



Charter Log

A Quarterly Newsletter for Sport Fishing guides & Charterboat Operators

Issue 33, December 1999

Published by University of Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program

Council to Select GHL Options

The halibut sportfishing charterboat fleet got a little relief from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council at the Council's December meeting, but not much. And the press is on to come up with a solution to the dilemmas imposed by the Council's Guideline Harvest Level (GHL) requirement. Final action will be taken at the Council's meeting starting Feb. 7.

The good news is that in-season closure was dropped from the Council's list of options for meeting the GHL mandate. Operators were concerned that they could be shut down in mid-season if the GHL or "cap" was reached because of especially good fishing, or too many new entrants to the fishery. Threat of in-season closure would have had a chilling affect on the operators' ability to book anglers, particularly in the latter part of the season.

Another success, of sorts, was the Council's willingness to consider a three-year "rolling average" for calculating landings against the GHL, rather than implementing catch reduction measures the year following a single season overage.

Despite the apparent modest gains that came from the December meeting, charterboat operators are dismayed with the direction the process is taking.

"We're not happy with what they're doing," says Bob Ward of Homer, who is a member of the Council's Advisory Panel. "We're going to challenge them to the end; and the recent drop in the

Total Allowable Catch (TAC) shows why we should stay out of the commercial part."

Ward refers to the IPHC staff recommendation for a 25% reduction in area 3A TAC due to lower halibut recruitment. IPHC scientists are recommending decreases in other areas as well, for a coast-wide reduction of about 10%. IPHC meets Jan. 10-13 in Lynnwood, Washington to set overall quotas for the year 2000 halibut fisheries.

Ward says if the lower TAC is adopted, and if some form of GHL implementation passes the North Pacific Council, "the worst problem we'll have will be dividing up 3A port by port."

The Council is grappling with questions of how to apply the GHL to the TAC, basing it on a fixed percentage annually expressed in pounds, a fixed range in numbers of fish, or as a percentage of the constant exploitation yield (CEY) by area after non-guided sport and personal use landings are deducted. The Council is considering a complex set of options for determining how much to reduce the charter allocation when and if the GHL is exceeded.

Ward doesn't like any charterboat allocation which is based on a fluctuating stock and TAC, saying "We don't take advantage of the stocks when they go up, and we shouldn't pay for it when they go down."

The Homer Charter Association continues to press for the status quo option, which is Alternative 1 on the list

for consideration at the February meeting. The association's position is that: 1) Charterboat operators are not commercial fishermen and should not be managed as such; 2) The growth of the charterboat fleet has slowed or halted, and charterboat halibut landings have stabilized; 3) That the GHL and subsequent calculations relative to it are meaningless because until 1998 and introduction of the charterboat log program no reliable data on charterboat catches existed.

Catch reduction measures being considered include: line limits, boat limits, annual angler bag limit, vessel trip limit, bag limit (one fish instead of the current two), super-exclusive registration, sport catcher vessel only areas, sportfish reserves, rod permit, and possession limits. Analysts already have determined that some of the proposed measures would have little or no direct effect on total landings and, hence, on the fleet's performance regarding the GHL. Meanwhile, other measures, such as a one-fish limit, would be harmful to the conduct of business far out of proportion to the savings against the quota.

None of the above measures would be implemented until two years after attainment of GHL in most cases, or one year if data became available in time.

Other issues the Council will consider include whether to "roll" fish unharvested under the charter GHL into the longline quota, into a sportfish reserve, or leave them unharvested, and whether to establish either a local or area-wide charter industry moratorium.

Council analysis of the options are available to the public on its web site starting Jan. 10. The address is www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc.

“Five Star” Safety Program Proposed



The Coast Guard wants to encourage Alaska charterboat operators to improve their safety equipment and training, and has proposed a voluntary safety rating system tentatively known as “Five Star Safety Rating”.

The idea originated with Capt. Ed Page, Chief of Marine Safety, in Juneau. He says that the potential for tragedy is great in the six-pack fleet, and rather than imposing new regulation, he wants to encourage the industry to develop its own standards for vessel safety. And he believes that operators can use a high safety rating as a competitive advantage and an advertising hook. He also believes that once it catches on, operators may enjoy reduced insurance premiums.

First step in implementation would be pilot projects in one or more ports, Page says. Captains there would meet to agree upon suitable criteria and an inspection or

evaluation process. Participating vessels would be inspected and would be rated in accordance with the agreed-upon criteria, receiving from one to five stars. Page has suggested criteria, including participating in a safety “audit program” and safety seminars. Equipment mandated under Page’s recommendation include: EPIRB, portable VHF, CG-approved life-raft or suitable rescue boat or skiff, exposure suits, bilge alarm, two high capacity bilge pumps, and a LORAN or GPS. A vessel equipped with some but not all of these items could receive a lesser number of stars.

Page says the proposal is directed only at the uninspected, or “six-pack” fleet. The Subchapter T vessels already have rigorous safety equipment requirements in place.

Page emphasizes that the program will be voluntary, and is intended to be a

“palatable, reasonable solution” to the perceived dangers inherent in uninspected passenger vessel operations. He says that the area Marine Safety Offices in Southeast, Prince William Sound, and Western Alaska (located in Anchorage) will oversee development of the program.

If captains express an interest in the concept, the Marine Advisory Program is available to help coordinate meetings and help operators decide on appropriate criteria for the ratings.

Contact MAP at 235-5643 or at rflj@uaf.edu to offer suggestions, or if you want to organize a workshop on the proposed Five-Star Safety Rating program in your area.

Two Upcoming Conferences

Two upcoming conferences will address issues close to the hearts of Alaska charterboat operators.

January 27-29 the National Association of Charterboat Operators (NACO) holds its 2000 annual conference at the Clarion Hollywood Beach Hotel in Hollywood, Florida. The workshop program is scheduled for Friday, Jan. 28. Session titles are: *Federal Fishery Issues: Recreational Fishing Statistics, Observers, Magnuson Stevens Act* conducted by Rebecca Lent of NMFS; *Possible New Vessel Accessibility Modifications for Charterboat Operators* by Louis Linden, American Sailing Association; *New U.S. Coast Guard Lifesaving Regulations Affecting the Charter Boat Industry* presented by Lt. Dean Firing, U.S. Coast Guard; *The U.S. Coast Guard Drug*

Testing Program: Bringing the Charter Industry into Compliance, presented by Douglas Rabe, Marine Investigation Div., U.S. Coast Guard; *Lessons Learned from Risk Management*, conducted by Allen Graham of Lyons, Pipes & Cook.

Registration for NACO members is \$49 and non-members is \$69. For more information, contact NACO at (800) 745-6094.

On February 2-4 the 7th Annual Ecotourism in Alaska Conference is scheduled for the Alyeska Prince Hotel in Girdwood, sponsored by the Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association (AWRTA). The conference is divided into three distinct programs: *Small Business Training, Communities and Policy, and Wildlife Issues. A*

sampling of session titles which may be of interest to charterboat operators includes: *Internet Marketing & Technology, Insurance and Liabilities, Quick Books Tax Preparation, Brochure Production & Distribution, Networking—Retailers and Travel Agents, Customer Service, ATIA & Marketing Alaska, State of Alaska Wildlife Viewing Program, and Marine Mammal Viewing.*

The session on insurance and liabilities is designed specifically for adventure tour operators and charterboat operators.

For more information, contact AWRTA at 258-3171.

Association Wants Crucifier Ban

The Alaska Sport Fishing Council is proposing a ban on crucifiers, or hook strippers, which they say are mutilating or killing large numbers of halibut. Crucifiers are mounted near the roller on longliners and consist of a pair of parallel bars spaced just far enough apart to allow gangions and hooks to pass, but not hooked fish. Hooks are torn out of the fish' mouths, often taking the lip, jaw, or even most of the fish face with it.

Mike Bethers, director of ASFC, says that 48 % of the halibut his clients caught fishing out of Juneau last season exhibited damage due to removal by crucifiers, or by longline fishermen "horning them off" at the roller with a gaff hook. Taking the number of injured fish he saw and extrapolating to the stock as a whole, Bethers calculates that mishandling during release by the commercial fleet killed more halibut than taken by the guided sport fishery.

Crucifiers at one time were banned in the halibut fishery, but their use was reinstated after the North Pacific Fishery Management Council adopted the IFQ program for halibut.

ASFC is submitting a proposal to ban the devices to the International Pacific Halibut Commission at its Jan. 10-14 meeting in Washington State. Bethers says that even if the IPHC does not approve the measure, the proposal serves notice to longliners that they had better improve their handling of undersized halibut.

Reader Survey Points to Allocation Issues

A survey in the last issue of the Log asked you, the readers, what you do, what your concerns are, where you get your charter fishery information, and what you want to read in these pages. Some 60 of you responded, more than ten percent, and the responses reveal some important facts about the industry and about your interests. Future issues will be planned to address at least some of your concerns. Although the survey is officially finished, please feel free to send comments or suggestions any time. Here is a brief summary of the answers you sent. Keep in mind that 60 completed questionnaires were received, but many of the questions were worded so that an individual could check more than one answer.

1. Please identify the kind of operation you have.

The great majority of respondents, 50 in total, checked "sportfishing charterboat." Another 26 checked "ecotourism charterboat" followed by "water taxi, transporter" (17) and "sportfishing guide" (17). Only one respondent checked "other" although in the accompanying comments it was clear that some readers are also involved in booking, resource management or other fields.

2. What business-related publications do you read?

Alaska Fisherman's Journal topped the list with 41, followed closely by *National*

Fisherman (37). *The Alaska Sport Fish Council Newsletter* and *Fishing and Hunting News* tied (21 each), followed by *Pacific Fishing*. Other contenders were *Saltwater Sportsman* and *Alaska Business Monthly* (15 each), *Powerboat Reports* (14), *Boat/US Newsletter* and *AWRTA Newsletter* (12 each), *Salmon Trout Steelhead* and *Outdoor Life* (10 each), *Professional Mariner* (8), *Work Boat* (7), *The Life Ring* (6) and the *NACO Report* (5). Only two respondents listed *Marine Safety Newsletter* and only one *AMSEA's Marine Safety Update*.

Additional publications listed by readers include: *Alaska Business*, *UAA Procurement Production*, *Peterson's Hunting*, *Pacific Maritime*, *Field & Stream*, *Maritime Reporter*, *Marine News*, *Fog Horn*, *PVR Newsletter*, *Boats & Harbors*, *Sport Fishing*, *KRPGA Newsletter*, *North American Fisherman*, *Fishermans News*, and local newspapers and "national NGO magazines."

3. What are the issues/problems you are facing in your charterboat business?

The great majority, 45 in total, checked "Halibut or salmon allocation and management, and when you add 26 votes for "Local area management" it is clear that fishery allocation issues are foremost on the minds of readers. "Booking, advertising and marketing" came in third

(23), followed by "Profitability, business management..." (17) and "Coast Guard and other regulations" (16). "Sport fish guide licensing" (11), "Equipment maintenance" (8), "Customer service" (4) and "Training, education" (1).

4. What do you want to see in the Charter Log?

"Statewide charterboat and fishing guide industry news" scored tops with 54, followed by "Safety and Coast Guard regulations news" (44). "Customer service tips" and "Advertising and Marketing tips" tied with (29 each).. "Fishing how-to" (16), "Business management" and "Equipment and technology" tied (14 each), "Equipment and vessel maintenance" garnered 13 and "Personalities and profiles" finished last with 9 votes.

Most of you still prefer paper over electronic format, by a margin of 49 to 13, with two respondents apparently preferring both.

A few of you took the time to include additional information or comments. Most pertained to halibut allocation issues, including the guideline harvest level proposals, charterboat limited entry, representation on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, and the effectiveness or lack thereof of various management agencies.

Those who responded helped to direct the future of Charter Log. Now, help keep it on track by writing or calling if the Log strays from its charted course.

Updates, Apologies, and Welcome to New Readers

Here, at long last, is your second issue of Charter Log under my editorship. My sincere apologies for taking so long to get it to you. Fault for the delay is largely mine, compounded by the following: I have moved from Dillingham to Homer, where I am starting to fill the shoes vacated by the fully retired Doug Coughenower; I took some time off for the move and to attend the birth and early days of my first child, Aleksandr; and, not least, while the University granted me a new position, it did not provide a secretary. Fortunately, Beverly Bradley in our Anchorage office has agreed to help publish The Log, which is the only reason this issue is getting to you now.

Many of you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, since we are now using a mailing list of all charterboat operators and sport fishing guides in the state. New readers haven't had an opportunity to reply to the reader survey in the last issue, so I welcome you to let me know what you think of The Log and about your problems and issues. Complaints, compliments, and suggestions are all given a fair hearing. If you don't want this newsletter, let me know and you'll be taken off the list immediately. If you or someone you know isn't getting The Log and wants it, tell me and I'll put you on the list. And you don't have to be a charterboat

operator or sport fishing guide to subscribe; anyone, including scientists, bureaucrats, sporting goods and marine supply dealers, and just plain anglers, can get a free subscription. Just send me the address.

One more thing: I want to spice up Charter Log, with your help. Send me photos of your boat, your customers, or anything unusual you saw last season, and I'll try to work them into The Log. Stories, tall tales or true, will also be considered for publication. Whatever you have, send it to me c/o Marine Advisory Program 4014 Lake St. #201B Homer, AK 99603, tel. 235-5643, fax 235-6048, e-mail rftlj@uaf.edu

Terry Johnson, editor

University of Alaska
Marine Advisory Program
4014 Lake Street #201B
Homer, AK 99603

Charters are about to see some changes.

This is a report from Robert Ward, charterboat operator and Advisory Panel member representing charterboats to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

For 7 years I have been involved in the Halibut charterboat harvest cap battle at the NPFMC, and as it comes to final action in February I thought I should try to explain the whole halibut charterboat issue and how it might impact us.

The council will decide on the management measures needed to be implemented to hold our catch under the Guideline Harvest Level (GHL), and may consider alternate forms of the GHL, and may decide to continue further discussions on an Individual Fisherman's Quota (IFQ) and how the charterboat industry can be integrated into the existing IFQ program.

Under all of the Alternatives on the table now with the exception of Alternative 1. Status Quo, we will see some serious changes in the way we do business. The Status Quo is not a probable choice of the council because it leaves the commercial quota at risk of being eroded by increasing catches from other users. I believe this is the priority issue that this council sees as a need for some kind of action.

All of the remaining alternatives place the entire area's charterboat fleet in a derby competing with each other against an always-decreasing window of opportunity, when client numbers go up and when halibut stocks go down. The Alaska Tourist industry is expecting some increases in the future but not increasing as fast as recent history, but we can expect to see more customers before we see less each year. For the next 10 years the IPHC expect the halibut stocks to drop by about 10% per year. Under the GHL our amount drops also, leaving us with insufficient amounts. The constraining measures may be for the entire year, maybe on a pre-announced date during the season

we may see a reduction measure placed on our customers, either way we can see an obvious customer reaction to the reduced opportunity resulting in a reduced participation level and erratic management at best, which will have severe impacts on the charter businesses individually.

Alternative 2. This idea would give the charters the GHL amount but as an allocation so we would be able to roll over any un-caught GHL for use in another year. Under the GHL anything uncaught goes to the commercial fleet in the following year, under an allocation the uncaught fish are ours. One drawback is if we didn't have anything in the bank and we ran over we would have a default in-season closure, and this we couldn't live with. This is one alternative the council will probably refuse.

When you have a harvest limit placed on the entire area, (area 3A runs from the Western end of Kodiak to Yakutat, 2C from there to Canada) then each port and each charter company competes with each other for as much of the total available as they can fish until there is no more, or the season ends. Knowing that we are catching all that the council has ever offered us I see no room for increases by any company (boat), or port within an area. As written the port of Homer would be taking fish from all ports in area 3A if Homer catches more people, or they all catch their full limit each, so under the GHL all ports are impacted even though they may not have been the cause. What if I sell eight boats from Homer and they all go to Juneau, or Seward? Homer has more fish/boat available due to fewer boats, but Juneau now has more boats but fewer fish/boat. These local issues may be expected to be taken care of

through the Local Area Management Plans (LAMP's) but they are long in being developed and may not totally encompass an area so development in an open portion of an area may reduce the opportunity in the closed portions of that area even though restrictions have already been taken. How about the average size of the fish caught in a port being bigger in a year for no reason; will this restrict the other ports, or just the one port? What about pre-sold reservations at one expected bag limit, but before they get here it is now reduced?

Even under Alternative 3. "the range plan" there is still a limited available resource with a larger than needed capacity and the derby is still there. The amount available to us has been misunderstood to be fixed, not floating with the total abundance, but this alternative does reduce our amount either in relation to the commercial/charter ratio and (or) in relation to the total amount available in the given area (2C, 3A). The range doesn't float with the total, it stairsteps down at different triggers so we don't have the annual adjustments but some adjustments when the total goes down. We will continue to see more boats competing for fewer fish making the charterboat industry unstable.

Alternative 4. This is the original idea the council had in 1997 when they passed it. This just puts us under a GHL with any and all restrictions available to hold our catch below the GHL amount. If they choose this plan and implement the restrictions included we will probably see a 1 fish limit as soon as 2001 in all areas.

None of the above alternatives will work without a moratorium on new entry into the halibut charterboat business. As more boats come in and pick up some of the available customers and the historical full-time fleet loses its market share beyond what it needs to be sustained, that full-time operation is lost. As this increases, the fleet profile changes from one of full-time professionals to part-time hobbyists. When the customers can't find an available charter, the guided fishery is diminished. End result, more fish for commercial fishermen to sell.

There seems to be a lot of opposition from the state on moratoriums due to the redirected effort that may occur on less healthy species and the impact this limitation could have on anglers ability to find a charter. The problem of what to do about Salmon guides becomes a state concern also. Moratorium is still in the air but there seems to be much opposition and misunderstanding about what this will do for the industry, customers, and catch.

So none of the Alternatives are real comfortable for us to live with, some are just too restrictive to keep our industry in a marketable commodity; all are unduly restrictive to such a valuable use and for such a small removal. What do we do now? There has never been an opportunity to put a reasonable plan in front of this council because the problem statement (which is their guiding light on this issue) needs to be addressed, and it says we are expanding too fast and too much, taking fish away from them.

I for one am tired of all the meetings, time away from home and for not much in thanks from those who benefit from my efforts. This has not been a one man show by any means, there has always been a good contingent of charter operators at every meeting that had our issue scheduled, their efforts are probably more effective than mine at the Advisory Panel level. We have focused most of our moves to be in front of the council because the AP is too loaded with commercial fishermen

& associates, but when a motion goes before the council and can't get a second from another council person our motion never even gets discussed. This has happened many times these last seven years, along with proposals targeting longliners, but the longliner committee tosses these out. We can't continue to be manning this seat and never getting anything out of it, it's too much to ask of anyone in the industry to go through what I have been going through. We can't be fighting for a GHL increase from now on; we will never get it in this lifetime. So what can we do???

Our choices as I see them: Do we continue to defend our customers' catch as a noncommercial removal and hope to win a recreational allocation, do business as we are, and continue to fight the next attack from other users, or accept a commercial status and move forward on getting into the present IFQ program and make it work for us?

There is talk of looking into the idea of charterboat IFQ so it can be exchanged between the commercial fleet and the charterboats. Originally it was offered to us by the council to "allow us to buy quota from commercial fishermen", but this idea falls short because we should get an initial issue of quota by boat first and then maybe purchase more if you need it, but this was not what they offered because we didn't have an individual catch history that was verified to base our initial issue of quota on.

Now we have two years of logbooks that are required by law, in a short time we will have three or four years of logbooks, and a history of our catch by boat. We have a control date and the 1998 & 1999 logbooks showing your activity and at what level. If you weren't here before June 24, 1998 you don't qualify. If we took a 3 year average of what your logbook reports and used that number as your percentage of the total catch reported on charterboats we have now established your traditional amount of fish caught. Each year this percentage would be

converted to your total poundage of the total poundage available. We would then have our poundage converted to numbers of fish, which would come from the average size charter caught fish in each area (2C & 3A). As the total available increases or decreases so will your number of fish. If you need more, you buy or lease it, if you need less, you can sell or lease your excess. Commercial quota can be converted to charter quota and back so we never have an allocation battle again. It has the potential for ending the allocation problem that the GHL will not correct, the GHL is too low and we will forever be trying to raise it. The IFQ plan can be raised for all we want, and we would remove that same amount of longline effort when we bought commercial quota. For monitoring our quota use we will still have the logbooks, they can be verified at any landing and will keep track of your quota use. This is just an idea at this stage, but I intend to ask the council to develop a discussion paper on its possibility due to new information being available that wasn't before.

Got ideas?, Got E-mail?, drop a note to get on the e-mail list. Thanks for your time, Bob Ward
a-ward@xyz.net.