



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF THE COORDINATOR OF FISHERIES

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The Pacific halibut fleet, including hundreds of high seas vessels, will begin its annual visits to the banks at midnight, April 15, when the season opens, according to the Office of the Coordinator of Fisheries.

This year, American and Canadian fishermen will be allowed to take 50,500,000 pounds of halibut--a million pounds more than last year. Quotas are set by the International Fisheries Commission which was set up to protect this choice and valuable species.

The Pacific halibut is a giant flounder. Commercial fishermen are allowed to take them when they weigh a little more than five pounds but with age they become much larger. Males rarely grow to more than 40 pounds but females weighing over 400 pounds are on record.

The halibut catch is now carefully limited due to the fact that overfishing had materially depleted many of the banks. The halibut **grows** to commercial size in about five years but it does not **spawn** until its twelfth year and too many fish had been taken before they were of spawning age.

Like other flatfish, the halibut is one-sided. Shortly after it hatches, it looks very much like any other fish, but as it grows it begins to swim on its side and the eye on the lower side migrates to the upper side. The upper side of the halibut is deeply pigmented; the lower is white.

The halibut is a "bottom" fish; it feeds near the floor of the sea. No commercial fish is caught in deeper water. It is caught with lines set at depths ranging from 300 to a little more than a thousand feet. To the long bottom line are attached a number of short lines, about five feet long and set from 9 to 15 feet apart. This is called a "skate". Hooks are ordinarily baited with herring.

Like the Atlantic halibut, to which it is closely related, the Pacific halibut is found in the general areas where ocean currents from the south meet Arctic currents. It is almost always found in water with temperature ranging from 37 to 47 degrees Fahrenheit. In the Pacific, this limits the area in which it is found to a rough crescent beginning off the northwest coast of the United States and continuing around south of the Alaska peninsula. They are also found, in smaller numbers, near Japan.

Formerly the fish was largely marketed fresh. Now larger quantities are frozen and are available most of the year.