

721-19-8
WAF/IARMEMORANDUM

Re Modified Halibut Treaty.

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1.- While the annual total catch of halibut by the Canadian and United States fleets is being maintained at about 55,000,000 pounds per annum, such is possible only by constantly increasing intensity of fishing and extension of the fishery farther west. The fishery had its inception off Cape Flattery at the entrance to Juan de Fuca Strait in 1888. It was rapidly extended northwards, the best fishing grounds being found in Hecate Strait. These also produced the finest quality of halibut. By 1910 the fishery had extended as far north as Cape Ommaney, southwestern Alaska, about 600 miles north of Juan de Fuca Strait. It has now been extended to more than 1,200 miles farther west to beyond the Shumagin Islands, but no more fish are being taken on the 1,800 miles of coast than were being caught on the 600 miles in the earlier days of the fishery. Also, the catch on the older grounds, south of Cape Ommaney, has decreased from over 50,000,000 pounds in 1910 to about 20,000,000 pounds. Moreover to make this diminished catch much more intensive fishing is necessary. For instance, a unit of gear that on the older grounds would catch 300 pounds of fish in a given time now catches less than 50 pounds.

2.- In the light of these facts, it was evident that if something were not done to control the situation, the commercial exhaustion of this great fishery was in sight. It was this fact that brought about the Halibut Treaty of March 2nd, 1923. This Treaty embraced two main provisions,-

1.- An annual close time of three months extending from November 16th to February 15th following, both days inclusive, to last for at least three seasons when it might be changed by special agreement.

2.- The appointment of a Commission to make a thorough investigation into the life history of the halibut and to submit recommendations as to the regulation of the fishery that seem necessary for its preservation and development.

3.- The Commission reported at the end of the three year period. The substance of its recommendations being,-

(a) That the annual close time should be extended so as to begin November 1st in each year, and that authority should be given for further changes as experience might show to be necessary, by authority of the two Governments.

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W.L. Mackenzie King Papers
Memoranda & Notes

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