

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS NEWS BULLETIN INCLUDE:

- NOTABLE CALENDAR EVENTS
- SALISH SEA SALMON CHALLENGE FISHING DERBY
- 2020 SOOKE CHINOOK (SEA PEN) ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVE
- 2020 HALIBUT SEASON UPDATE

NOTABLE CALENDAR EVENTS

- SEPT 01 Chinook Regs in FMA 19-1 to 19-4 and 20-5 Change to 2 Chinook per day over 45cms – Possession Limit 4
- SEPT 05 *SVIAC Salish Sea Salmon Challenge Derby – one day Saturday daybreak until 4:00PM – Cheanuh Marina*
- OCT 01 Coho Regs Change Allowing Retention of 1 Wild Fish as Part of The Daily Bag Limit in Areas 19 And 20 (check DFO's regs)

The 2020 Salish Sea Salmon Challenge Fishing Derby

SATURDAY 5TH SEPTEMBER
\$60 PER ROD TICKET



Buy Your Tickets NOW!!

Full Details Online At <https://www.anglerscoalition.com>

THE SALISH SEA SALMON CHALLENGE FISHING DERBY

Yes, it's on again, the Salish Sea Salmon Challenge is a go, rain or shine COVID-19 be damned!

... AND NO MORE 80CM MINNOWS, YOU CAN KEEP A BIG CHINOOK TOO!!!

This derby is a one-day fun event on **Saturday 5th September 2020**. Fishing is from day break until 4:00PM and the derby HQ plus the weigh scale (*open from 7:00AM until 4:00PM*) are at **Cheanuh Marina**.

**Derby Tickets Are \$60 Each – Skipper's Challenge (Side Bet) Tickets \$50 Each
Swag Draw Tickets Are \$10 Each**

EVENT PRIZES – The main event prize board is based on ticket sales. One third of ticket revenue goes to the contestant with the biggest salmon weighed in, one third goes to the random draw prize winner and one third goes to SVIAC and the Chinook Sea Pen projects. *If ticket sales reach 100 the cash prizes are \$2,000 each, if the ticket sales reach 150 the cash prizes are \$3,000 each and if we sell 200 derby tickets the cash prizes are \$4,000 each.*



DERBY PRIZES:

Biggest Salmon – Cash Prize
Random Draw – Cash Prize
**Biggest Hatchery Chinook – Scotty HP
Downrigger (value \$750)**

SWAG DRAW:

Scotty HP Downrigger (value \$750)
Mooching rod and Reel Combo (value \$500)

PLEASE NOTE: this event is a fundraiser for SVIAC and their Chinook Sea Pen Initiatives. Please give serious consideration to participating and help us raise funds to keep our important Chinook program going. You can even buy a \$60 derby ticket without fishing and have a chance to win the random cash draw prize (*est. betw. \$2,000 - \$4,000*)

Buy tickets in-person at Cheanuh Marina, Gizmos Computer (Victoria) or the Sooke Harbour Resort and Marina – Regs are on SVIAC website

**** FULL FISHING DERBY DETAILS AT: [HTTPS://WWW.ANGLERSCOALITION.COM](https://www.anglerscoalition.com) ****

2020 SOOKE CHINOOK (SEA PEN) ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVE:

The Sooke Chinook sea pen project was all set to receive the approved quantity of 500,000 juvenile Chinook from Nitnat Hatchery in April and May earlier this year.

This is a great news story, but regrettably with a little not so good news tacked on the tail end.

The eggs were collected as usual under a SEP license from wild Nitnat river brood stock in the fall of 2019. Once hatched, the alevins did really well over the winter months and developed into fry at the Nitnat Hatchery (*The hatchery DFO staff do an amazing job ... thanks!!*). All things being equal our volunteer sea pen team expected to welcome the first delivery of juvenile salmon to the Sooke project back in the middle of April.

Then everything changed in a heartbeat ... The Corona Virus COVID-19 pandemic reared its very ugly head and the world became a different place overnight. Social distancing, mask wearing, glove wearing, self- isolation, stay at home orders, travel bans all created an environment that made it seem certain by mid-March the 2020 Sooke sea pen project would be cancelled. *We all felt devastated!*

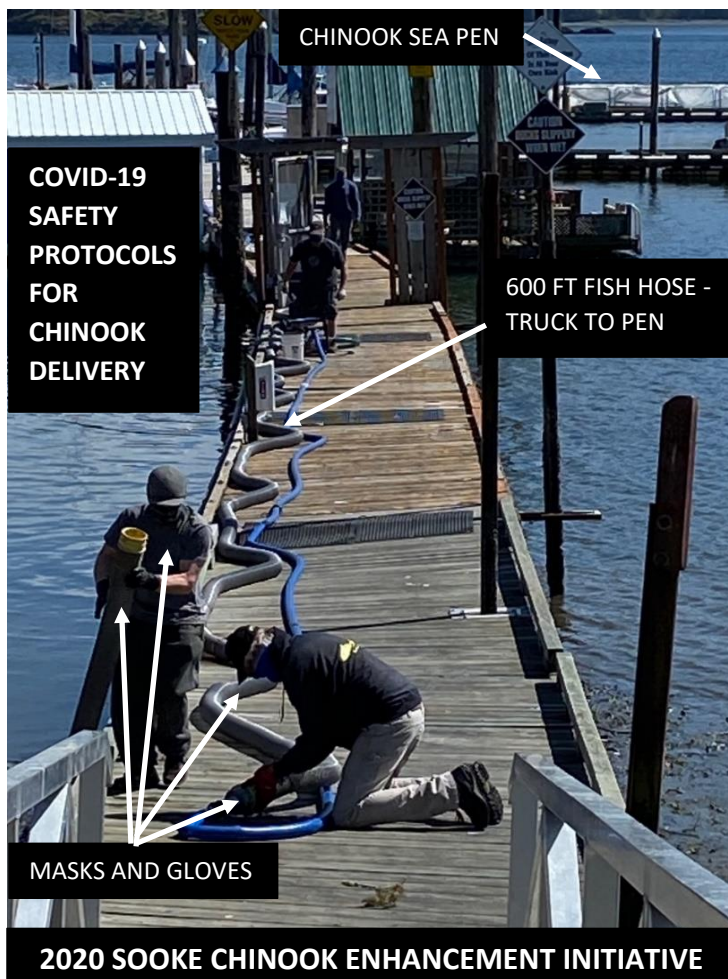
Understandably, DFO had to be extremely cautious. If the project were to proceed, they rightly feared for their staff's safety and well-being. Senior government also orders seemed to prohibit the delivery of fish and blocked any possibility of DFO employees being out working in crowded public places. That spelled doom for our net pens. It seemed for a couple of weeks our Chinook smolts, earmarked for the sea pen, were simply going to be released en masse into the Nitnat River near their hatchery. Fortunately, with careful planning, development of comprehensive COVID-19 safety protocols

and assurances from all involved to social distance as well as wear masks and gloves, the project got the green light; *we were so pleased!!* So, after all, the project went ahead as originally



planned, which is amazing considering all other pen projects on Vancouver Island were cancelled. The fish deliveries and pen operation were all achieved without anyone being at excessive risk and no one suffered any illness. *Fantastic news!!*

With Glen Varney and a number of willing volunteers having looked after the fish husbandry again, we are thrilled to report the Sooke Chinook (Sea Pen) Enhancement Initiative was again a phenomenal success! Not only was there a successful release of healthy Chinook from the pen operation, but the DFO staff and our project volunteers were all fine too!



However, there were strict orders from government. There should be ZERO publicity about the project going ahead, until well after completion. No public attention or media coverage could be brought to what we were doing. We honored that order to the letter and are only publicizing our project success now, well after the fact. Hence you may not have heard the way things shaped up in public before. It is very pleasing to report out that the project continues to be successful year after year. *Thanks to everyone involved!!*

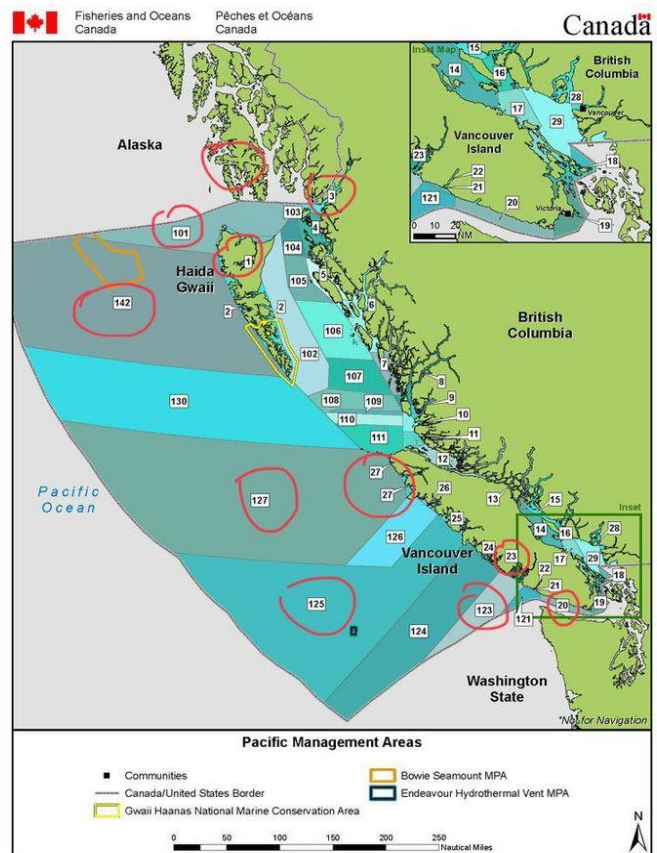
The Jack Brooks Hatchery (Sooke Salmon Enhancement Society) have traditionally operated a small sea pen at the government wharf in the Sooke Basin. We understand that due to the Corona Virus, their 2020 Chinook pen project was cancelled.

The juvenile Chinook, earmarked for their pen project, were from Nitnat River brood stock and raised at the Nitnat Hatchery as well. Instead of releasing them into the river as may have been the Plan B, DFO proposed they be pen reared in Sooke anyway. So, in addition to our projects 500,000+ smolts, the SSES Chinook were added to our pens in the April and May deliveries, also getting the VIP treatment we provide. This meant that **SVIAC transplanted and successfully penned 630,000+ Chinook smolts this spring**, our largest output to date.

We are also extremely pleased to report that the morts, those poor little Chinook that don't survive, were kept to an extremely low number again this year. Only a few hundred were lost that can be attributed to being in our quality pen rearing equipment and under our excellent project management.

Discussions with DFO's Salmon Enhancement Program staff lead us to believe our pen program may process a similar or greater number of Chinook in 2021, perhaps, if approved, it could finally increase to a million.

There is another piece of good news to share too. Measuring success of the Sooke Chinook Enhancement Initiative is not only how well we did with the pens vis-à-vis number of healthy fish released, but how is the survival to adulthood of all those little Chinook? Our project plan indicated an expectation of 1.5% to 4% survival rate. Well, we are starting to get some interesting data back. Each year, the Sooke Chinook pen project has coded wire tagged and adipose fin clipped 100,000 of our transplanted fish. In 2019, coded wire tag returns from fisheries showed that our Sooke Chinook sea pen fish from 2017 pen project have survived better than expected. Those CWTs were from fish that were returning to spawn at three years old.



Normally, a 4-1 ocean-type Chinook, like those from the Nitnat and Sooke Rivers, have approximately 15% of the surviving adults return as 3 year-olds to spawn and those fish weigh approximately 11 – 14 lbs. Of interest, **23 of our 2017 penned CWTed Chinook were identified last fall**, mainly in the Public Fishery and for the most part off South West and West Coast of Vancouver Island (*see map*). The really good news is those 3 year-olds seem to have done well in the ocean phase of their lives. That same transplant year class from 2017 should now have the majority of the surviving adults return this summer/fall (approximately 60%) to spawn and those fish will be in the mid 20 lbs range. Additionally, there will be 3 year-old Chinook returning from our 2018 transplant and pen rearing project as well. So, we are expecting the first respectable

return from our efforts this summer and right now, in the Juan de Fuca Strait, there are adult Chinook salmon from our project in the mid-twenty lbs range for the catching. If the 2019 return of 23 CWTs is an indicator of survival abundance, then this year's mid-twenty pounders should be present in the thousands. We also know that these adults will benefit the Southern Resident endangered Orcas too!

And now two pieces of not so good news ...

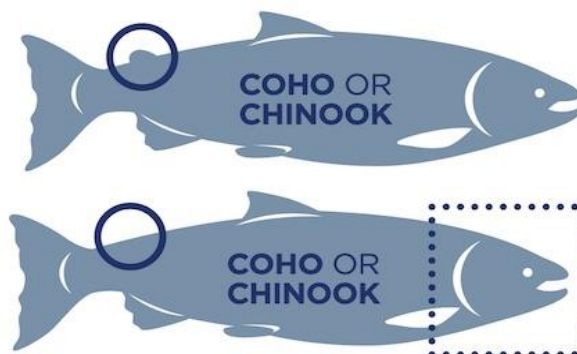
First of all, the SVIAC Board of Directors are particularly concerned by the lack of public fishery access to the fish returning this year from the Sooke Chinook (Sea Pen) Enhancement Initiative. As covered in the previous paragraph, we are expecting a good return this cycle, perhaps thousands of marked adult spawning-sized Chinook from 2017 and 2018 pen operations are coming back to the Sooke Basin. Right now, those fish are staging in our area waters, from Oak Bay to Bamfield. This is a great opportunity for the endangered Southern Resident Orcas to gorge on those large returning 2017 penned-reared fish. In addition, as planned for in this program, there would be a chance for salmon anglers to bag a few mid-twenties Chinook for the BBQ while downrigging an anchovy. Sorry, no dice on that this year courtesy of Ottawa and Minister Jordan's unfair salmon management plan.

What is particularly troubling is the current fishing regulations, which have been in place since August 1st, do not permit the retention of Chinook greater than 80 cms, whether wild or hatchery. To protect the large migrating spawners, making it mandatory to release wild Chinook greater

WANTED!

Adipose fin missing? It's a hatchery fish.

- Check for closures before retaining
- Remove head & submit to a Salmon Head Recovery Depot



than 80 cms is logical, except by August the Fraser stocks of concern we are trying to protect have traditionally gone from the Juan de Fuca Strait area.

Back in July, prior to the August 1st regulations came into force, there were efforts made to plead the case for large hatchery Chinook retention. SVIAC President Chris Bos attempted to have the department approve the retention of hatchery Chinook greater than 80 cms in FMA 20-5 (Race Rocks to Sheringham) during August, even getting a special motion passed through the local Victoria SFAB Committee to make it official (See SFAB Motion Below). This was done so anglers could benefit from the expected bump in the number of large hatchery fin-clipped Chinook in our local waters.

Victoria SFAB Committee

Motion re: Area 20-5

Date: August 1 to August 31 2020

Subject: 1 Chinook per day 45 cms to 80 cms wild or hatchery, only hatchery marked Chinook greater than 80 cms.

Whereas; Stock assessment provided by catch information and CWT returns is needed to determine the success of enhancement programs in the Sooke watershed.

Whereas; Surviving adult clipped and CWTed hatchery Chinook of the 100,000 released into the Sooke Basin from 2016 brood will return as 4-year spawners (approx 25 lbs each) this year.

Whereas; Surviving adult clipped and CWTed hatchery Chinook of the 100,000 released into the Sooke Basin from 2017 brood will return as 3-year spawners (approx 15 lbs each) this year.

Whereas; Coded Wire Tag recoveries in 2019 from the 2016 brood year community net pen project Chinook indicated high survival of 3-year adult spawners (23 tags collected).

Whereas; Opportunity exists for members of the T'Sou-ke First Nation to perform data collection at local marinas to accompany their in-river data collection program for FSC fisheries.

Whereas; The average size of returning hatchery marked Chinook from the 2016 and 2017 brood are expected to be greater than 80cms.

Therefore, be it resolved: DFO amend the existing Area 20-5 regulations from August 1 to August 31 to "1 Chinook per day 45 cms to 80 cms wild or hatchery; only hatchery marked Chinook greater than 80 cms".

MOVED: Chris Bos ***Seconded:*** Tom Cole ***Passed***

Unfortunately, word came back from DFO that this opportunity would **not** be entertained in 2020. It seems the management of our fisheries on the Pacific was overruled by a rigid dogma regarding from the feds back east in Ottawa; a dogma that whiffs of anti-BC angler and the Public Fishery.

Not permitting the Public Fishery to retain a large hatchery origin Chinook greater than 80 cms right now is absurd! This is especially troubling as DFO, when helping SVIAC design the Sooke Chinook Enhancement Initiative, required as much data as possible to be able to ascertain the survival rate and program success. One of the key factors in assessing the stock in such a fashion is the Coded Wire Tag data from marked fish turned in through the DFO Head Recovery Program. So, having anglers turn in the heads of hatchery salmon encountered when fishing would be a key project assessment tool. Not being allowed to retain these larger fin-clipped and CWTed fish is, therefore, a loss of valuable opportunity to gauge the success of the Sooke Chinook (Sea Pen) Enhancement Initiative. This is unreasonable, counterproductive and the current regulations are in direct contradiction to the DFO project monitoring requirements.

There is absolutely zero harm to any stock of concern associated with retaining hatchery marked fish of any size when the fishery is already open. In fact, anglers are much more likely to get off the water sooner, should they limit on hatchery fish, which commonsensically means less pressure on wild stocks of concern.



And now, the second piece of bad news is the current and near future financial situation of the pen project. The Sooke Chinook (Sea Pen) Enhancement Initiative, since inception, has been funded primarily by private donation from many generous sponsors and partially by non-government grant funding. Most unfortunately, the Corona Virus COVID-19 pandemic has dealt our funding model an almost killer blow.

Our Southern BC salmon fisheries have experienced a double kick in the teeth this year. The two factors are: (i) a second year of Chinook catch and release in the crucial spring and early summer period; and, (ii) the COVID-19 lockdown curtailing international angling and travel tourism.

Many of our large project sponsors are businesses that rely exclusively on tourism, namely the travel, angling, lodging and whale watching sectors. Due to the necessary and mandatory government-implemented travel restrictions, many of those businesses that were flourishing only months ago, are brought to their knees and now in survival mode. Naturally, donating money when those same businesses are operating at a loss is extremely unlikely. The pandemic has had a direct and immediate impact on the funding of our 2020 program and leaves us with a shortfall. And, even if the pandemic passes and things return to normal, which is going to take some time, those same companies will have to rebuild and may take extended time to be in a position to donate again.

There is no question this project is widely supported, but under current pandemic conditions we need to seek alternate financial support to carry on in the short-term and make up our 2020 losses. Beyond the 2020, the Sooke Chinook (Sea Pen) Enhancement Initiative also has to have \$75,000 to operate at the same level in 2021. SVIAC's Board of Directors believe it would be a tragedy to have to mothball this program just as the results of everyone's hard fought efforts start to come to fruition and fish are returning.

Set up originally as a BC angling advocacy and lobbying non-profit society, SVIAC's constitution does not permit taking government grants or borrowing of funds in its operation. Therefore, we need to look at alternate ways of achieving ongoing success and finding the funds to make it all happen. The SVIAC Board are currently looking at several avenues that might open up new funding opportunities, including a unique large raffle draw. However, increased support from individual anglers is badly needed to carry on and urgently too. Making a donation, buying a SVIAC membership or participating in the Salish Sea Salmon Challenge fishing derby on September 5th in the short term will all help our cause. ***Please give serious consideration to chipping in to save our amazing sea pen project.***

HOW TO SUPPORT SOUTH VANCOUVER ISLAND ANGLERS COALITION

Membership fees are \$40 dollars annually and can be purchased online at <https://www.anglerscoalition.com> or by phone at (778) 426-4141 or in person at SVIAC, Unit 3-774 Bay Street, Victoria V8T 5E4 or by mail to the same address – cash, debit and credit cards accepted.

Donations can be made in the same manner as above.

So, in conclusion, there is lots to be delighted about regarding the ongoing success of the Sooke Chinook (Sea Pen) Enhancement Initiative. As always, we want everyone to know that our project could not happen without the broader community coming together and supporting our efforts. With over 1,875,000 healthy Chinook smolts transplanted, reared and released into the Sooke Basin over the past four years, SVIAC and everyone who has stepped up to make this a major success should be very proud. That includes all those selfless volunteers, kind individuals, generous companies and funding sponsors who have been critical. **Thank you all sincerely!** It is a testament to the will of this South Island community, when most said this project would never be approved in the first place.

Now, with great hope the ocean survival is strong, expect to see marked CWTed fish being identified more and more in the CWT Head Recovery Program. If we can navigate through the pandemic and find funds to stay the course, the future looks rosy.

2020 HALIBUT SEASON UPDATE:

There is also good news for those anglers who enjoy halibut fishing. Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown a spanner in the gears of this year's halibut fishing season, but is now a positive for those who can still get out on the water.



Each year the SFAB Halibut Committee spend hours poring over computer modelled catch estimate tables and attempt to design a fishing plan for the coming season that meets the needs of BC's anglers. Their goal is to deliver a plan that uses as much of the available catch allocation as possible during the year, without risking fishing over the maximum amount. It has been especially hard for the committee in recent years as the Pacific-wide halibut stock has been declining. Correctly, the

International Pacific Halibut Commission management strategy has been to reduce the total North American harvest for conservation reasons. Even though the annual catch amount has been declining, the annual plans have been designed to offer as best a coast-wide fishery as possible with reasonable fishing opportunities for all. The 2020 fishing plan was crafted before the Corona Virus pandemic took hold and there has been a big impact on the fishery as a result.

With BC’s halibut catch data for March 1st to the end of June now in hand, it is clear that impacts of the pandemic such as lock downs and travel restrictions have really slowed the catch compared to prior years. This means, if the trend continues, BC will be leaving a large amount of its public

Table 1. Summary of the 2020 In-season Recreational Halibut Catch			
Regional Area	PFMA	Est. Piece Count	Est. Total Net Wt. (lbs)
North Coast	1	139	1,362
	2	256	3,498
	3	972	11,559
	4	2,302	27,399
	5/6	450	5,597
Central Coast	7/8/9	135	1,235
South Coast	10/11	282	3,324
	12	271	3,492
	13/14	21	283
	15-18/28/29	148	1,930
	19	397	7,647
	20	341	6,179
	21/121	801	17,889
	23/123	696	12,790
	24/124	249	4,894
	25/125	162	2,327
	26/126	61	1,247
27/127	223	3,624	
Total Landed in Canada		7,905	116,276
		Recreational TAC	877,750
		Estimated Balance - END OF JUNE	761,474
		% underage (+) overage (-)	86.75%

2020 Canadian Halibut Catch Estimates March 1st through June 30th

fishery 2020 allocation in the water. Additionally, the summer months of July and August in Haida Gwaii, when the big fishing lodges are normally operating at peak, will now register almost zero catch. During July, only a few of those lodges were open and having to operate under reduced capacity. In August, all the Haida Gwaii lodges have been forced to close under a provincial government advisory. What does this mean? It means that BC will most likely not reach its maximum catch allocation or anywhere close to it under the current fishing plan by the end of

December. The SFAB Halibut Committee has worked closely with DFO to try and get a change in the regulations to address this issue.

In January and early February this year, when the committee were designing the 2020 season fishing plan with 877,750 lb of allocation, they had absolutely no idea there would be a global pandemic, nor did they know the virus spread would be playing such a major part in the harvest of Canada's recreational total allowable halibut catch. At a recent online Halibut Committee meeting, discussions took place on how to amend the existing fishing plan in order permit better opportunities thus greater use of the 2020 allocation. Unfortunately, due to long-standing law and government policy, the changing of fishing opportunities in the middle of a DFO license year doesn't provide for complete change, but allows for some tweaking. DFO has been amenable to changes that are possible and they signed off on a regulation variation order for improved public access to halibut.

In addition, for some time the SFAB Main Board and the Halibut Committee have strongly advised DFO to approve an uncaught allocation roll over. This means, if approved, a percentage of any uncaught halibut allocation from one year could be credited toward the following year's allocation, thus providing a greater annual total allowable catch. Canada has indicated that it supports harvesters catching the entire Total Allowable Catch. So far, the department has not accepted this roll over recommendation for the Public Fishery. Under the circumstances of the Corona Virus pandemic and the looming likelihood of a significant amount of Canada's 2020 recreational halibut catch going unused, it seems critical that DFO make a special exception for this year. And that is even if they can't confirm a permanent acceptance of the uncaught allocation roll over provision at this time.

So, what is the bottom line? (1) Effective August 14th until further notice BC coastwide the daily catch limit for halibut is now increased to two fish per day less than 90 cm for the remainder of the season; (2) Anticipate the season remaining open until the end of December, with little to no likelihood of an early closure; and (3) If approved, a rollover of uncaught allocation (around 10% of remaining TAC) would soften the blow of a lower total allowable catch for halibut anticipated in 2021

That is a small piece of positive news to cheer South Island anglers, which is especially pertinent as we go about our daily lives in a world filled with uncertainty and turmoil due to the lethal COVID-19 pandemic and poor salmon fishing opportunities. *If you do get a chance, get out there for some hali fishing and make the most of it!*