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May 22, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Charter Lawsuit Ignores Halibut Conservation Concerns *Resource and Other Users Harmed by Charter Fleet Overfishing*

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The Halibut Coalition was disappointed to learn today that charter boat operators will sue in an attempt to overturn the new one halibut per day rule. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) created the rule in an attempt to curb charter overfishing of the halibut resource.

Halibut Coalition representatives said the rule is both fair and necessary to protect halibut stocks. “The Council [NPFMC] has been working on charter halibut management plans since 1993,” said Halibut Coalition Chair Linda Behnken. “The process has been both extensive and open, with public comment taken in more than 30 meetings and thousands of pages of analysis completed. It is disheartening that charter boat operators have chosen to sue, rather than reduce their catch to meet conservation goals.”

The halibut resource in Area 2C has suffered a significant decline in the past decade, with a 58 percent drop in exploitable biomass. The Southeast longline fleet has accepted a 54 percent reduction in the commercial quota over the past 4 years. While the cuts have created economic hardship for many commercial longliners, they acknowledge the smaller quota is necessary to ensure the long-term health of the fishery. The commercial fleet has never surpassed its quota since the IFQ system was implemented in 1995.

In sharp contrast, the charter fleet has exceeded its Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) for five consecutive years. In 2008, the charter sector caught almost one million pounds more than it was allotted. This overage directly harms the threatened halibut resource and the harvesters that rely on the resource, including subsistence and unguided sport fishermen.

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

Contrary to recent statements by charter boat representatives, a reduction in the charter catch does not result in a corresponding increase in the longline quota. NMFS addresses this misperception directly in the “Comments and Responses” section published with the final rule:

This action should reduce the overall harvest rate from all fisheries in Area 2C to a level closer to the 20 percent harvest rate target set by the IPHC for conservation of the resource. If successful, a reduction in the charter vessel harvest should leave more halibut in the water to the benefit of all fisheries now and in future years....

[Federal Register - Vol. 74, No. 86, p. 21199]

In order for all harvesters – subsistence, unguided sport, commercial and charter – to benefit from the halibut resource in the future, the charter fleet must begin sharing in the conservation burden now. The one-halibut per day rule will force the charter fleet to stay closer to its allotted GHL, leaving more fish in the water to help rebuild the depleted stocks.

The new rule is scheduled to take effect on June 5.

The following commercial longline seafood industry members are available to discuss this issue:

1. Linda Behnken, Executive Director and fisherman, Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association (Sitka), (907) 747-0695.
2. Jev Shelton, Halibut Coalition (Juneau) and fisherman, 907-586-2242
3. Peggy Parker, Executive Director, Halibut Association of North America (processing sector), (Deming, WA) (360) 592-3116 or cell (360) 319-6208
4. Kathy Hansen, Executive Director and fisherman, Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance (Juneau), (907) 586-6652 (will auto forward).
5. Julianne Curry, Executive Director, Petersburg Vessel Owners Association and fisherman, (907) 772-9323

Background material:

http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/current_issues/halibut_issues/halibut.htm

Halibut Coalition comments on the one halibut/day rule:

[Halibut Coalition Comments on Proposed 2C One Fish Rule \(1/21/09\)](#)