

Fisheries Policy Practicum
Final Paper 2-3-16

The overall experience from the Fisheries Policy Practicum provided a much deeper understanding of the many aspects of just one fishery. Combining the knowledge and experience that I received while taking this course with other courses and general personal experience, I feel that I have come away with a more comprehensive understanding how many aspects are required to make a fishery work effectively.

The first thing that stood out the most was how many varied interests were involved in the fishery. From scientists, to commercial fisherman, processors, subsistence fisherman, and sports and charter fisherman. The people that were most impacted were there to voice their opinions, which showed the groups working together in amazing ways.

One the same page, I felt that the commissioners could have responded more to the public. In the opening day, subsistence fisherman from an island community in the Bering Sea gave information on their community and essentially requested more surveys for their area. I felt their presentation and willingness to attend the meeting and present their side was impressive. However, I feel the response was less appreciative; simply it was stated that the availability of such surveys was limited. I felt that while the subsistence fishermen were not being ignored, proper consideration of their objectives was not being taken. Also, for many of the regulatory proposals, commissioners did not discuss or did not acknowledge the proposals. This seems contrary to the educational and cooperative nature of the commission, and seemed to me to be a lack of communication to those making the proposals; if the commissioners were not willing to consider these proposals a short explanation would help those making them understand why and perhaps feel more validated that their thoughts were not ignored.

Other aspects of the commission meeting that I observed included the subsistence report by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. What I thought was interesting was first the response from subsistence fishing in reporting how many and what size fish were caught, which seemed to be a very high percentage. The commission commented on this, with the response being that the survey is short and those who fish for halibut as subsistence care about continuing the program. I also thought that the lack of funding for the program (which consisted of a postage paid one-page survey to halibut subsistence card holders) was limited and may or may not continue in the future due to budget issues for the state.

Another point of interest I observed was the report by California. The length of the fishing season for halibut was only 57 days this year, while previously it was much longer (in the 150's). The commission asked about the effects of El Niño, to which the representative from California answered there hadn't been much.

This raised questions I had been wondering myself, as to how flexible the stock assessments were to the population of halibut being affected by increases or decreases in non-human predation, mortality events (such as oil spills), and climate change. I also wondered how those sorts of events would impact the fishery.

The question of tagging halibut was also extremely interesting. While many ideas are provided, it seems that most everyone from the commissioners to the fisherman were asking for more data especially on the movement of halibut. The request for information from everyone was impressive, especially that those most interested in the halibut movement weren't necessarily the commissioners, but fishermen.

One of the last things that struck me was the very brief mention of reducing albatross bycatch in the halibut longline fishery. I was impressed by this, but I had been wanting more information. Having taken Marine Ornithology just two years ago, I knew that there had been issues with this. I overheard two longline fishermen briefly discussing halibut on their lines, but did not hear the full conversation. While this is likely not the most important aspect of the fishery, I was extremely interested in it. While numerous interests compete and make proposals to the commission, I felt that interests in conservation of other species were less represented, which I think would be to the benefit of the commission to consider.

Prior to the meeting, I researched several proposals being made to the commission. One proposal from the Commercial Halibut Fisherman of Alaska was of particular interest. The proposal suggested that a maximum size of 60 inches for Pacific Halibut be adopted by the commission to protect spawning biomass. The commission made no comment and took no action regarding a maximum size limit on Halibut. I feel that while no decision was made, at least a reason as to why the commission would not consider this could have been provided. Logical reasons could be assumed; for instance, allowing large halibut to be captured could mean that fewer fish are needed to fill a quota in pounds, which would allow the smaller fish to continue growing.

The experience provided me with a much more detailed idea of what goes into a fishery, not only from what I saw during the meeting, but from knowledge gleaned from other courses. It seems that fisheries are more multifaceted, with no single fishery being cut and dry, and no other species needing consideration. This also shows how interconnected the species in the ocean actually are.