

Halibut Coalition
PO Box 22073
Juneau, AK 99802-2073
(425) 949-1810msg (206) 260-9111efax
halibutcoalition@gmail.com
June 10, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact: Linda Behnken, (907) 747-0695h
Office (907) 747-3400**

Halibut Fishermen and Processors Have Conservation Concerns in Light of Judge's Temporary Order

The Halibut Coalition is disappointed in this morning's ruling granting a temporary restraining order (TRO) on a federal rule that established a one-halibut daily limit on charter anglers in southeast Alaska. The bag limit is necessary to constrain charter sector harvest to the 2008 charter halibut allocation and to prevent an overage of the total Southeast halibut quota. The charter sector has exceeded its halibut Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) for the past four years.

The ruling by federal district Judge Rosemary Collyer was based on procedural issues, not the more immediate concern of conservation. The charter plaintiffs have based their challenge on technicalities, focusing on the wording of the preamble to the 2003 GHL proposed rule rather than the appropriateness of the 2008 charter allocation. The effect of the TRO is to hold the bag limit regulation in abeyance until a decision can be reached on the validity of the plaintiff's arguments.

"We are disappointed that the TRO was granted, but even more disappointed that the lawsuit was filed at all," said Halibut Coalition member Charlie Wilber, who is also Chairman of the Board of the Seafood Producers Cooperative. "Resource over harvest can only be prevented if all sectors are effectively managed to their allocations. Setline fishermen are shut down when quotas are reached; if the plaintiffs object to the one halibut bag limit the only alternative that prevents over harvest is an in-season closure."

A preliminary injunction hearing is scheduled for June 20, 2008. The Halibut Coalition, a group of associations representing the set-line sector of

Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association ♦ Cordova District Fishermen ♦ Deep Sea Fishermen's Union ♦ Fishing Vessel Owners Association ♦ Halibut Association of North America ♦ North Pacific Fisheries Association ♦ Petersburg Vessel Owners Association ♦ Sea Food Producers Cooperative ♦ Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Association ♦ United Cook Inlet Driftnetters Association ♦ United Fishermen's Marketing Association ♦ United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters Association

the industry, was not a party to the lawsuit, but has been monitoring the proceedings closely. Southeast setline quotas have been reduced by 43% over the past two years to reduce pressure on halibut stocks during this time of low abundance.

“The plaintiffs have conflated this issue in every way they could,” said Wilber. “The process undertaken by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the International Pacific Halibut Commission has taken years, solid weeks of public testimony, and investment from all sectors of the industry, the public, and the professional managers. All that work should not be overturned based on a technicality. The resource has to come first.”

---30---

Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association ♦ Cordova District Fishermen ♦ Deep Sea Fishermen's Union ♦ Fishing Vessel Owners Association ♦ Halibut Association of North America ♦ North Pacific Fisheries Association ♦ Petersburg Vessel Owners Association ♦ Sea Food Producers Cooperative ♦ Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Association ♦ United Cook Inlet Driftnetters Association ♦ United Fishermen's Marketing Association ♦ United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters Association