

Alaska fights for their right to fish for halibut

by Bend Weekly News Sources

The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) is issuing a call to action from saltwater fishermen throughout the country in an effort to make their collective voice heard by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC); an organization forged under a U.S./Canadian treaty to manage the halibut biomass in Pacific waters.

Next week, the IPHC is scheduled to hold closed meetings for discussions on the recreational harvesting of halibut off the coast of Alaska. Currently, Alaska's commercial fleets take over 90% of the halibut resource and kill over 12 million pounds, annually, just in wasted bycatch. This, alone, is close to double the amount that sport anglers catch. However, the commercially dominated IPHC is proposing to cut the charter fleet bag limit to one fish per person, crippling Alaska's charter and tourism industry.

"The IPHC's main job is to continually monitor the health of the halibut biomass and then determine how many pounds of halibut can be harvested by the U.S. and Canada in a given year", explained RFA executive director Jim Donofrio. "In the past, the allowable catch for halibut is then managed federally by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) under the control of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act."

The RFA aims to protect Alaska's recreational halibut fishing industry and uphold legislation in the Magnuson Steven Act (MSA) that dictates fisheries management be a transparent process with public input, by urging individuals to voice their concern to Dr. William Hogarth, assistant administrator of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries, Alaskan Senator Ted Stevens, as well as their local senators.

"This proposed action sets a terrible precedent for U.S. fisheries policy", states Greg Sutter of the Alaska Charter Association. "We are currently looking into the legality of this action to insure that no jurisdictional bounds have been overstepped."

Alaska fights for their right to fish for halibut by Bend Weekly News Sources