

Halibut — Sagiq

UNA SAGIQ ANG'UQ. – THIS HALIBUT IS BIG.



Photo: Alaska Native Tribute, oil painting by Bruce Nelson, 2009. Purchased with support from Rasmuson Foundation, AM654.

The continental shelf waters surrounding Kodiak contain large concentrations of marine fish. Halibut, cod, pollock, and other species breed and winter in these productive, deep waters. As winter storms dissipate and the weather warms, bottom fish move into shallower coastal waters to feed. Here halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*) can reach impressive sizes, some topping four hundred pounds.

For Alutiiq people, halibut and other marine fish represent a predictable and delicious source of fresh spring food. Harvesting begins in April and continues through the summer months. In the past, fishermen in skin-covered kayaks used hand-held wood and bone fishing rigs baited with clams to lure bottom fish. Once hooked, the thrashing fish was pulled to the surface and clubbed with a wooden billy shaped like a small baseball bat.

Today people catch halibut on hand-held jigs, fishing poles, and with commercial gear. However it is caught, halibut remains a favored subsistence food. It is eaten fresh, and like salmon may be dried in strips for storage. Children in Old Harbor love dried halibut as a snack.