

Reported landings of halibut from the Alaska groundfish fishery's Prohibited Species Donation Program: 1998-2011

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Abstract

The amount of landed Pacific halibut caught as trawl bycatch in 2011 under the Prohibited Species Donation program totaled 18,429 pounds (net), based on fish ticket records obtained and compiled from eLandings. This was split between landings from the Bering Sea (11,191 pounds) and the Gulf of Alaska (7,238 pounds). Confidentiality policies prevent reporting many details about these landings. This landed bycatch is a result of incomplete and poor sorting practices at sea. Once offloaded, the fish is acquired by SeaShare (Bainbridge Island, WA) under a permit granted by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The fish is processed into steaks and distributed nationally to food banks. The data summarized from the eLandings data base for 2009 and 2010 were somewhat higher than reported by SeaShare for the same time periods. The differences may result from a combination of fish not meeting human consumption quality standards and thus disposed of during processing, the conversion from processed weight to the standard net weights used by the International Pacific Halibut Commission in tracking removals, or other unidentified sources.

Introduction

Since 1998, SeaShare of Bainbridge Island, Washington has acquired unintentionally-landed dead Pacific halibut bycatch from Alaska groundfish fisheries for donation to hunger relief programs. SeaShare acquires halibut, salmon, and many other species, from processors, and arranges for further processing and subsequent distribution nationwide. The Prohibited Species Donation (PSD) program is one of its sources for seafood and sole source for Pacific halibut. The PSD program was adopted by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) following several years of development and, ultimately, approval by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC). The PSD program had been limited to Dutch Harbor processors since its inception. In 2011, NMFS approved a permit for Gulf of Alaska (GOA) processors.

Program history and information acquisition

The initial program, adopted by the NPFMC in 1998, expired on December 31, 2000. NMFS and IPHC staff conducted a review of the program during 2000 for the purpose of examining the appropriateness of extending the program. The review was discussed with the NPFMC at its June, 2000 meeting and formed the basis of an extension of the PSD program. The extension contains no sunset provision, but does require a review every three years. Initially, the program was limited to shore-based trawl catcher vessels that land in Dutch Harbor. There was neither a limitation on the amount that could be donated nor a requirement that the halibut bycatch originated from specific fisheries. In 2011, NMFS approved a permit enabling the program to acquire landed halibut from GOA processors.

SeaShare has been providing annual reports to IPHC since 1998. The reports have included the weight of donated halibut, based on dock tallies of dressed (eviscerated) fish from Dutch Harbor processors. Beginning in 2008, the reports reflected the weight of final processed product, i.e., steaks. IPHC staff used a product recovery rate (PRR) of 0.79 to convert the product weights back to headed and gutted (net) weights for continuity in reporting (Crapo et al. 1993). This tally did not include any fish determined to be of insufficient quality for human food consumption. The amount of reported halibut ranged from a high of 43,579 pounds in 2001 to a low of 4,475 pounds in 1999 (Table 1).

In 2011, IPHC staff requested data from the eLandings data base for records (Alaska state fish tickets) on landed halibut under the PSD program. The eLandings data base offers a more comprehensive dataset, including quantity, and location of capture of landed halibut, although IPHC and eLandings confidentiality policies prevent reporting certain data. SeaShare had not been contacted for 2011 data as of the date this report was written.

Reports from eLandings

In 2011, IPHC staff became aware of the availability of PSD landings data through eLandings. These data provided a different look at this mortality, as they originated from harvesting records, rather than processing/distributional reports. The eLandings data were compiled from ADF&G fish tickets, which represent individual vessel landings. Information on area of catch, vessel name, date of landing, port, processor, and the number of animals and weight (round) of halibut landed was included. Net weight of landed halibut was determined using a 0.75 round:net conversion rate. These data have been broadly summarized for this report.

The 2011 landings totaled 11,191 pounds (net weight) from the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) fishing and 7,238 pounds from the GOA, for an annual total of 18,429 pounds (Table 2). The total from the Bering Sea is one of the lowest amounts reported since the program began. The amounts for 2009 (17,122 pounds) and 2010 (14,513 pounds) were 20% and 11% higher than those reported by SeaShare (Tables 1 and 2). The differences could be attributed to the landed fish being of insufficient quality for processing or not suitable for human consumption. Additionally, the PRR used to estimate net weight from processed weight may not be accurate for this application.

The eLandings data also provided other information regarding these landings. The number of BSAI vessels landing halibut from their poorly sorted catches ranged from 19-29 during 2009-2011 (Table 3). Only 15 vessels reported landing halibut from the GOA fishing. Also, larger halibut were landed from the BSAI fishing than in the GOA. From 2009 to 2011, the mean weight of halibut from Bering Sea catches ranged from 10-12 pounds (Table 4). In contrast, the mean weight of halibut from 2011 GOA landings was much less (4.2 pounds).

Future work

In light of the information provided by the eLandings data base regarding PSD landings, IPHC staff will investigate reasons for the apparent differences from the information reported by SeaShare during 2009-2010. To aid in the comparison, the standard request to SeaShare for 2011 information will be submitted. Additional characteristics of this catch may also be identified from the eLandings data.

References

Crapo, C. Paust, B., and J. Babbit. 1993. Recoveries and yields from Pacific fish and shellfish. AK Sea Grant, Mar. Adv. Prog. Bull. No. 37.

Table 1. Amount of halibut (pounds, net weight) received and distributed by SeaShare through the National Marine Fisheries Service Prohibited Species Donation program since program inception in 1998. Through 2007, the values are based on dock-side tallies of fish weight. Beginning in 2008, the values are based on finished product (steak) and a recovery rate of 0.79, based on Crapo et al. (1993). Source: Seashare (personal communication).

Year	UniSea	Alyeska	Westward	Icicle	Total
1998	10,498	10,698	--	--	21,196
1999	3,762	714	--	--	4,476
2000	6,534	5,051	6,684	--	18,269
2001	32,318	10,281	980	--	43,579
2002	33,256	718	--	--	33,974
2003	15,737	2,669	--	--	18,406
2004	14,274	1,616	--	--	15,890
2005	27,340	1,946	--	--	29,286
2006	7,415	3,347	--	--	10,762
2007	32,261	2,358	--	--	34,619
2008	27,504	15,871	--	--	43,375
2009	6,887	7,371	--	--	14,258
2010	2,000	9,739	--	1,375	13,114
Total	219,786	72,379	7,664	1,375	301,204

Table 2. Pacific halibut landed under the National Marine Fisheries Service Prohibited Species Donation Program (pounds, net weight) in Alaskan fisheries, by year and region from eLandings records.

Year	Bering Sea	Gulf of Alaska	Grand Total
2009	17,122	-	17,122
2010	14,513	-	14,513
2011	11,191	7,238	18,429
Total	42,826	7,238	50,064

Table 3. Number of vessels and landings, in parentheses, of retained halibut bycatch by year and region, under the National Marine Fisheries Service Prohibited Species Donation Program.

Region/Year	Bering Sea/Aleutian Isl.	Gulf of Alaska
2009	19(415)	-
2010	27(229)	-
2011	29(290)	15(86)

Table 4. Mean weight (pounds, net weight) of halibut landed under the National Marine Fisheries Service Prohibited Species Donation Program, 2009 - 2011.

Region/Year	Bering Sea/Aleutian Isl.	Gulf of Alaska
2009	11.8	-
2010	10.8	-
2011	10.2	4.2