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### **Council steps back from halibut catch sharing commitment**

Today the Halibut Coalition expressed its deep disappointment with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's action to consider changes to the halibut allocations that were set in 2014 with passage of the hard fought 2C/3A Halibut Catch Share Plan (CSP). The motion keeps open the possibility of another uncompensated reallocation of commercial quota, or IFQs, to charter operators.

The Halibut Coalition calls for calm as the discussion about this action and possible changes to the Catch Share Plan are debated anew in Alaska, Washington, and Oregon coastal communities. Now, members of the commercial fleet, many of whom are saddled with significant debt for their purchased quota shares, are facing new uncertainties that more of these quota shares will be taken away with no compensation.

According to statements on the record, the Council opened this extremely sensitive issue to gain increase understanding of the 'nuances' of reallocation not explicitly described in the current analysis. Council member Cora Campbell pushed back against this action arguing that no new data will emerge to change what we know today, and the action will have "significant human cost" in fishing communities.

"In 2012 the Council committed that the Catch Share Plan ended 20 years of uncompensated reallocation of commercial quota to the charter sector and included a one-way market-based mechanism to allow charter operators to increase harvesting opportunities for the clients by leasing quota," said Linda Behnken, long-term advocate for

Alaska's small boat fishermen. "Evidently paying for quota is an obstacle for charter operators; they prefer to take it and the Council just legitimized that approach by scheduling this analysis. We are deeply disappointed by this action, and by the focus of the motion on relieving stress in the charter sector while remaining virtually silent on existing impacts to the commercial sector. While we urge a calm response, please focus your concern in comments to the Governors of Alaska, Washington, and Oregon, since their Council representatives supported the reallocation alternatives, and be prepared to turn out to testify when the issue comes back before the Council next fall."

Public testimony spanned two days. Of the more than 70 individuals speaking; about 70% supported keeping the charter/commercial catch share allocation as it was adopted in 2012 and implemented in 2014.

The directed halibut fleet and processors in 2C (Southeast Alaska) and 3A (Gulf of Alaska) presented a strong case that the CSP was working to share the conservation burden at low levels of abundance and that uncompensated reallocation should be off the table. Complaints from the charter sector, they said, were not due to shortcomings in the CSP, but the continued low abundance in the halibut stock. The commercial fleet pointed out other remedies — changes to the management process to increase predictability for the charter sector, end of a punitive apportionment agreement with Canada, and positive signs of resource recovery in Gulf of Alaska halibut stocks — that will address the charter sector's demand for more fish. They also pointed to increased use of the Guided Angler Fish (GAF) program which allows leasing from commercial quota holders, the pending Recreational Quota Entity (RQE) program, which allows a charter entity to purchase commercial quota, and adopting charter management measures for two years rather than one, as alternatives available to the Council today.

"The commercial sector delivered clear, focused testimony that described money owed on quota, the effect of reallocation on new entrants to the fishery, and the dependence of community-based fishermen on the halibut resource," said Marc Carrell (Cordova District Fishermen United and longtime 3A halibut fisherman), "That testimony was heard by Council members Cora Campbell, John Jensen, and Kenny Down, who voted against Mr. Mezirow's motion. The Coalition appreciates that these members upheld the Council's previous commitment to ending uncompensated reallocation."

When the CSP was adopted in 2014, charter operators received 125% of their historic catch at low levels of abundance. That additional 25% came from the commercial longline sector. The commercial longline sector was assured at that time that no further uncompensated reallocations would be considered. The Halibut Coalition will continue to work to uphold that commitment.

Bob Alverson, Fishing Vessel Owners Association, commented that “The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has struggled with the allocation between charter and commercial interests for 25 years. This seemed to be resolved when the Council supported the idea that charter interests could purchase commercial quota to augment charter seasons and catch. The NPFMC chose to allow the marketplace to be the arbiter of future allocations. This reconsideration of allocation puts Alaska, Washington, and Oregon Commercial and Charter interests in unnecessarily adversarial positions, which is something previous council members intended to avoid”.

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