

Making Fishing Safer

THE U.S. CONGRESS WANTED MANAGERS TO CONSIDER SAFETY WHEN THEY DEVELOPED NATIONAL STANDARD #10 OF THE MAGNUSON-STEVENS FISHERY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT THAT GOVERNS OUR NATION'S FISHERIES.

The Act states that conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable, promote the safety of human life at sea. But the question arises: Did safety actually improve with the imposition of rights-based management off Alaska?

Comprehensive rationalization of the fisheries off Alaska and the introduction of rights-based management starting in the mid-1990s were highly contentious issues. A major justification for managing the sablefish and halibut longline fisheries with individual fishing quotas (IFQs) was that it would stop the race for fish and significantly improve the safety of fishing operations. Fishing vessels would be in a better position to pick the right weather to take their catch and would not have to be in the middle of a frenzied fishing opener when a storm struck.



At-Sea Processors Association

HUMANS :: Making Fishing Safer

Assessing Safety in Halibut, Sablefish, and Pollock Fisheries

Project 533

THE BOARD FUNDED PROJECT 533 TO SYSTEMATICALLY assess whether safety improved after quota-based management systems were established in the Alaska halibut and sablefish, and pollock fisheries. Researchers measured safety improvements by identifying declines in fatalities and search-and-rescue missions. Their results demonstrated a statistically significant decline in rates of fatalities (-81%) and search-and-rescue missions (-47%) for halibut and sablefish fishermen since the introduction of IFQs. Non-fatal injuries in the Bering Sea pollock fishery declined by 76%. These results provide valuable information to guide future management decisions on whether to use rights-based management as the preferred approach to ameliorate safety problems inherent in the "race for fish."



John Home

