

Ardent Angler for 05/13/09.

Readers of the May 1st edition of the *Courier Islander* may have read a letter from Jake vander Heide, president of the Pacific Halibut Management Association (PHMA), regarding an earlier column of mine in the *North Islander* about the current halibut allocation policy. Those who haven't seen his letter can find it by accessing the *CI* website.

Mr. vander Heide's letter deserves a response because, apart from anything else, he finishes up by asserting that my column is a "one-sided vested interest diatribe" containing "twisted distortions" and that regarding the halibut allocation policy "that it is the recreational sector that has it wrong".

After stating who he and the PHMA are, Mr. vander Heide starts by emphasizing that I am part of what he describes as the "commercial recreational sector" and as such I have a vested interest and am not an "independent by-stander" in this debate. First and foremost I am a keen angler personally, but I have never hidden the fact that I make part of my living as a fishing guide. However, that occupation is simply one of many in the recreational fishery sector that function as a service-provider to those anglers seeking a particular level of experience while pursuing their recreation. Importantly, being a guide or any other recreational fishery service-provider confers no additional fishing harvest benefits beyond those available to every recreational fishing license holder.

Consequently, I am one of the 99.9% of Canadians who don't own a commercial halibut license and quota and who collectively, by government policy, are currently limited to no more than 12% of a supposedly common property resource. In contrast, Mr. vander Heide is one of the several hundred commercial quota holders who have access to 88% of the halibut total allowable catch, the original recipients of which were awarded their valuable quota for free by government, for them to actively fish, lease out or sell as they please. I leave it to the reader to decide who is really the vested interest in this discussion.

Mr. vander Heide states that from my perspective "Commercial fishermen have it wrong because they produce food for Canadians and provide jobs and incomes for British Columbians." This assertion is simply untrue and without any basis of fact. In contrast, I have written that I support Canada harvesting every pound of halibut available to it each year and that even in years of lower abundance the recreational fishery would only be able to catch a minority share. Who else apart from the commercial sector would be able to catch the millions of pounds of available halibut?

He also comments on the relative value of halibut caught in the commercial and recreational fisheries. I would agree that because of the nature of the fishery developing a precise figure for the value of recreationally caught halibut is all but impossible, all the same an approximate value can be readily calculated. Fishing for halibut is

thought to account for 20% of the coast wide effort in the marine recreational fishery and so by assigning that portion of the estimated overall economic value of the fishery divided by the estimated halibut catch in pounds an approximate value is determined.

Government has never rejected the figure of \$18.63 per pound put forward by the Sport Fishing Advisory Board (SFAB) and earlier this year even the PHMA calculated the value of recreationally caught halibut as \$8.56 per pound. The SFAB has used last years average landed value of commercially caught halibut of \$3.60 per pound and, while it thinks this number should be higher, the PHMA has not offered a competing statistic.

Rather than enter into an interminable debate about exact values, it seems to me that the important point is that a pound of halibut caught in the recreational fishery is worth more than when caught in the commercial fishery. That being the case, the question needs to be asked again - what is the public policy basis for arbitrarily limiting the recreational fishery for halibut to a 12% catch ceiling?

This is not a question that DFO managers should have to answer because this was a political decision made by politicians. The current federal government has this year reiterated its support for a decision made by an earlier administration, but I think Canadians are entitled to an understanding as to why. I note again that John Duncan has declined several requests of mine to provide just such an explanation even as many of his Vancouver Island North riding constituents are struggling with the consequences of this allocation policy in the absence of a halibut conservation problem.

Perhaps I'm incredibly naïve, but I'd like to think that governments actually mean what they say. In a document entitled "Recreational Fisheries in Canada – An Operational Policy Framework" DFO states that "Further consideration will be given to increased or priority access for recreational use under the concept of "best use" of the resource, after obligations to First Nations are met". It should be understood that the 88/12% commercial/recreational halibut catch sharing is calculated after First Nations Food, Social and Ceremonial needs are accounted for.

DFO helpfully describes "best use" in its Atlantic Fishery Policy Review as "Best use decisions concern access and allocation of fisheries resources among different uses e.g. commercial fishing, aquaculture, recreational fishing, etc. They also involve the determination of the particular uses of a fisheries resource that will generate the greatest possible public good or best serve the interests of all Canadians."

How these statements can be considered consistent with the current reality, whereby government has effectively privatized 88% of a supposedly common property fisheries resource and is thus ensuring lower social and economic benefits to Canada from the available halibut harvest continues to be a mystery to me.

If government representatives can't explain the benefits of this policy it

needs to be ended, and quickly.