

## TOPICS COVERED IN THIS NEWS BULLETIN INCLUDE:

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- **COVID-19 PANDEMIC – REALITIES - PROTOCOLS - OPPORTUNITIES**
- **FRASER RIVER CHINOOK (WRITE A LETTER TO MINISTER JORDAN)**
- **BIG BAR SLIDE UPDATE**
- **2020 HALIBUT SEASON**

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## NOTABLE CALENDAR EVENTS

- APR 16      SFAB GROUND FISH SHELLFISH WORKING GROUP – ONLINE MTG
- APR 17–18   SFAB MAIN BOARD MEETING – ONLINE MTG
- MAY 1      ROCKFISH AND LINGCOD OPEN IN FMA 18, 19 AND 20-5 TO 20-7
- JUNE 1      POSSIBLE DFO APPROVED CHANGES TO FRASER CHINOOK MANAGEMENT
- JUNE 19 -21 BC FAMILY FISHING WEEKEND (LICENSE FREE THREE-DAY EVENT)
- AUG 15      SVIAC 2020 “KMC” SALMON CHALLENGE ... at CHEANUH MARINA

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC – REALITIES - PROTOCOLS - OPPORTUNITIES

The far-reaching disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has not only brought about uncertainty in our day-to-day way of lives, but also to our fisheries here in Southern British Columbia.

With as many as one hundred and eighty-four countries struggling to contain the spread of this horrid scourge, those of us on Vancouver Island ought to be thankful as we seem to have, so far, avoided the worst of the contagion and can at least still go fishing.

To date (30 April 2020) Vancouver Island Health Authority has conducted 12,715 COVID-19 tests, with 120 being confirmed positive. Of those with positive test results, only 24 have been hospitalized and 92 have recovered completely. Currently 5 individuals are in hospital on the island, of which none are currently in an Intensive Care Unit. There are approximately 875,000 people living on our island, which translates to a 1 in 7353 likelihood of being tested positive if you experience symptoms and a 1 in 36,458 chance of being hospitalized. When comparing these statistics to other places in the world, especially the dreadfulness experienced in certain parts of New York State, USA., we are unquestionably fortunate.



*Washington State Launch Ramps Closed due to COVID-19 Pandemic*

However, any loss of life is tragic, and collectively our hearts go out to those who have lost a loved one. Sadly, as of today 4 people on Vancouver Island have succumbed to the virus.

So how has this COVID-19 pandemic impacted our fisheries on the South Island? In several ways:

- The government-required travel restrictions have resulted in no tourism to the area, thus limiting fishing to those who live here.

- The government’s “stay at home” and physical distancing orders mean that those who might have gone fishing on a small boat with a group of buddies currently don’t have that option (*unless they live together*).
- Some of those among us who are either later in life and/or in identified high-risk categories have to be mindful of the consequences of visiting public places. Having to be extra cautious for fear of contracting COVID-19 means many of those at risk might opt not to venture out.

These impacts so far have resulted in angling effort below normal and that includes factoring in existing negative Fraser River Chinook fishing regulations of catch-and-release only. In addition, the likelihood is this drop in effort will last for an extended period.

Also, the planning of fisheries by DFO, where angling effort is considered in the decision process, is now almost impossible. When the “stay at home” requirements are lifted and when tourism travel resumes, how busy will this area become? Certainly not like normal and how soon will “normal” return? One estimate is that fishing effort on the entire BC coast will be lower this year, which means that forecasted catch of the various species will be lower too. This is particularly significant to halibut management this year (*more on this point under halibut later in this news bulletin*).

**The good news** is that fishing currently remains open under the government required COVID-19 protocols here in BC. Compared to our neighbours to the south in Washington State, where their fishery is closed completely or Oregon, where certain fisheries have been closed as well. At the time of writing this article Washington State was planning to loosen the closure of launch ramps. So, even though fishing for Chinook salmon is limited to catch-and-release here in Areas 19 and 20, the halibut season is wide open and so are prawns and crabs. Plus starting May 1<sup>st</sup>, lingcod and rockfish will open up as well. So, there are indeed some great opportunities to be had and provided everyone approaches them in a safe manner, us locals can all enjoy some time on the water if we choose.

To that end, with the calmer weather now, longer days and many fishing opportunities that allow us to harvest fresh seafood for our families, don’t rule out launching your boat to go fishing. Or, even consider taking your fly rod to one of our local rivers, or nearby lakes, to try and tempt a trout to chomp down on your Woolly Bugger. It is better than

being cooped up at home in isolation, that's for sure. But if you do consider venturing out on the briny or visiting your favourite freshwater fishing hole, please please be mindful of your physical distancing and personal hygiene responsibility; no one wants anybody to catch this horrible, sometimes deadly disorder.



*Tulista Park Launch Ramp in Sidney*

There are currently recommendations in place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which include these BC Government's fishing guidelines:

**Orders & Guidance for Fishing (*per Province of BC Government*) - if you cannot meet all the COVID-19 orders and guidance to fish safely, do not go fishing.**

- Only fish with members of your family or others you are living with;
- Stay 2 metres (6 feet) from other people you come across;
- Do not share vehicles with individuals outside of your family or others you are living with;
- Fish locally;
- Wash your hands often, especially around communal areas such as boat ramps, gates, etc;
- Follow all travel advisories and self isolation requirements, and;

- Follow all municipal, First Nation community, provincial and federal closures (e.g. parks, infrastructure, etc.)

While not on the above list, we also recommend that you voluntarily wear a mask and gloves when in public places, especially if you are unable to maintain a 2 metre (6 foot) distance from others.

The key to our fishery remaining open is for all of us to practice the COVID-19 orders and guidance protocols. Failure to do so could not only result in you catching the disorder or infecting someone else, or worse, might lead to another outbreak and we certainly don't want that! The Washington State closure was put in place to address anticipated crowding at launch ramps and along the river banks when certain fisheries were about to open. As previously mentioned it appears that Governor Inslee in Washington is going to lift some of the closure restrictions soon.

We definitely do not want our government to change the rules and close off boat launches with fishing being one of the few local outdoor opportunities available right now. Failing to keep physical distance in public or gathering in small crowds could lead to complaints to government, thus putting pressure on the authorities to take action.

SVIAC has learned from the president of Sidney Anglers Association that the Tsartlip First Nation boat launch ramp has been closed by the band already. In addition, Sidney Anglers Association, who look after the Tulista Park boat launch ramp in Sidney, have been working with the municipal council and the town's emergency operations group to avoid a closure of that ramp too as of May 1<sup>st</sup>. They need a crew of volunteers to act as launch ramp observers to keep the ramp in operations (***any one interested to help should email [executive@sidneyanglers.ca](mailto:executive@sidneyanglers.ca) to let them know***).

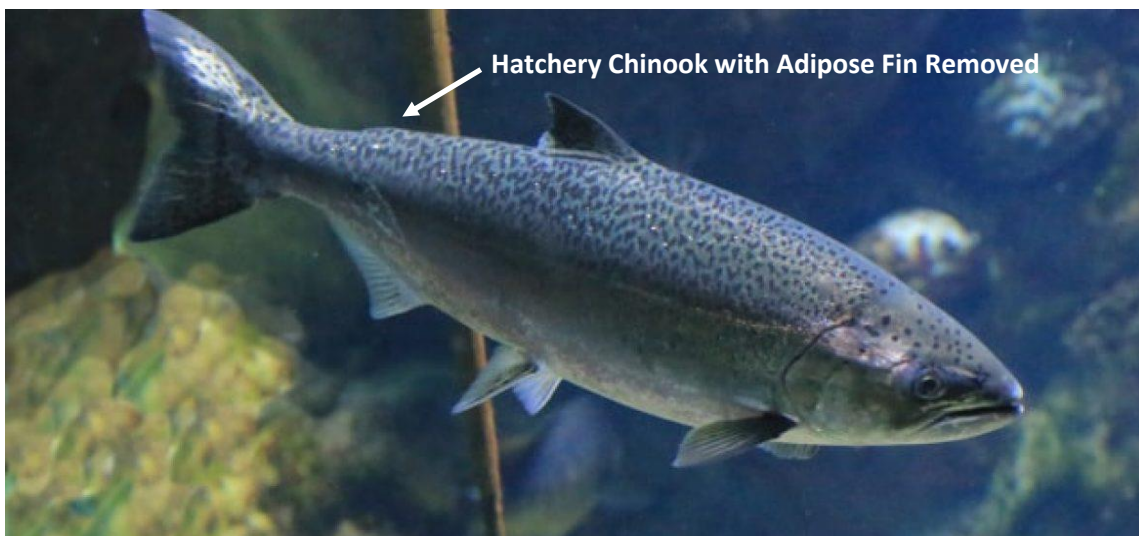
So, our recommendation if you want to go fishing, is do so, but with caution and check, if you are launching your boat, that the ramp you plan to use is open first. Enjoy the outdoors wisely AND please do continue to adhere to the government's COVID-19 general guidelines, maintain the physical distance recommendations and fishing protocols for your and everyone else's protection!



## FRASER RIVER CHINOOK UPDATE

**Existing Regulations Until End of July** - As per the article in our last SVIAC bulletin, where we suggested that DFO *would not* change from their 2019 approach to managing the Chinook fishery for the public in April and May of this year; sadly, our fears were realized.

Chinook fishing is currently limited to catch-and-release only in our area, so keeping a hatchery Chinook is not possible. On March 30 ... DFO published Fisheries Notice *FN0322- RECREATIONAL - Salmon - Chinook - Areas 11 to 28, 111, 121 to 127 and Subareas 29-1 to 29-5 and 29-8 - Chinook Management Measures - Effective April 1, 2020*. This notice amended the usual hatchery fish retention + slot size fishing regulations to Chinook non-retention across the board from 00:01 hours April 1 to 23:59 hours July 31.



*Hatchery Chinook retention for the public in JDF during April and May is NOT a conservation concern*

We at SVIAC recognized again how detrimental this regulation is to the Public Salmon Fishery as it rolled over the non-retention of Chinook regulation from last spring. For a second straight year the opportunity to retain a USA origin hatchery Chinook (identified by its clipped adipose fin) has been taken away from the public. This makes no sense to us at SVIAC when DFO's own catch figures indicate there is no exploitation of the very Fraser Chinook their regulation is supposed to protect. Yet the hatchery Chinook make up 75% to 85% of the fish in our waters at this time of year. In 2019, the negative economic consequences of the non-retention regulation in Southern BC were significant

to all those who supplied or serviced the recreational fishery either directly or indirectly. Having the same restriction in place this year is even more unreasonable during the COVID-19 pandemic, when salmon fishing effort is down further.

During this Coronavirus pandemic lock-down period, how hard would it really be for DFO to make a minor adjustment through a variation order and provide Canadians living on Southern Vancouver Island a chance to bring a fish home for the family. The main point here being that Nicola River 4-2 stream-type stocks of concern experience virtually zero impact when our salmon fishery retains the abundant hatchery fish present. And the Fraser Spring and Summer 5-2 Chinook are not present in April and May. So, hatchery Chinook retention meets conservation objectives at that time. Depriving the public an opportunity to retain a hatchery Chinook of Washington State origin makes no sense!

**SVIAC Letter to Fisheries Minister** – recognizing conservation of Nicola 4-2 Chinook would be met while allowing the retention of hatchery fish around the South Island and fearing DFO fisheries managers would implement the catch-and-release restriction regardless, an urgent recommendation was directed to DFO. SVIAC sent a letter, under the president’s signature, to Fisheries Minister Bernadette Jordan in mid-March strongly urging the Chinook regulations in Area 19-1 to 19-4 and 20-5 be amended to permit the retention of one hatchery Chinook per day greater than 45cm between April 1<sup>st</sup> and May 31<sup>st</sup>. Unfortunately, our request fell on deaf ears. For reference, the content of the SVIAC letter is published online at this link ...

<https://anglerscoalition.com/sviac-urges-new-fisheries-minister-to-act-asap/>

In March at the local Victoria and Area SFAB meeting a motion was passed unanimously that, if implemented, would permit local anglers to retain a hatchery Chinook. This motion also passed unanimously at the South Coast SFAB meeting and has been sent on to DFO for inclusion into the IFMP with the Main SFAB Board’s blessing. Here is the motion from the Victoria Committee:

### **VICTORIA SFAB COMMITTEE MOTION 3 – 16MARCH2020**

#### *PUBLIC ACCESS TO ABUNDANT HATCHERY CHINOOK IN THE SPRING*

*Whereas DFO annually implements fisheries management specifically for the avoidance of certain Fraser Chinook stocks of concern in Southern British Columbia;*

*And whereas there is no CWT or DNA evidence showing the presence of Spring or Summer Fraser 5-2 Chinook prior to June 1<sup>st</sup> in the Public Salmon Fishery in FMAs 19-1 to 19-4 and 20-5 (Victoria and Juan de Fuca South areas);*

*And whereas there is insignificant risk to wild Nicola 4-2 Chinook through their very low presence throughout April and May, especially as they would ALL be released by anglers if encountered;*

*And whereas there is an abundance of hatchery-marked Chinook salmon greater than or equal to 70% of all Chinook present during March, April and May.*

*And whereas the Victoria SFAB Committee believe there is no science-based reason to restrict angling opportunities of hatchery-marked Chinook to non retention during March, April or May each year;*

*And whereas DFO is required to take into consideration the socio-economic aspects of fisheries when planning fisheries management;*

*Therefore, be it resolved that DFO open FMAs 19-1 to 19-4 and 20-5 (Victoria and Juan de Fuca South areas) to the retention of one hatchery-marked Chinook only per day, with a total possession limit of two, from April 1<sup>st</sup> to May 30<sup>th</sup> this year (2020).*

**Moved: Chris Bos   Seconded: Tom Davis   Passed: Unanimous**



The Head of the DFO Salmon Team, Jeff Grout, indicated at the mid-April Main SFAB Board meeting that this request is unlikely to be approved as the Minister is the person to authorize such change and she will not be signing off on the Southern Salmon Integrated Fisheries Management Plan (IFMP) until earliest June 1<sup>st</sup>. There seemed to be no interest



in fast tracking our request either. Once again, another year lost and our once thriving fishery suffers due to a bureaucracy that is out of sync with the socio-economic needs of our sector, apparently failing to honour the important principles in the “Vision of Recreational Fisheries”, which they signed too.

Earlier this year, the Chinook and Coho Working Group and a small technical group of the Sport Fishing Advisory Board worked behind the scenes to craft a proposal with viable Chinook retention fishing options for this spring and summer. Key considerations for the proposal included the need for conservation of the struggling Fraser Chinook stocks, while allowing public access to abundant fish in areas where there is no presence of those stocks of concern. It has been approved by the Main SFAB Board and forwarded, prior to the deadline, to DFO for inclusion into the current Southern Salmon IFMP planning process.

If approved, the fishing opportunities will be starting June 1, 2020 and will remain in place until May 31, 2021. Unfortunately, the opportunities are very limited around the south end of the island, but still better than catch-and-release only throughout the summer or even closed to salmon fishing through June and July. **The full proposal is available at the following link:**

<https://anglerscoalition.com/sfab-2020-2021-ifmp-chinook-fishing-proposal/>



**PLEASE WRITE AN EMAIL LETTER – IT IS IMPORTANT TO SUPPORT THE SFAB PROPOSAL**

The DFO Salmon Team are currently sorting through many recommendations from multiple stakeholders regarding the new Salmon IFMP. The SFAB proposal will be considered as part of that process. There are other groups involved in the salmon planning process, of which some are lobbying DFO for a closure of the public salmon

fishery around the South Vancouver Island. Even the catch-and-release of all wild Chinook in Southern BC doesn't satisfy them. They want anglers off the water, often presenting their rationale without hard scientific evidence and erroneously claiming that the mortality when anglers release wild fish is higher than DFO claims and studies show.

A number of closure proposals are included as part of the IFMP process and will be considered by DFO's salmon team. Once they have evaluated all the proposals, they will be making recommendations to the fisheries minister. Therefore, it is very important that our sector show DFO we support conservation of the Fraser Chinook, but equally support scientifically defensible salmon retention opportunities that maintain our unique saltwater public fishery in BC during these difficult times. Showing support can be done by the angling community and all the people and businesses that benefit from the public fishery; **let's make our voices heard!**

### **PLEASE WRITE AN EMAIL LETTER – IT'S IMPORTANT!**

Take a few moments to write an email to Fisheries Minister Bernadette Jordan and DFO's Fraser Chinook Management Team expressing your support for the SFAB Main Board approved Chinook proposal (<https://anglerscoalition.com/sfab-2020-2021-ifmp-chinook-fishing-proposal/>). It will help our cause if lots of anglers and service providers show their support. The email link is below in blue, as well as the individual email addresses are listed if you can't use the link through your email system:

#### [Minister Jordan and the DFO Salmon Team](#)

*(Bernadette.Jordan@parl.gc.ca; min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca; info@anglerscoalition.com;  
DFO.PacificSalmonRMT-EGRSaumonduDpacifique.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca;)*

### **BIG BAR SLIDE UPDATE**

With many Upper Fraser River salmon stocks considered at risk and struggling to maintain their abundance, last year's slide at Big Bar was yet another nasty surprise and yet more bad news for those stocks of concerns. The 2019 returns of Chinook stocks that normally spawn above the Big Bar area experienced very low or disastrous numbers. Although the interruption or loss of one year's worth of spawners is extremely troubling, many feared that another year would pass with the slide impeding the fish for a second year. Salmon,

by their nature, can adapt to the interruption of one year’s spawning but multiple years can provide an insurmountable challenge for survival. But there is good news to report! Fortunately, the mitigation work at the site of the slide seems to be addressing the problem and putting fixes in place to ensure there isn’t a repeat of last year’s trouble.

Attendees at the mid-April Main SFAB Board meeting received a report from DFO’s Gwil Robert, who is part of the team charged with fixing the slide problem. His presentation outlined the many challenges and he explained the work that had been completed so far, plus issues still being addressed. Soon the work must stop for the season as the Spring and Summer 5-2 Chinook return to the area while migrating to their natal streams.

Gwil indicated the location and remoteness of the slide area makes working there very difficult to start with, but progress has been made on clearing the channel obstructions. A large part of the early work was creating access for workers and equipment, plus making the hazardous site safe for workers to access. Rock blasting and removal work has cleared a lot of the in-stream debris. Gwil suggested the in-channel debris removal will greatly help towards fixing the problem, but there is more to be achieved. The bird’s eye picture below shows the before and after the blasting of the east side toe, but does not show a before and after of many larger in-channel boulders that have already been removed.

### ONGOING ONSITE OPERATIONS



**PICTURED:** (L-R) A comparison of the East Toe before and after blasting that occurred on April 11, 2020. At higher flows, the river will be widened significantly.

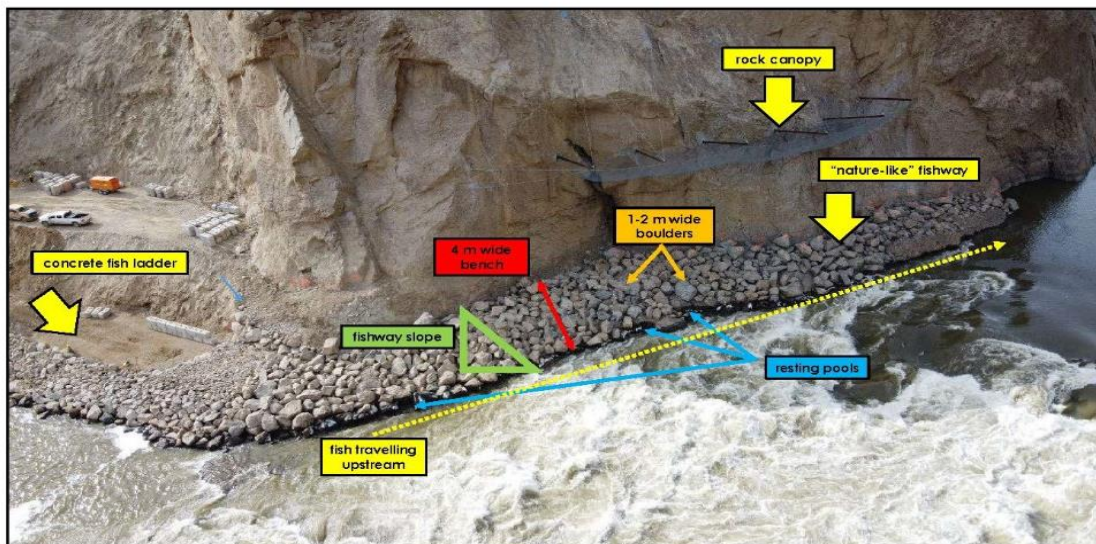


Even though some of the debris has been removed, DFO are still not 100% sure that the fish will be able to pass unhindered. This spring is expected to bring a significant wall of water when the melting snow due to higher temperatures increases the river level and flow.

The DFO plan to get fish safely past this potentially impassable obstruction this year adds three additional options: (1) – The west side has been restructured to include a “nature-like” fishway by large (2 metre) boulders being strategically located to act as natural steps and resting pools that support fish passage; (2) – 500 very large cement blocks are being fashioned into a fish ladder that allows fish to pass if the water level is too high; and (3) a pneumatic pumped-water fish transport system will be installed to move fish past the slide area if the other options fail.

Some of you may have heard about the Seattle-based company, Whooshh Innovations Inc. (*Whooshh.com*). They invented a pneumatic water pumping system for safely transporting fish. DFO have contracted the company to install one of their Whooshh fish systems at the slide site, which DFO plan to operate 12 hours per day during fish migration. The infrastructure for installing this system was a challenge in itself as there is no power on the river bank at the slide site. DFO had to construct a special platform (*seen in the picture below – top left*) by the river bank to house the diesel fuel, generators, several massive pumps and the worksite building.

## THE SCIENCE BEHIND A “NATURE-LIKE” FISHWAY



To gauge the size and scale of this jobsite, look in the upper left corner of this picture to see a large pick-up truck parked on the special work area.

So, even though many challenges still exist for the Fraser River salmon stocks of concern, we can breathe a little easier about the consequences of the Big Bar slide. Congratulations to the team for the thorough job in fixing this difficult challenge, SVIAC appreciates all their efforts.

### 2020 HALIBUT SEASON

With the season having opened on March 1<sup>st</sup>, many avid halibut anglers among us have already ventured to their favourite spots. There is something special about being anchored up awaiting your rod tip to bob up and down signaling a halibut, perhaps a behemoth, trying out the tasty offering down below on your hook. Fishing within the COVID-19 orders and guidelines is possible and the weather seems more conducive now to getting out on the water. So, for those with cabin fever, getting out fishing to bring home some halibut is a good idea and still possible. Local reports indicate there are some halibut around, but they seem less abundant than in previous years. However, combine a halibut trip with opportunities to harvest any of the lingcod, rockfish, prawns and crabs that are also open seems a great idea.



*Oven roasted Halibut topped with crab, sweet pepper, brie in an herbed beurre blanc sauce*



On another front, and eluded to earlier in this news bulletin, there is the question of what COVID-19 will do to our fishing effort through the rest of this season. Will the number of fishing trips be less? Or will our fisheries all get back to normal by July 1<sup>st</sup>? That is most unlikely. Coast wide, much of our fishing effort in the peak season is based on tourism. Whether from the USA, Alberta or other parts of the world our fishing effort, especially the guided fishing charters and lodge business that service out of towners will more than likely be way down in 2020.

Some predict tourism globally to drop by 50% or greater this year. If this is close to accurate, will DFO alter fishing regulations to permit better fishing opportunities for the locals who can and will fish near their homes? Or will fisheries managers simply hold the same regulations resulting in less fish caught? Many of the fishing regulations for this year have already been calculated on normal angler effort pre-COVID-19.



This situation is of particular concern for halibut, where the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the public fishery is carefully calculated from Canada's TAC. Canada's TAC is based on negotiations at the International Pacific Halibut Commission annual meeting. DFO and SFAB have already designed a season based on anticipated effort using historic data before COVID-19 played any role. The Fisheries Minister anticipates the fishery to utilize its TAC and not leave halibut in the water uncaught. This year is an incalculable dilemma.

So, the 2020 public halibut fishery was designed based on normal angler effort. This now seems incorrect under current pandemic circumstances and will likely lead to significant unfished quota. In the past year, our sector has pressed DFO to give halibut anglers the opportunity to have an overage/underage roll-over provision built in to the harvest plan for our annual TAC; similar to the commercial sector. So far, DFO has only agreed to overage, meaning if we fish beyond the available TAC in a particular year, then that overage is deducted from the following year's TAC. Sadly, to date, DFO has not approved an underage provision yet.

This is likely a year when being able to carry forward uncaught TAC from this COVID-19 influenced year to add to next year's TAC would make the most sense of all. Even with an increase in daily limit and/or increasing the size of fish one can keep in mid-summer, our sector is unlikely to catch the amount that may be "uncaught" due to an across the board reduction in effort. For that reason, the SFAB has struck a COVID-19 sub-committee to look into a variety of options to maintain and enhance existing public fisheries during this extraordinary time. And this sub-committee will be presenting options to the SFAB executive that will address the emerging halibut TAC usage issue. At SVIAC, we strongly support the department approving an underage provision, where any uncaught TAC can be fished the following year as opposed to leaving them in the water. This would be especially valuable, if approved, as next year may well see Canada's TAC be lower than 2020.