

# LETTER TO THE MINISTER

February 18, 2000

The Honourable Herb Dhaliwal, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Fisheries and Oceans  
200 Kent Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0E6

Dear Minister,

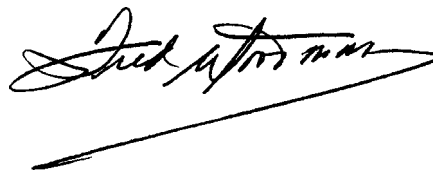
In December, 1999 I notified you that the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (FRCC) had decided to delay its advice to you on Atlantic halibut until February 2000. On January 18, 2000, the Council issued its report to you on *2000 Conservation Requirements for Groundfish Stocks on the Scotian Shelf and in the Bay of Fundy (4VWX), in Sub-Areas 0, 2+3 and Redfish Stocks*. Attached to this letter, I am pleased to provide the FRCC Advice on Atlantic Halibut for 2000/2001.

You will note that the Council held a special consultation with industry to discuss any results which might be available resulting from the joint industry/Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) longline survey. The Council was extremely heartened by the participation of many industry participants at this consultation, and by the input and discussion which resulted. Of the over 100 consultation sessions the FRCC has held, this meeting was one of the best.

The Council fully supports this joint survey and commends the work of industry and DFO scientists in carrying it out: in the words of the DFO scientist in charge "this is the best source of data on Atlantic halibut which we have ever had".

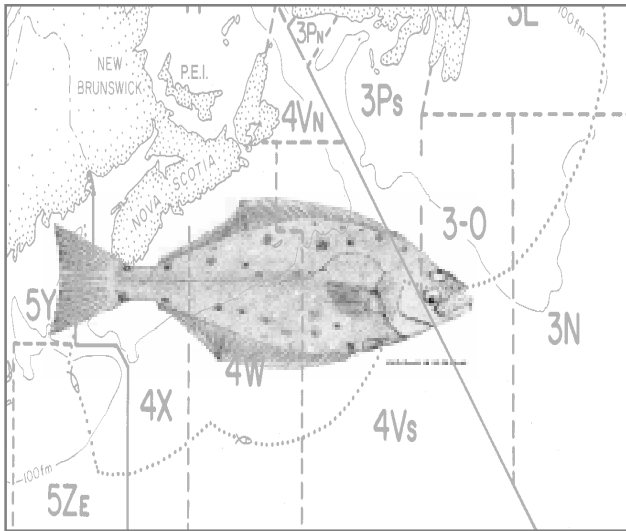
The recommendation from the Council is for a slight increase to the TAC, from the current 850 t, to 1,000t. It is the Council's view that this increase, while not approaching levels requested by industry, recognizes fishermen's observations about this resource, and is not enough to negatively impact the resource.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Woodman", written over a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line that serves as a signature underline.

Fred Woodman, Chairman

# ATLANTIC HALIBUT - 3NOPs4VWX5Zc



## 1999 CONSULTATIONS:

In its January 2000 report, the FRCC reported that: “The Council has decided to defer its recommendations for 2000 on Atlantic halibut until it has had data from the industry/DFO longline survey presented to it. This initiative is too important for the Council to ignore.”

The FRCC held public consultations on this stock in Nova Scotia in Sydney on November 30, 1999, Shelburne on December 1, and Halifax on December 2. The results of the industry/DFO longline survey were presented in workshops in Shelburne on January 20, 2000 and in Halifax on January 27: FRCC members attended these workshops. Following these, the FRCC held a special consultation session in Halifax on February 9. A number of written briefs commented on the state of this resource, and recommended TAC levels for this fishery from a slight increase to the current 850t, up to 1,600t.

Participants in Sydney were critical of the industry/DFO longline survey, reporting that there were survey stations where halibut are known not to be found, as well as a lack of stations in traditional halibut areas (e.g., 4Vn, St. Paul’s area). Participants at consultations also acknowledged the changes initiated in January 2000 to the halibut conversion factor; however, they also criticized the lengthy delay before these changes were finally made.

The special consultation session in Halifax brought forward information that followed an analysis of the second year’s data from the DFO/industry longline

survey. Industry participants were consistent in reporting large numbers of halibut and good catch rates in the commercial fishery, citing these as indications of improved abundance of halibut. Participants also recommended that by-catches caught in the industry/DFO longline survey not be counted against the TACs for these stocks.

## ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

The 1997 Stock Status Report (last full assessment) indicated that:

- Abundance is low compared to previous years; declines have been more evident for the southern Grand Banks than Scotian Shelf.
- Total mortality (fishing and natural) seems to have increased.
- There is a reduced range of sizes in the population.
- Halibut-directed CPUE down since 1988; some indications of increase in 1996.
- “Present restrictive measures should be continued.”

The FRCC continues to note that the Stock Status Report and the information from fishermen are not compatible for this stock. The last assessment for this stock was done in 1997. This assessment, based on the DFO research vessel (RV) survey, indicates that abundance estimates are low and that halibut catches show reduced size ranges. It was noted that restrictive management regulations do not allow one to judge the status of the stock based on commercial catch rates.

Industry participants confirm DFO’s view that the resource status is not accurately reflected by the current RV survey. They report increased abundance in both the commercial portion of the industry/DFO longline survey and in the limited commercial fishery that they are able to prosecute with the available quota. The DFO RV survey does not cover depths beyond 200 fathoms. Industry fishing experience has demonstrated that good catches of large halibut occur in depths from 200-400 fathoms.

In addition, the RV survey does not cover the entire geographic range of this stock, in particular the Bay of Fundy area, and the Grand Banks. Exclusion of the Grand Banks is a key deficiency because it is believed that the larger fish are resident there and their exclu-

Figures are in 000t

Year	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999*
TAC				3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2	1.5	0.85	0.85	0.85	0.85	0.85
Catch	4	3.3	2.6	2.3	1.9	2.1	2.2	1.30	1.2	1.04	0.72	0.79	1.16	0.82	0.81

\*Catch as of Nov. 19/99

1. Figures are from the Integrated Fisheries Management Plan Atlantic Groundfish

sion may overstate the mortality calculation for the resource. Catchability of halibut in the DFO RV survey is also an issue with fishermen since the gear is not well suited to catch halibut.

The Council raised the issues of the adequacy of coverage by the industry/DFO longline survey with DFO scientists. Scientists reported that they are satisfied that the design of the survey adequately addresses these issues. While not all areas of the stock range are covered every year, it is the intent of the survey participants and of DFO Science to sample all areas periodically. The Council also notes that it is encouraged by industry and DFO implementation of the FRCC recommendation to conduct this new survey. It commends these cooperative efforts of the industry and of the scientists.

- 1. The FRCC recommends that the industry/DFO longline survey be continued with sufficient observer coverage to ensure its integrity.**
- 2. The FRCC recommends that aging of the population be given priority.**
- 3. The FRCC recommends that DFO, in consultation with industry, develop an Atlantic-wide protocol to address TAC and commercial quota issues related to removals of targeted species and bycatch species arising from all industry/DFO surveys. Until such a protocol is developed, removals of halibut and bycatch species should continue to be addressed as in the past, i.e. the catches of Atlantic halibut from the industry/DFO longline survey are to be in addition to the TAC.**
- 4. The FRCC recommends that DFO incorporate into the industry/DFO longline survey:**
  - a. initiatives to evaluate mortality/survival rates of halibut caught and released in this fishery; and,**
  - b. initiatives to determine the appropriate size of larger female halibut that might be caught and released as part of a future management plan.**

The Council is, once again, confronted with conflicting views of resource status. In light of the problems in the

DFO RV survey noted above and the observations of industry based on their experience in the commercial fishery, the Council has decided to recommend an increase in the TAC from 850t to 1,000t for 2000/2001. It is the Council's view that this increase, while not approaching levels requested by industry, recognizes fishermen's observations about this resource. The increase is not, in Council's view, enough to negatively impact the resource.

**5. The FRCC recommends that the TAC for 2000/2001 for 3NOPs4VWX5Zc Atlantic halibut be set at 1,000t.**

## HISTORY OF FRCC

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

In November 1993, the Council recommended that the 1994 TAC for 3NOPs4VWX5Zc Atlantic halibut be set at 1,500t as a precautionary measure. The Council also recommended that the mandatory landing provisions be reviewed with the aim of allowing halibut smaller than 81 cm (32 inches) to be released. This was imple-

### COUNCIL'S VIEWS ON STOCK STATUS:

Overall Stock Indicator:	Fair <i>Compared to average</i>
Spawning biomass:	Unknown
Total biomass:	Unknown
Recruitment:	Indications of incoming recruitment
Growth/Condition:	No reliable information
Age structure:	Unknown
Distribution:	Appears to be widely distributed
Recent exploitation:	Unknown

mented in 1994 and remains a critical component of the FRCC recommendation for this stock. In 1994, the Council recommended that the 1995 TAC for 3NOPs4VWX5Zc Atlantic halibut be set at 850t as a precautionary measure. The Council recommended also that mandatory landing provisions be reviewed regarding the discarding of incidental catches of halibut smaller than 32 inches. In November 1995, the Council recommended that the 1996 TAC for Atlantic halibut remain at 850t with the same small halibut release provision.

In October 1996, the FRCC recommended that the 1997 TAC for 3NOPs4VWX5Zc Atlantic halibut be set at 850t, and that the provision for the release of halibut smaller than 81cm be maintained. In addition to this recommendation the Council asked that a joint DFO/industry study be conducted to assist in the overall assessment process, such as appropriate biological sampling, a tagging/movement component, identification of stock sub-components and identification of alternative survey indices. The Council reiterated these recommendations for 1998 and for 1999.

For 1999 the Council also recommended that DFO Science investigate the biological link of Atlantic halibut in 3Pn (not currently included as part of existing management units) to adjacent stocks in management units 4RST and 3NOPs4VWX5Zc.

WRITTEN BRIEFS RECEIVED BY THE  
FRCC FOR ATLANTIC HALIBUT  
IN 3NOPs4VWX5Zc

Scotia Fundy Inshore Fishermen's Association –  
Evan Walters, Executive Director  
(FRCC.99.GR.SF.6)

Inshore Fisheries – Claude d'Entremont  
(FRCC.99.GR.SF.8)

Shelburne County Competitive Fishermen's  
Association – Pam Decker (FRCC.99.GR.SF.9)

Shelburne County Fixed Gear Quota Group –  
Gary Dedrick, President (FRCC.99.GR.SF.10)

Eastern Shore Fishermen's Protective Associa-  
tion (FRCC.99.GR.SF.14)

Halifax West Commercial Fishermen's Associa-  
tion – Sam Elsworth (FRCC.99. GR.SF 17)

<45' Shelburne County Fixed Gear Quota Group  
– Gary Dedrick, President (FRCC.00.GR.AH.1)

Halifax West Commercial Fisherman's Associa-  
tion – Nick Henneberry (FRCC.00.GR.AH.2)