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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Halibut Coalition Members Intervene in Charter Lawsuit

Subsistence, Commercial, Community, and Processing Sectors Unite to Protect Resource

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Halibut Coalition members moved to intervene today in the lawsuit filed by the Charter Halibut Task Force seeking to overturn the one halibut per day rule. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published the rule earlier this month to curtail charter overfishing of the halibut resource.

Halibut Coalition members intervening in the lawsuit include commercial fishermen, the Southeast coastal communities of Pelican and Port Alexander, processing sector members, subsistence fishermen, and Frank Wright Jr. representing himself and the Hoonah Indian Association. All of the interveners support the federal managers' decision to restrict charter clientele to retaining one halibut per day.

The one halibut per day rule is a necessary step to curb charter boat overfishing of halibut in Area 2C. Over the past three years, the charter fleet has exceeded its quota by an average of 55 percent, and last year exceeded its quota by 106 percent, or almost one million pounds. The charter boat fleet opposes NMFS' rule to limit the charter fleet to its allotted quota.

In contrast, as the halibut resource has declined, the Southeast longline fleet has accepted a 54 percent reduction in the commercial quota over the past four years. The dramatic cuts have created economic hardship for many commercial longliners, some of whom are now in danger of losing their quota shares or fishing boats due to the shrinking catch limit. Even while they face economic ruin, the commercial fleet acknowledges the smaller quota is necessary to ensure the long-term health of the fishery.

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

“The commercial halibut fishery has been around for 100 years,” said Sitka longliner Carolyn Nichols. “We’ve learned to put the resource first. It’s just common sense that we won’t have a fishery in the future unless we take care of the fish now.” Nichols’ son has filed as an intervener in the lawsuit.

Charter halibut overfishing has hurt subsistence and non-guided sport fishermen as well. Since charter boat fishing is concentrated near communities, the overharvest has caused significant localized depletion of the halibut resource. This makes it increasingly difficult for Southeast subsistence and non-guided sport fishermen to catch fish.

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 GHF, leaving more fish in the water to help rebuild the depleted stocks.

While charter boats bring people to the fish, commercial longliners bring the fish to the people. Commercial longline fishermen and processors in Southeast Alaska will provide Americans with approximately 10 million halibut meals this year. Many of these consumers do not have the time or money to travel to Alaska to catch halibut themselves. For most Americans, the commercial catch provides their only access to the halibut resource.

The following harvesters and 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. Randy Gluth, subsistence and resident sport fisherman (Sitka), (907) 738-5325
3. Jev Shelton, Halibut Coalition and fisherman (Juneau), (907) 586-2242
4. Peggy Parker, Executive Director, Halibut Association of North America (processing sector), (Deming, WA), (360) 592-3116 or cell (360) 319-6208
5. Kathy Hansen, Executive Director and salmon fisherman, Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance (Juneau), (907) 586-6652 (will auto forward)

Background material:

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

Fact or Fiction? Halibut Fishing in Southeast Alaska

http://www.halibutcoalition.org/docs/Fact_or_Fiction.pdf

The One Halibut per Day Charter Rule: The Facts

http://www.halibutcoalition.org/docs/ONE_HALIBUT_RULE_FACTS_SHEET.pdf