

29th Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801



Dan Hull, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th, Suite 306
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

April 15, 2015

Re: Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Halibut Bycatch Reduction

Dear Chairman Hull,

As members of the Alaska Legislature with constituencies that include fishermen and families who depend on soundly managed halibut stocks for their wellbeing, we urge the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to take action as soon as possible to lower halibut bycatch limits in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI). Specifically, we ask that the Council adopt a regulation change this June to reduce halibut bycatch limits by 50 percent.

Over the past decade, more than 62 million pounds of halibut has been caught, killed, and discarded as bycatch in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands. During the same period, landings of halibut as the target species have declined from an already alarmingly small 52 percent of the total removals to only 34 percent of removals.

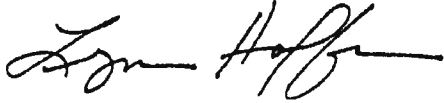
This startling dynamic, in an ever worsening state, has continued for too long.

In 2014, the BSAI trawl fisheries killed and discarded seven times more individual halibut than the directed fishery in the same region landed. This bycatch total was overwhelmingly comprised of juveniles, weighing less than five pounds on average and well below the level of maturity necessary ever to have reproduced. In tagging studies conducted by the International Pacific Halibut Commission, 70 to 90 percent of halibut tagged in the Bering Sea were recovered in the Gulf of Alaska. Hence, the waste allowed in the BSAI is adversely affecting halibut users far beyond the Bering Sea.

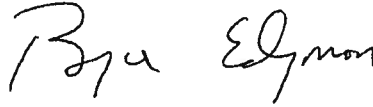
The impacts on Alaskans have been considerable. Conservation measures implemented over the past 15 years to address declining halibut stocks have fallen disproportionately on the backs of halibut fishers all over the state. While the bycatch limit for the BSAI trawl fleet has hardly changed in decades, catch limits for Individual Fishing Quota owners have been cut by 70 percent, and charter fleet harvests have been reduced by 50 percent in some waters.

We urge the NPFMC to carefully consider the effects of halibut bycatch on all Alaskan coastal communities and in June make a 50 percent reduction in bycatch limits in the BSAI to ensure that the directed halibut fisheries across Alaskan waters remain viable.

Sincerely,



Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senate District S



Representative Bryce Edgmon
House District 37



Representative Bob Herron
House District 38



Senator Donny Olson
Senate District T



Representative Neal Foster
House District 39



Senator Dennis Egan
Senate District Q




Representative Cathy Munoz
House District 34



Senator Peter Micciche
Senate District O



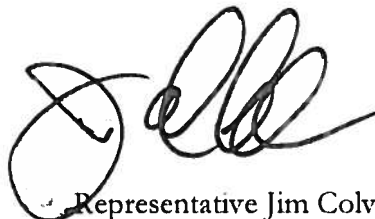
Representative Paul Seaton
House District 31



Representative Johnathan Kreiss-Tomkins
House District 35



Representative Dan Ortiz
House District 36



Representative Jim Colver
House District 9