



PRESS RELEASE

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 11

FOR RELEASE AT 12 noon EST,
MONDAY, MARCH 2, 1953

Representatives of the Governments of Canada and of the United States today signed in Ottawa a Convention for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the Northern Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea.

The Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. L.S. St. Laurent, presided at the ceremony and the new Convention was signed on behalf of Canada by the Minister of Fisheries, the Hon. James Sinclair, and the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Hon. Hugues Lapointe, and on behalf of the United States of America, by the Charge d'Affaires a.i. of the United States in Ottawa, the Hon. Don C. Bliss, and the Special Assistant for Fisheries and Wildlife to the Under-Secretary of State, the Hon. William C. Herrington.

The Convention was signed on the thirtieth anniversary of the signature of the first Halibut Fisheries Convention between Canada and the United States of America, which was also the first bilateral treaty signed on behalf of Canada by a Canadian plenipotentiary, the late Rt. Hon. Ernest Lapointe, father of one of the signers of the present Convention.

(Background information is attached)

BACKGROUND NOTES ON THE SIGNING OF THE
CONVENTION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND
CANADA FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE HALIBUT
FISHERY OF THE NORTHERN PACIFIC OCEAN AND
THE BERING SEA

The North Pacific Halibut Convention signed in Ottawa today (Monday, March 2) to replace the Halibut Convention of January 29, 1937, is the third revision of the Convention of March 2, 1923, for Securing the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the North Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea.

The signing of the present Convention on this thirtieth anniversary of the first Halibut Fisheries Convention with the United States recalls the fact that the latter was the first formal international agreement signed for Canada by its own plenipotentiary alone. Prior to 1923 several multilateral treaties had been signed by both Canadian and United Kingdom plenipotentiaries on behalf of Canada.

The first treaty in which a Canadian participated as co-signer with a United Kingdom representative was the International Radio Telegraph Convention of 1912, which was signed on Canada's behalf jointly by Mr. G.J. Desbarats of Canada and Mr. H. Babbington Smith of Britain. In 1914 a Canadian again acted as co-signatory when Mr. Alex Johnston, Deputy Minister of Marine, signed the Convention on Safety of Life at Sea.

A further example which has been given considerable prominence was the Canadian co-signature with United Kingdom plenipotentiaries of the Treaty of Versailles. This treaty was signed for Canada by the Hon. C.J. Doherty, Minister of Justice, and the Hon. A.L. Sifton, Minister of Customs, as the second Canadian plenipotentiary, as well as by the Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George and other British representatives on behalf of the British Empire.

THE INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

The Convention between Canada and the United States of America for the preservation of the halibut fishery of the North Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea was first negotiated in 1923. It was revised in 1930 and again in 1937 and during the past three years negotiations have taken place between the two countries which have led to the present revisions.

The change in name, from "The International Fisheries Commission" to the "International Pacific Halibut Commission", is to enable ready identification and to distinguish the Commission from other fishery commissions on which Canada and the United States are represented.

The original treaty provided a close season and established a commission of four - two from each country - to investigate and recommend to the two governments measures for restoring the dwindling stocks of halibut. In 1930, powers of making regulations subject to approval of the two governments were bestowed on the Commission. These powers were further extended in the 1937 revision. In the present revision the number of commissioners has been increased from four to six - three from each country. The reason is that in the United States, unlike in Canada, fishery jurisdiction is vested in each state and the federal Government only acquires some jurisdiction by virtue of a treaty made with another country. In this case the United States wanted to give Alaska representation on the Commission. The other two United States Commissioners represent the federal Government and the industry at large.

Under the new treaty, the Commission has power to establish more than one open season. There was some doubt as to the Commission's power to do this under the former treaty. The granting of this power was considered necessary in order to allow the Commission to extend fishing over more than one period of time. The scientists of the Commission advanced the hypothesis that during a concentrated short season, some fishing grounds might be under-exploited. The experiment of dividing up the season will be useful to determine to some extent whether this hypothesis is correct.

Under the former treaty, the Commission had power to limit or prohibit the incidental catch of halibut taken by vessels fishing for other species during the close season only. Additional power is now being given to the Commission so that it has the right also to regulate such incidental catch during the open season.

The first treaty limited the Commission's powers to regulate the fishery by a three-month close season and this was ineffective in stemming the decline. Evidence of the success of the Commission's work following the second revision of the Convention is shown in the increase in Canadian halibut landings. During the years that intervened between 1932 and 1952, the Canadian halibut fishery increased its total annual yield about four-fold - from 6,500,000 pounds to 24,500,000 pounds. The landed value of the 1952 Canadian catch, including livers and viscera, was about \$4,200,000 or 20 times the 1932 value.

The total Canadian and United States catch in 1952 from the areas under regulation was 62,282,000 pounds, the largest catch in 37 years.

When the Commission was first established evidence of over-fishing was apparent. Since that time it has regulated the areas to be fished, and changed the quota for areas as it seemed advisable at the time. The Commission established nursery areas where fishing was completely prohibited, and also set quotas for the entire fishery.

Present members of the Commission are Mr. George R. Clark, Assistant Deputy Minister of Fisheries, Ottawa; Mr. George Nickerson, Prince Rupert, B.C.; Mr. Milton C. James, Washington, D.C.; and Mr. Edward W. Allen, Seattle, Washington.

Dept. of Fisheries,
February 28, 1953.

INTERNATIONAL (HALIBUT)
FISHERIES COMMISSION

The International Fisheries Commission regulating the halibut fishery of the North American side of the Pacific Ocean was established in 1923 by treaty between Canada and the United States. It consists of four commissioners --- two from each country. The commissioners serve without salary while the expenses of administration and investigation are divided between the two countries.

Its original purpose was to eliminate fishing during the halibut spawning season from November to February and to undertake an intensive investigation into the life history of the halibut. As a result of the recommendations of the Commission, a new treaty was concluded in 1930 which set up regulatory power to rebuild the fishery. Included in the Commission's responsibilities was the power to set a catch limit for halibut in any area along the coast.

Historical Background

The year 1888 marked the beginning of the commercial halibut fishery on the West Coast. The completion that year of transcontinental railroads opened eastern markets, especially Boston, to Pacific halibut. From a catch of 1,500,000 pounds in that year the take increased steadily until 1908. Approximately 50,000,000 pounds annually were taken from then on.

To achieve this production the industry had to use more efficient equipment with bigger and stronger ships. Diesel engines reduced costs considerably so that it was possible to make distant fishing a profitable operation. Even with the increased fishing effort there were fluctuations of millions of pounds from year to year.

Owing to the character of halibut which live along the ocean bed and because of the uneven bottom of the fishing grounds, ground lines are most effective for halibut fishing. The unit of gear, which is the amount of gear that can be easily operated by one fisherman, is known as a "skate". It consists of six fairly heavy ground lines each about 50 fathoms long and to each of which, at 13-foot intervals, five-foot lines are attached which carry a single hook at the end. At one time fishing was conducted from dories but they became outmoded and finally were prohibited in the fishery. With the skate as a measure of efficiency it was shown that where formerly the average catch per skate was several hundreds of pounds the catch had fallen to under a hundred pounds. In addition, where formerly the fishermen were able to get their fish in a 600 mile area, the fishery now covered an area of almost 1,800 miles.

Effects of Regulation

When the Commission was first established the fishery had fallen off considerably. Evidence of over-fishing was apparent. A much greater fishing effort was required to

bring in approximately the same amount of fish. It was relatively easy to establish a unit of catch as the fishing method was standard throughout the industry.

Since its inception the Commission has regulated the areas to be fished, changing the quota for each area as seemed advisable at the time. It established nursery areas where fishing was completely prohibited. It set a quota for the entire fishery which at present averages about 54,000,000 pounds. It does not interfere with the rate of fishing.

Summary

The International Fisheries Commission seems to be successfully achieving its purpose -- the gradual rebuilding of the halibut supply to a higher level of productivity. The Commission's achievements have shown what can be accomplished when two countries co-operate fully to reach a common goal.

The question of port privileges has been a consideration since the Commission was first established. Formerly the two Governments had to pass enabling legislation each year to renew the agreement. However, in March 1950 an international convention was signed allowing reciprocal port privileges for halibut fishing vessels on the West Coast. Instruments of ratification were exchanged later in 1950 and brought the Convention into force. As a result Canadian and U.S. halibut fishermen are assured of yearly reciprocal privileges in the landing of catches for trans-shipment, and obtaining supplies, repairs and equipment.