

## Abundance-Based Management of Halibut Bycatch Frequently Asked Questions

### **Why do your boats take so much halibut?**

All fisheries, including the halibut fishery, have bycatch and according to NOAA, Alaska flatfish cannot be fished without a small percentage of bycatch. Groundfish Forum members have worked closely with NOAA Fisheries for over a decade to pioneer modern fishing techniques and innovative practices to reduce bycatch, including deck sorting to minimize halibut mortality. The fleet mandates participation in a cooperative Halibut Avoidance Plan which establishes a performance standard and other incentives to keep bycatch low throughout the year and is supported by 24/7 observer coverage and real-time data collection and monitoring. **We have lowered halibut bycatch by 49% since 2007, and current halibut bycatch is very low at 0.4%.**

### **The directed halibut fishery quota is very low. How can you say that halibut bycatch isn't to blame?**

We understand that the halibut quota is in the low end of its normal range, but **five years of NOAA scientific analysis clearly show that bycatch by our fleet is not the cause**, nor will further reductions remedy low quotas in the directed halibut fishery.

### **Isn't your halibut bycatch destroying the livelihood of halibut fishermen? Won't halibut ABM fix that?**

On the contrary, halibut ABM alternatives won't result in increases in the halibut quota and will come at a huge cost to our fleet and to the states of Alaska and Washington. If the Council adopts any of the current Halibut ABM alternatives, the result would be an additional **\$60 to \$120 million loss to the A80 fleet** annually and millions in losses to state economies. According to Council economists, this bycatch reduction would increase the value of the halibut fishery by **only \$1 to \$2 million**. A comparison of the effects of current Halibut ABM alternatives under Council consideration shows an average halibut crew position would make an additional **\$435 to \$871** per season. The same alternatives result in an **average flatfish crew position losing \$20,884 to \$42,118** per season.

### **Aren't your boats just wasting halibut by throwing it back into the ocean?**

All of our boats deck sort our catch so we can return live halibut back to the ocean. The fish that don't survive are counted as bycatch. By current law, bycatch must be discarded at sea. We don't like to waste these fish and would like the Council to provide an option for utilizing this catch, but current regulations don't allow for that.

### **Doesn't halibut bycatch negatively affect Alaska Native communities?**

Catch allocations for subsistence are taken off the top before commercial harvest levels are set, so the communities that depend on these subsistence fisheries are already protected from variations in halibut abundance. Since 2013, our fleet has voluntarily avoided harvest areas near Western Alaska communities to ensure local access to subsistence halibut. In addition, Alaska Native communities hold quotas in the A80 fisheries that generate an average of \$26 million annually. Some also have ownership in our companies, so negative impacts on our fishery affect them negatively, too.

### **I see that your companies are building multi-million-dollar boats. It's clear you can afford a reduction in halibut bycatch more than a small halibut fisherman can.**

Our fleet is 41 years old on average, so we must update our vessels to provide a safe working environment for our crew. Our investment in new vessels will also provide additional benefits in efficiency and less climate impacts. Our new boats will operate in Alaska for another 40 years, so they represent a long-time commitment to Alaska maritime communities.

