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Tagging of halibut

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In previous years tagging of halibut in the Davis Strait by Norway has been carried out only incidentally in conjunction with tagging of cod. A scheme for halibut tagging was evaluated in 1955, when tagging was performed on a larger scale.

In regard to the earlier taggings we have the following results:

In 1948, one halibut was marked on Lille Hellefiske Bank. This fish was recaptured in the same locality one year later.

In 1950, three halibut were marked on the southern edge of Lille Hellefiske Bank (Banan Bank) on August 7. They were all recaptured within 2-3 weeks. One was taken in the locality where tagged after 11 days. The second one had moved a little northward to Lille Hellefiske Bank, where it was recaptured after 14 days. The third had moved a bit southwards to Fyllas Bank where it was recaptured after 17 days.

A fourth fish tagged in 1950 on the Banan Bank was recaptured after four years of liberty on Lille Hellefiske Bank, i.e. approximately in the same locality where tagged.

These few taggings do not tell very much about the migrations of halibut in these waters. The two recaptures taken after one and four years respectively may indicate that the halibut stays in the same locality, or that it returns to the same locality in summer after perhaps long migrations to localities where no fishing is carried out.

In 1955, 100 halibut were tagged by Norway in the Davis Strait. None of these have as yet been recorded as recaptured. The localities of marking have been very widespread. Eleven individuals were tagged off Store Hellefiske Bank, 26 on Lille Hellefiske Bank, 26 on Fyllas Bank, 26 off the northern part of Labrador, four off the middle part of Labrador, and seven individuals in the region off Cape Farewell. It is hoped that a similar program can be performed during the summer of 1956.

Earlier investigations on halibut in other waters indicate that it is a migratory species. Norwegian tagging has for instance been carried out in the Barents Sea. In 1929-31 Thor Iversen tagged 315 halibut around Bear Island. Of these 22 (or 7%) were recaptured. This experiment showed migrations from Bear Island towards the Norwegian coast.

Furthermore in 1937-38 halibut were tagged in Norwegian waters and in the Barents Sea by Finn Devold. The longest migration proved by this later marking was a halibut tagged off the northern part of Spitsbergen which was recaptured off the west coast of Norway after travelling 1,200 miles in 239 days. The travelling speed of this fish averages a minimum of 5.8 miles a day. Other long migrations proved by this tagging experiment were from Northern Spitsbergen to northern Norway, from Bear Island to Finnmark, and from eastern Finnmark to the West coast

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of Norway. The latter migration covered a distance of 780 miles (see fig. below).

Another indication of the migratory habits of halibut is the findings of dogfish in halibut caught in northern Norway. The dogfish is distributed in more southern regions mainly off the west coast of Norway, in the North Sea and around the Faroe-Shetlands Islands. It does not occur north of the Trondheim Fiord in Western Norway. In the long-lining for dogfish special hooks are used. The finding of these hooks in halibut caught far north indicate migrations from the North Sea region northwards. Norway have recently started a new project of halibut tagging in the Barents Sea and on the Norwegian coast. In 1956 already, 95 halibut have been tagged by Steinar Olsen. Further taggings will continue later in the year. The type of tag used in this area is partly Lea's tags and partly clips fastened to the gill cover. In the Davis Strait tagging we have used the round yellow plastic tag fastened to the gill cover.

If possible the halibut tagging program in the Davis Strait ought to be extended to waters outside the ICNAF area, for instance to East Greenland and to Iceland. It would also be of importance to have more taggings carried out in the Labrador and Newfoundland area. This in order to investigate if the halibut population is one and the same in the whole area, and to what degree the halibut emigrate or immigrate into the Davis Strait fishing grounds.

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