

# Pacific Halibut

BC's First Fishery with Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Certification

**SPECIES**

Pacific Halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*)

**OTHER NAMES**

Halibut

**ABOUT**

Pacific halibut belong to a family of flounders called *Pleuronectidae* and are found along the continental shelf in the North Pacific and Bering Sea. They have flat, diamond-shaped bodies that are compressed laterally. Pacific halibut are the largest of all flatfish and can reach 2.4 metres (8 feet) in length and over 272 kg (600 lbs). Fishing is primarily in offshore areas of the British Columbia (BC) coast using longline gear. Market weight for halibut is between 9-90 kg (20-200 lbs).



Fresh halibut meat is sparkling white and firm. It is a lean, mild tasting fish whose firm meat holds together well.

**STOCK STATUS**

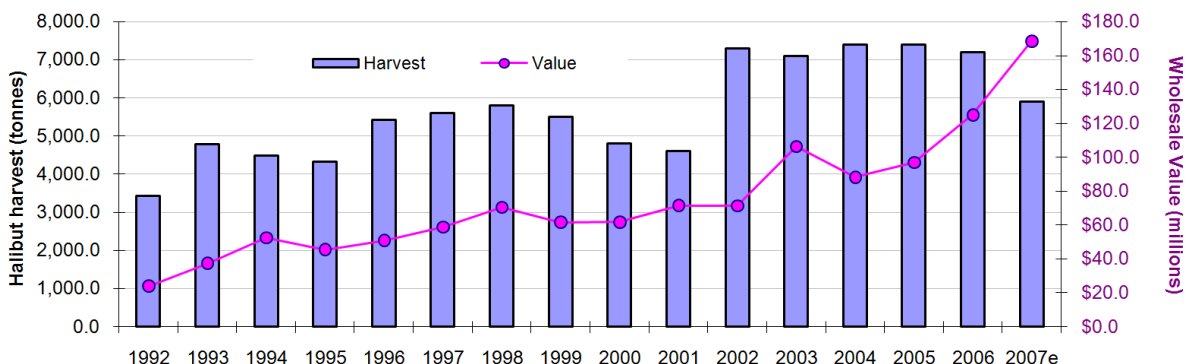
Stocks are considered reasonably stable and healthy but have declined due to lower recruitment than previous years (*DFO - Fisheries Management*).

**MANAGEMENT**

BC's halibut fishery is managed by the federal Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) under the new Integrated Groundfish program (*See: Integrated Groundfish Information Sheet*) that was put in place April 2006. The objective of the integrated groundfish program is to improve stock management through bycatch monitoring, reduced discarding, and requiring harvesters to be accountable for all catch. The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) establishes BC's quota. DFO assigns individual transferable vessel quotas (ITQs) to each holder of a category "L" licence. 100% dockside and onboard monitoring and hail-out/hail-in are required (*DFO - Fisheries Management*).

**PRODUCT VALUE**

Harvest is steady and the wholesale value has been increasing: 5,900 tonnes at \$168.5 million in 2007 (*BC Seafood Industry Year in Review*).



e: estimate

**LIFE HISTORY**

Pacific halibut have flat, diamond-shaped bodies that are compressed laterally with both eyes located on the right (upper) side of the head. Pigmentation varies from olive to dark brown or black with lighter, irregular blotches on the “upper” side, while the “underside” is white with occasional blotching.

Halibut are strong swimmers and can migrate long distances. However, most adult fish tend to remain on the same grounds, making only a seasonal migration from the more shallow summer feeding grounds to deeper spawning grounds in winter. They are carnivorous and their diet includes cod, sablefish, pollock, rockfish, sculpins, Arrowtooth flounder, and other flatfish. Halibut are occasionally eaten by marine mammals, but are rarely found as prey for other fish.

Pacific halibut enter the commercial fishery at about 8 years old. Most males are mature by the time they are eight years old, whereas the average age of maturity for females is about 12 years.

The major Canadian spawning sites include Cape St. James, Langara Island (Whaleback), and Frederick Island. Other reported spawning locations include Goose Islands, Hecate Strait, and Rose Spit. Spawning concentrations also occur in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska.

**PRODUCTS**

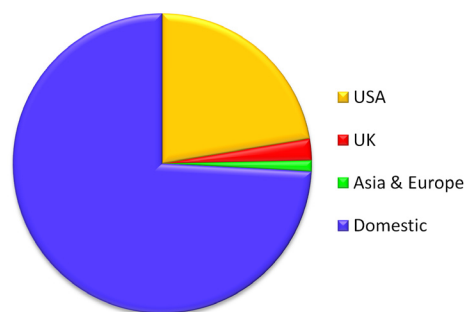
Pacific halibut is available fresh or frozen as whole fish, steaks, boneless fillets and roasts, and cheeks.

**PRODUCT MARKET**

Approximately 25% of Pacific halibut from BC is exported. Most of the exported halibut is sold to the United States and the balance is sold to European markets.

**MARKET TREND**

There is a general worldwide interest in sourcing whitefish products, which provides great opportunities for the BC industry to diversify. BC halibut received MSC certification in September 2009.

**LINKS**

DFO - Fisheries Management Plans: [www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/ops/fm/fishmgmt\\_e.htm](http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/ops/fm/fishmgmt_e.htm)

BC Seafood Industry Year in Review: [www.env.gov.bc.ca/omfd/reports/index.html](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/omfd/reports/index.html)

International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC): [www.iphc.washington.edu/halcom/Default.htm](http://www.iphc.washington.edu/halcom/Default.htm)

Pacific Halibut Management Association (PHMA): [www.phmana.org](http://www.phmana.org)

BCSeafood.ca: [www.bcseafood.ca/index.php](http://www.bcseafood.ca/index.php)

Fish and Seafood Online: <http://www.ats-sea.agr.gc.ca/sea-mer/index-eng.htm>

Marine Stewardship Council: <http://www.msc.org/>