

- ❑ Fish become part of the bag limit of the person originally hooking them.
- ❑ Anglers may not continue to keep fish once they've reached their daily bag limit, unless they have a Proxy Fishing Information Form validated by ADF&G.

Frequently Asked Questions

How old is my halibut?

Females grow faster than males, but, just like people, there is a lot of variation between individual fish. Check the chart for the approximate range of ages for each size.

Length (in.)	Weight (lbs.)	Age of Male	Age of Female
25	7		
30	12	6-12	4-12
35	19		
40	29	10-22	6-15
45	43		
50	60		8-18
55	82		
60	109		10-20
65	141		
70	179		12-23
75	224		
80	277		14-25
85	337		
90	405		
95	483		
100	570		

Length & weight data provided by International Pacific Halibut Commission.
Weight is whole, uncleaned fish.

How do I tell the sex of halibut?

Examine the gonads, which are located on both sides near the bottom of the bony arch behind the gut cavity. In females, the ovaries appear as triangular, hollow pink sacs. In males, the testes appear as solid (not hollow) gray or light brown, rubbery masses of tissue that look like earlobes.

What is "chalky" halibut?

It is not a health hazard to humans. The flesh of chalky halibut is bright opaque white, rather than translucent like normal flesh. When cooked, chalky halibut is drier, but has acceptable flavor and higher oil and protein content.

Chalkiness is not necessarily visible at the time of landing but may develop over a period of hours. It is caused by a buildup of lactic acid, which reduces the ability of flesh to retain water. Important factors include exhaustion, water or air tem-

perature, and handling. Chalkiness is also more prevalent in August. Overall occurrence in Alaska is about 5%.

How much edible meat can I expect to get from a halibut?

This depends somewhat on the skill of the filleter, but your skin-on fillets should be 50-60 percent of the weight of the fish. Don't forget to remove the cheeks, they're great!

How well do halibut survive catch-and-release?

Halibut do not have a swim bladder and do not suffer severely from changes in water pressure. The survival rate of halibut caught using circle hooks and then released in excellent condition (not gaffed!) is believed to be around 95%.

What's wrong with my halibut? It's skinny, has big teeth, and turns to mush when I cook it.

Your "halibut" may in fact be an arrowtooth flounder. They're often confused with small halibut. Arrowtooth flounder have a more pointed head, larger scales, and a longer mouth with numerous needle-like teeth. They turn soft when cooked because heat activates an enzyme in the fish that breaks down the flesh.

What do I do if I catch a tagged halibut?

Halibut are either tagged by the IPHC to study movements, or sometimes tagged by local derby officials. You are not obligated to either keep or release a tagged fish.

If you release a fish tagged by the IPHC, cut off the tag without injuring the fish, and note the location and date. If you keep the fish, leave the tag in the fish until a port sampler has seen your fish, then send the tag, along with length (measured from tip of snout to middle of tail), date, location (lat./long. preferred), depth, sex of the fish, gear type (sport), and port of landing to the IPHC at the address below.

For more information

ALLOCATION OF HARVEST, IFQs:

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

605 West 4th, Suite 306
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252
Voice: (907)271-2809 Fax: (907) 271-2817
www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc

RESEARCH, CATCH LIMITS, LENGTH/WEIGHT CHARTS:

International Pacific Halibut Commission
P.O. Box 95009
Seattle, Washington 98145-2009
Voice: (206) 634-1838 Fax: (206) 632-2983
www.iphc.washington.edu/halcom

PUBLICATIONS, MARINE EDUCATION, RESEARCH:

Alaska Sea Grant Publications
P.O. Box 755040
Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-5040
Toll free order line: (888) 789-0090
www.uaf.edu/seagrant

WEEKLY IN-SEASON FISHING REPORTS, FISHING

LICENSES, REGISTERED CHARTER LISTS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Various locations statewide, or
Southcentral Region Sport Fish Information Center
333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, Alaska 99518
Voice (907) 267-2218 Fax: (907) 267-2424
www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/statewide/html/sf_home.htm

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game administers all programs and activities free from discrimination on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, pregnancy, parenthood, or disability; administers all programs and activities in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.

If you believe you have been discriminated against or if you desire further information please write to ADF&G, P.O. Box 25526, Juneau, AK 99802-5526; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4040 N. Fairfield Drive, Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 or O.E.O., U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington DC 20240.

For information on alternative formats for this and other department publications, please contact the department ADA Coordinator at (voice) 907-465-4120, (TDD) 907-465-3646, or (FAX) 907-465-2440.



The Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Region II
Division of Sport Fish
Marine Waters
Sport Fishing Opportunity

Pacific Halibut

Hippoglossus stenolepis



Lifecycle, management, sport fishing information, and Frequently Asked Questions

Alaska's Halibut

Where to Find Them

Halibut are found throughout most of the marine waters of Alaska — as far north as Nome, along the Aleutian Chain, and throughout the waters of the southeastern Alaska panhandle.

Halibut are usually on or near the bottom over mud, sand, or gravel banks. Most are caught at depths of 90 to 3,600 feet.

Life Cycle

Halibut spawn at depths of 600 to 1,500 feet from November through March. Although maturation age varies, about half of male halibut are sexually mature by 8 years of age, while half of the females are mature by about age 11. Female halibut release ½ to 4 million eggs, depending on the size of the fish.

About 15 days later, the eggs hatch and the larvae drift with deep ocean currents. In the Gulf of Alaska, the eggs and larvae drift in a northward and westward direction. As the larvae mature, they move higher in the water column and ride the surface currents to shallower, more nourishing coastal waters.

Eye Migration

The larvae start life in an upright position like other fish, with an eye on each side of the head. When the larvae are about one inch long and about 6 months old, the left eye moves over the snout to the right side of the head. At the same time, the coloration on the left side of the body fades. The halibut end up with both eyes on the pigmented (olive to dark brown) upper side of their body, while their underside is white. These young halibut settle to the bottom in shallow, nearshore areas.

Diet

Halibut feed on plankton during their first year of life. Young halibut (1-3 years old) feed on small shrimp-like organisms and small fish. As halibut grow, fish make up a larger part of their diet. Be-

sides pollock, sablefish, cod, and rockfish, large halibut also eat octopus, herring, crabs, clams, and smaller halibut.

Migration

Juvenile halibut migrate in an easterly and southerly direction, counterbalancing the northwesterly drift of eggs and larvae. Halibut tagged in the Bering Sea have been caught as far south as the coast of Oregon, a migration of over 2,000 miles.

Adult halibut also move between shallow waters and deep waters, depending on the time of year. In the fall, mature fish begin to move to deeper offshore areas in order to spawn in January. In order to protect spawning fish, sport fishing for halibut is therefore closed in that month. They return to nearshore feeding areas in early summer. It's not yet clear if all halibut return to the same areas to spawn or feed.

Size and Age

Halibut are the largest of the flatfishes, occasionally exceeding 400 pounds. The state sport fishing record is 459 pounds, caught in 1996 out of Unalaska Bay.

Female halibut grow faster and are typically larger than males of the same age. Males greater than 100 pounds are uncommon. Halibut can reach

55 years of age, but most halibut taken in the sport fishery are 5-15 years old. Halibut age is estimated by counting growth rings laid down in the fish's otolith, a bony structure in the inner ear.

Federal Halibut Fishery Management

Halibut fisheries have been managed since 1923 by a treaty between Canada and the United States. The treaty established the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), which is charged with assessing the stock and setting allowable catches to provide for optimum yield of the halibut stock. Government representatives vote annually on quotas and other conservation measures, after getting input from fishing and processor industry representatives.

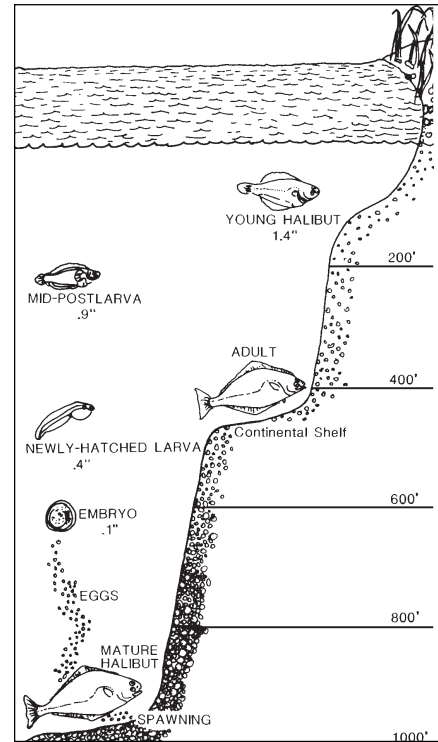
The North Pacific Fishery Management Council was established by Congress in 1976 to oversee management of Alaska's federal fisheries. The Council is headquartered in Anchorage. Once the IPHC has set the allowable halibut catches for each area in Alaska, it is up to the Council to apportion the poundage between sport, commercial, and subsistence users.

ADF&G collects sport fishery data and provides it to the IPHC and the Council to help them in making management and allocation decisions.

You can ensure that management agencies are using the best possible information by responding to surveys, providing accurate information if interviewed by fishery technicians, and by allowing your fish to be measured.

Sport Fishing for Halibut -- Tackle

Stout tackle is preferred for these large, strong fish. Most sport anglers use a heavy action, 5-6 foot rod with a reel capable of holding up to 300 yards of 60-80 pound test line. Use modern, small-diameter lines to minimize stretch and drag when fishing deep, or in heavy currents. Most anglers use large circle hooks baited with herring and fished on the bottom with cannonball weights up to 36 oz. on a slider. Halibut eat almost anything



they can catch, so jigging near the bottom with artificial lures or hooks baited with octopus or whole herring is also effective. You can also use the head, tail, fins, and/or viscera (but only these parts) of sport-caught fish as bait.

When to Fish

Success rates vary widely from vessel to vessel and from day to day, but good catches can be expected in nearshore waters mid-May through mid-September. Many believe the best fishing is just before, during, and after high slack tide. This is the easiest time to keep bait on the bottom.

Halibut Charters

Weather and tides are always major factors, but charter fishing often provides more success than unguided fishing. Although ADF&G cannot recommend a particular charter, we do maintain a listing of registered guiding businesses on our website at www.sf.adfg.state.ak.us/statewide/sfguides/html/index.cfm

Other good sources of information are local chambers of commerce and charter boat associations. You could also search the Internet for booking information.

Full-day trips are the norm, but many operations offer half-day trips at a reduced rate. Bait and tackle are generally provided. Processing and shipping of your catch is based on weight, and is usually extra.

You should always be prepared for a cool, damp day on the water. Wear layers of good outdoor materials such as wool or fleece. Bring rain gear or a waterproof shell for rain and spray. Long underwear and light gloves are a good idea also.

Brief Summary of Halibut Regulations

- All anglers need a fishing license, unless they're under 16.
- Open season: February 1–December 31.
- The bag limit is 2 fish daily and 4 in possession, no size limits.

Continued...