Christmas Holiday	Office closed
January 25-29, 2016	IPHC Annual Meeting	Juneau, AK Location TBA



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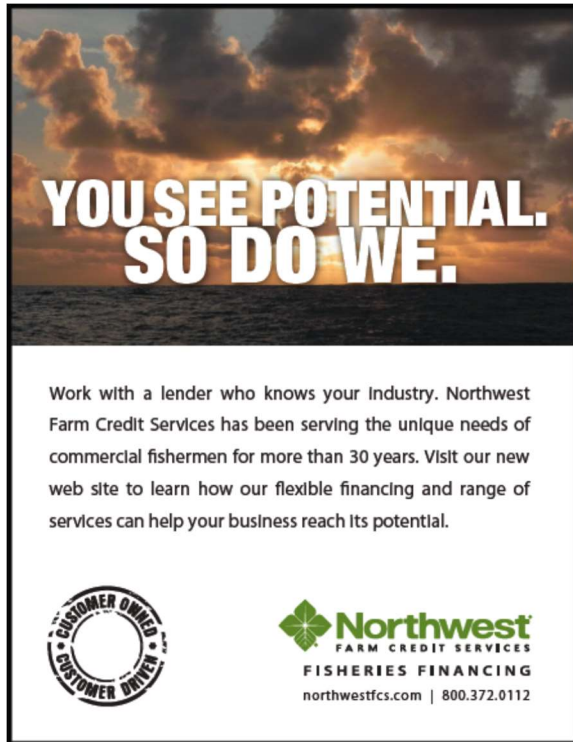
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