



Report of the 26th Session of the IPHC Research Advisory Board (RAB026)

Seattle, Washington, USA, 18-19 November 2025

Commissioners

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ACRONYMS

AM	Annual Meeting
FISS	Fishery-Independent Setline Survey
IPHC	International Pacific Halibut Commission
RAB	Research Advisory Board
SRB	Scientific Review Board
TCEY	Total Constant Exploitation Yield

DEFINITIONS

A set of working definitions is provided in the IPHC Glossary of Terms and abbreviations: <https://www.iphc.int/the-commission/glossary-of-terms-and-abbreviations>.

HOW TO INTERPRET TERMINOLOGY CONTAINED IN THIS REPORT

This report has been written using the following terms and associated definitions so as to remove ambiguity surrounding how particular paragraphs should be interpreted.

Level 1: RECOMMENDED; RECOMMENDATION; ADOPTED (formal); **REQUESTED; ENDORSED; ACCEPTED** (informal): A conclusion for an action to be undertaken, by a Contracting Party, a subsidiary (advisory) body of the Commission and/or the IPHC Secretariat.

Level 2: AGREED: Any point of discussion from a meeting which the Commission considers to be an agreed course of action covered by its mandate, which has not already been dealt with under Level 1 above; a general point of agreement among delegations/participants of a meeting which does not need to be elevated in the Commission’s reporting structure.

Level 3: NOTED/NOTING; CONSIDERED; URGED; ACKNOWLEDGED: General terms to be used for consistency. Any point of discussion from a meeting which the Commission considers to be important enough to record in a meeting report for future reference. Any other term may be used to highlight to the reader of an IPHC report, the importance of the relevant paragraph. Other terms may be used but will be considered for explanatory/informational purposes only and shall have no higher rating within the reporting terminology hierarchy than Level 3.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 26th Session of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Research Advisory Board (RAB026) was held in Seattle, Washington, USA on 18-19 November 2025. A total of thirteen (13) members attended the session (9 in-person, 4 online) from the two (2) Contracting Parties, as well as nine (9) observers. The meeting was opened by the Chairperson, Dr David T. Wilson, and the Vice-Chairperson Dr Josep Planas.

The following are a subset of the complete recommendations and requests for action from RAB026, which are provided in [Appendix IV](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reproductive assessment of the female Pacific halibut population

RAB026-Rec.01 (para. 18) The RAB **RECOMMENDED** prioritising fecundity estimations to determine the relationship between Pacific halibut female weight and total egg production.

Guidance on, and discussion of, other potential applied research projects

RAB026-Rec.02 (para. 33) **NOTING** recent issues identified regarding the alleged illegal retention and landing of Pacific halibut by non-target sectors for processing into fishmeal (e.g. the Kodiak trawl fleet; <https://www.northernjournal.com/alaska-troopers-seize-kodiak-trawl-groups-electronics-in-bycatch-probe/>), the RAB **RECOMMENDED** that:

- a) the IPHC undertake an information gathering effort to document, explore via communications with enforcement entities engaged on the issue, so that the IPHC has a clear indication of what is being removed, and the likely impacts on the Pacific halibut resource.
- b) as an affected party, the RAB would like the IPHC to be kept in the loop of any penalties that may be applied, so that a portion be requested and used to subsidise the annual FISS.
- c) the gathered information should be summarised and provided as an information paper to the Annual Meeting and appropriate subsidiary bodies.

RAB026-Rec.03 (para. 34) **NOTING** the importance of accurate accounting for all sources of mortality from the Pacific halibut stock, and concerns about the accuracy of the estimates for the unguided recreational fisheries in Alaska and Canada, the RAB **RECOMMENDED** that the Secretariat first summarise the information received from Contracting Parties through the annual reporting process, and that the Commission request additional detail on the methods used to derive estimates of unguided removals, including the potential sources of bias and uncertainty in those estimates.

The full recording of the RAB026 is available to the following link: [IPHC-2025-RAB026-WEBINAR](#)

1. OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The 26th Session of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Research Advisory Board (RAB026) was held in Seattle, Washington, USA, on 18-19 November 2025. A total of thirteen (13) members attended the session (9 in-person, 4 online) from the two (2) Contracting Parties, as well as nine (9) observers. Apologies were received from Grace Allan (USA), Brian Dafforn (USA), and Al Pazar (USA). The list of participants is provided at [Appendix I](#). The meeting was opened by the Chairperson, Dr David T. Wilson, and Vice-Chairperson, Dr Josep Planas.
2. The RAB **RECALLED** its mandate as stated in the IPHC Rules of Procedure (2024) as follows:
Appendix VII, I.1-2:
“1. The Research Advisory Board (RAB) is composed of members of the Pacific halibut community that shall:
 - a. Suggest research topics to be considered for incorporation in the IPHC integrated research and monitoring activities, as well as to comment upon operational and implementation considerations of those research and monitoring activities;*
 - b. provide the IPHC Secretariat staff (who participate in Sessions of the RAB as Observers) with direct input and advice from industry on current and planned research activities contemplated for inclusion in the IPHC 5-Year program of integrated research and monitoring.**2. The RAB may also make recommendations to the Scientific Review Board concerning options for new suggest research topics, and current and planned research activities, and their prioritization for its consideration.”*

2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION

3. The RAB **ADOPTED** the Agenda as provided at [Appendix II](#). The documents provided to the RAB are listed in [Appendix III](#).

3. IPHC PROCESS

3.1 *Update on the actions arising from the 25th Session of the RAB (RAB025)*

4. The RAB **NOTED** paper [IPHC-2025-RAB026-03](#), which provided an opportunity to consider the progress made during the inter-sessional period, in relation to the recommendations and requests of the 25th Session of the IPHC Research Advisory Board (RAB025).
5. The RAB **NOTED** that three (3) of the actions from RAB025 remained in progress and will be reported on at RAB027 in 2026.
6. The RAB **AGREED** to further discuss and provided guidance on the following request, at the current RAB meeting:
RAB025-Req.05 (para. 32) Guidance on, and Discussion of, other Potential Applied Research Projects: The RAB REQUESTED that the IPHC Secretariat collect information on possible conditions that could lead to the observed increased prevalence of sand fleas affecting longline catches.
7. The RAB **AGREED** to consider the actions arising from RAB025 and revise as necessary, and for these to be combined with any new actions arising from RAB026.

3.2 *Outcomes of the 101st Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM101)*

8. The RAB **NOTED** paper [IPHC-2025-RAB026-04](#), that provided the outcomes of the 101st Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM101) relevant to the mandate of the RAB.

4. SEASON OVERVIEW – 2025: RAB MEMBERS

9. The RAB **NOTED** the following key 2025 fishery updates provided by RAB members:
 - a) Whale depredation remained an issue coastwide;
 - b) Dogfish were a continued problem in 2025, with high catches reported in IPHC Regulatory Areas 2B, 2C, and 3A;

- c) The discrepancy observed between low dogfish abundance estimates in IPHC Regulatory Area 2B and actual high fishery encounters was a source of concern;
- d) Sand fleas were reported as a substantial problem again in 2025 in most northern areas, with improved reporting coastwide considered important to better understand the issue;
- e) Habitat impacts due to non-halibut fisheries on Pacific halibut catch rates and recruitment represent a source of continued concern;
- f) Fish prices were substantially higher in 2025 compared to 2024 and remained so for the entire fishing period;
- g) Several reports on spotty fishing during 2025 and continued concerns regarding localised depletion in IPHC Regulatory Area 4D (St. Matthew Island) were raised;
- h) Catches in the charter sector remained high in IPHC Regulatory Area 2C and decreased in 3A, but required substantial searching to obtain those rates;
- i) Small fish (U32 inches) were being seen in high numbers in IPHC Regulatory Areas 2A, 2B, 2C, 3B, 3A, and 4A;
- j) Fishing in IPHC Regulatory Area 2A was poor in the first half of the year, with the suggestion of hypoxic events impacting sub-areas;
- k) There was continued interest in understanding the effects of habitat disturbance immediately prior to the fishing period opening, due to negative fishing effects from bottom contact by both mid-water trawl and bottom-trawl gear in IPHC Regulatory Area 2A;
- l) Changes in the length-weight relationship, possibly indicative of changing fish condition, and in the presence of different crab species (e.g. from blue king crab (*Paralithodes platypus*) to Pacific lyre crab (*Hyas lyratus*)) within stomach contents (i.e. St Matthew Island), possibly indicative of dietary changes, were reported;
- m) High yelloweye rockfish bycatch, particularly in IPHC Regulatory Area 2B, 2C and 3A, was a source of concern coastwide.

5. INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION INTEGRATED RESEARCH AND MONITORING PLAN

10. The RAB **NOTED** paper [IPHC-2025-RAB026-05](#), that provided the RAB with the draft IPHC Integrated Research and Monitoring Plan.

5.1 Research

5.1.1 Description of IPHC Biological and Ecosystem Sciences Research (Core research streams)

11. The RAB **NOTED** paper [IPHC-2025-RAB026-06](#), that provided a description of the biological and ecosystem science research projects conducted and planned by the IPHC Secretariat and contemplated within the Integrated Research and Monitoring Plan.
12. The RAB **NOTED** that the main objectives of the Biological and Ecosystem Science Research at the IPHC are to:
- a) identify and assess critical knowledge gaps in the biology of the Pacific halibut;
 - b) understand the influence of environmental conditions; and
 - c) apply the resulting knowledge to reduce uncertainty in current stock assessment models.

Delineating the genetic population structure of Pacific halibut throughout Convention Waters

13. The RAB **NOTED** paper [IPHC-2025-RAB026-06](#), that provided a description of the studies conducted by IPHC Secretariat on population genomics. Conclusions based on final analysis of the complete data set were presented indicating a lack of discrete genetic groups among the spawning groups examined and, in

particular, the lack of genetic differentiation between spawning groups sampled to the East and to the West of Amchitka Pass in the Western Aleutian Islands.

14. The RAB **NOTED** that the existence of a single genetic stock within IPHC Convention Waters supports current IPHC assessment practices that model the Pacific halibut population as a single coastwide stock. These results are attributed to a high degree of gene flow due to the highly migratory nature of Pacific halibut.

Reproductive assessment of the female Pacific halibut population

15. The RAB **NOTED** paper [IPHC-2025-RAB26-06](#), that provided a description of the studies designed to update maturity schedules and estimate fecundity in female Pacific halibut.
16. The RAB **NOTED** the update in maturity schedules that resulted from the histological assessment of maturity from samples collected in the FISS during 2022, 2023, and 2024, and its incorporation in the 2025 stock assessment.
17. The RAB **NOTED** the collection of ovarian samples for fecundity in 2023, 2024, and 2025 over a broad range of female sizes and the choice of the auto-diametric method for fecundity estimations.
18. The RAB **RECOMMENDED** prioritising fecundity estimations to determine the relationship between Pacific halibut female weight and total egg production.

Whale depredation mitigation strategies involving longline catch protection devices

19. The RAB **NOTED** paper [IPHC-2025-RAB026-06](#), that provided a description of a study designed to evaluate the efficacy of a catch protection shuttle device to reduce killer whale depredation in the Pacific halibut longline fishery.
20. The RAB **NOTED** the preliminary results from this study, indicating that the shuttle can be safely deployed and retrieved by fishing vessels with a picking boom, and that it has good retention of Pacific halibut.

5.2 Monitoring

5.2.1 Fishery-dependent data

21. Nil

5.2.2 Fishery-independent data

5.2.2.1 2025 FISS season: Design and implementation

22. The RAB **NOTED** paper [IPHC-2025-RAB026-07 Rev 1](#), that provided an overview of the IPHC Fishery-Independent Setline Survey (FISS) design and implementation in 2025.
23. The RAB **DISCUSSED** the 2025 FISS activities and generally confirmed trends in catch rates and fish prices.

5.2.2.2 2026-28 FISS design evaluation

24. The RAB **NOTED** paper [IPHC-2025-RAB026-08](#), that provided proposed designs for the IPHC's Fishery-Independent Setline Survey (FISS) for the 2026-28 period, and an evaluation of those designs.
25. The RAB **SUPPORTED** an annual FISS design with sufficient coverage across all Biological Regions, and that the IPHC Secretariat continue its efforts to obtain supplementary funding for FISS activities that would support this goal, including through direct increases in Contracting Party contributions.
26. The RAB **DISCUSSED** the following concerns raised throughout the meeting:
 - a) including what the impact of reduced footprint designs means for the stock assessment, the longer the reduced designs persist;
 - b) the need to move back to a broad coastwide design involving a randomised station count, as a rotational block design;

- c) the possible application of funds resulting from any fines paid to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement due to exceeded bycatch caps or other Pacific halibut-related violations for scientific research purposes.

6. GUIDANCE ON, AND DISCUSSION OF, OTHER POTENTIAL APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECTS

27. The RAB **NOTED** an update from the Secretariat on the use of AI for ageing Pacific halibut, including that work is underway to expand the training dataset, particularly to incorporate a critical number of older specimens and ensure full spatial coverage, to test more advanced model architectures, and to evaluate variable weighting schemes that assign greater weight to otoliths aged twice compared with those aged only once.
28. The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat continue investigations on Pacific halibut female maturity at age in different Biological Regions.
29. The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat set up efforts to increase documentation of sand flea occurrence during commercial fishing activities by encouraging fishing vessels to report such occurrences in logbooks, and to also relay this information to IPHC Fisheries Data Specialists (Field).
30. The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat collate and potentially analyse FISS data on sandflea prevalence.
31. The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat continue investigations on Pacific halibut juvenile stages, including the mapping of juvenile habitat throughout IPHC Convention Waters.
32. The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat collect information on catch rates during openers of the Pacific halibut directed fishery in IPHC Regulatory Area 2A in relation to previous trawling activities in Pacific halibut fishing grounds.
33. **NOTING** recent issues identified regarding the alleged illegal retention and landing of Pacific halibut by non-target sectors for processing into fishmeal (e.g. the Kodiak trawl fleet; <https://www.northernjournal.com/alaska-troopers-seize-kodiak-trawl-groups-electronics-in-bycatch-probe/>), the RAB **RECOMMENDED** that:
 - a) the IPHC undertake an information gathering effort to document, explore via communications with enforcement entities engaged on the issue, so that the IPHC has a clear indication of what is being removed, and the likely impacts on the Pacific halibut resource.
 - b) as an affected party, the RAB would like the IPHC to be kept in the loop of any penalties that may be applied, so that a portion be requested and used to subsidise the annual FISS.
 - c) the gathered information should be summarised and provided as an information paper to the Annual Meeting and appropriate subsidiary bodies.
34. **NOTING** the importance of accurate accounting for all sources of mortality from the Pacific halibut stock, and concerns about the accuracy of the estimates for the unguided recreational fisheries in Alaska and Canada, the RAB **RECOMMENDED** that the Secretariat first summarise the information received from Contracting Parties through the annual reporting process, and that the Commission request additional detail on the methods used to derive estimates of unguided removals, including the potential sources of bias and uncertainty in those estimates.
35. The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat continue to collaborate with industry on a range of research projects, noting the recent successful collaborations involving the catch-protection study. This could include facilitating the application and further innovation of catch protection devices by the commercial fishery.
36. The RAB **REQUESTED** the consideration of an investigation of a floor coastwide mortality limit (e.g. a minimum Total Constant Exploitation Yield (TCEY)) be conducted as part of the MSE process to understand potential risks to the Pacific halibut stock and fisheries for this type of management procedure.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

7.1 *IPHC Meeting Calendar (2026)*

37. The RAB **AGREED** that the placement of the RAB meeting in November, before the Pacific Marine Expo and prior to the Interim Meeting, over 1.5 days is optimal and to continue this meeting format moving forward.

8. REVIEW OF THE DRAFT AND ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE 26TH SESSION OF THE IPHC RESEARCH ADVISORY BOARD (RAB026)

38. The Report of the 26th Session of the Research Advisory Board (RAB026) ([IPHC-2025-RAB026-R](#)) was **ADOPTED** on 19 November 2025, including the consolidated set of recommendations and requests arising from RAB026 provided at [Appendix IV](#).

APPENDIX I
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

RAB Officers

Chairperson	Vice-Chairperson
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APPENDIX II**AGENDA FOR THE 26TH SESSION OF THE IPHC RESEARCH ADVISORY BOARD (RAB026)****Date:** 18-19 November 2025**Location:** Seattle, Washington, USA**Venue:** IPHC HQ office**Time:** 18th: 09:00-16:00; 19th: 09:00-12:00**Chairperson:** Dr David T. Wilson (Executive Director)**Vice-Chairperson:** Dr Josep V. Planas (Biological & Ecosystem Sciences Branch Manager)

- 1. OPENING OF THE SESSION (Chairperson)**
- 2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION (Chairperson)**
- 3. IPHC PROCESS (Chairperson)**
 - 3.1** Update on the actions arising from the 25th Session of the RAB (RAB025)
 - 3.2** Outcomes of the 101st Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM101)
- 4. SEASON OVERVIEW – 2025: RAB MEMBERS**
- 5. INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION INTEGRATED RESEARCH AND MONITORING PLAN**
 - 5.1 RESEARCH**
 - 5.1.1 Biology and ecology**
 - Description of IPHC Biological and Ecosystem Sciences Research (Core research streams)
 - 5.2 MONITORING**
 - 5.2.1 Fishery-dependent data**
 - 5.2.2 Fishery-independent data**
 - 2025 FISS season: Design and implementation (K. Ualesi)
 - IPHC Fishery-Independent Setline Survey (FISS)
 - 2026-28 FISS design evaluation (R. Webster)
- 6. GUIDANCE ON, AND DISCUSSION OF, OTHER POTENTIAL APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECTS (Chairperson & Vice-Chairperson)**
- 7. OTHER BUSINESS**
- 8. REVIEW OF THE DRAFT AND ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE 26th SESSION OF THE IPHC RESEARCH ADVISORY BOARD (RAB026) (Chairperson)**

APPENDIX III**LIST OF DOCUMENTS FOR THE 26TH SESSION OF THE IPHC RESEARCH ADVISORY BOARD (RAB026)**

Document	Title	Availability
IPHC-2025-RAB026-01	Agenda & Schedule for the 26 th Session of the IPHC Research Advisory Board (RAB026)	✓ 20 Aug 2025 ✓ 14 Oct 2025
IPHC-2025-RAB026-02	List of Documents for the 26 th Session of the IPHC Research Advisory Board (RAB026)	✓ 20 Aug 2025 ✓ 29 Oct 2025
IPHC-2025-RAB026-03	Update on the actions arising from the 25 th Session of the RAB (RAB025) (D. Wilson & J. Planas)	✓ 09 Oct 2025
IPHC-2025-RAB026-04	Outcomes of the 101 st Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM101) (D. Wilson)	✓ 08 Oct 2025
IPHC-2025-RAB026-05	International Pacific Halibut Commission Integrated Research and Monitoring Plan (D. Wilson, J. Planas, I. Stewart, A. Hicks, B. Hutniczak, & R. Webster)	✓ 08 Oct 2025
IPHC-2025-RAB026-06	Report on current and future biological and ecosystem science research activities (J. Planas, C. Dykstra, A. Jasonowicz, C. Jones)	✓ 14 Oct 2025
IPHC-2025-RAB026-07 Rev_1	IPHC Fishery-independent setline survey (FISS) design and implementation in 2025 (K. Ualesi, R. Rillera, T. Jack, & K. Coll)	✓ 16 Oct 2025 ✓ 29 Oct 2025
IPHC-2025-RAB026-08	2026-28 FISS designs (R. Webster, I. Stewart, K. Ualesi, T. Jack, & D. Wilson)	✓ 19 Oct 2025

APPENDIX IV

CONSOLIDATED SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 26TH SESSION OF THE IPHC
RESEARCH ADVISORY BOARD (RAB026)*RECOMMENDATIONS**Reproductive assessment of the female Pacific halibut population*

RAB026-Rec.01 (para. 18) The RAB **RECOMMENDED** prioritising fecundity estimations to determine the relationship between Pacific halibut female weight and total egg production.

Guidance on, and discussion of, other potential applied research projects

RAB026-Rec.02 (para. 33) **NOTING** recent issues identified regarding the alleged illegal retention and landing of Pacific halibut by non-target sectors for processing into fishmeal (e.g. the Kodiak trawl fleet; <https://www.northernjournal.com/alaska-troopers-seize-kodiak-trawl-groups-electronics-in-bycatch-probe/>), the RAB **RECOMMENDED** that:

- a) the IPHC undertake an information gathering effort to document, explore via communications with enforcement entities engaged on the issue, so that the IPHC has a clear indication of what is being removed, and the likely impacts on the Pacific halibut resource.
- b) as an affected party, the RAB would like the IPHC to be kept in the loop of any penalties that may be applied, so that a portion be requested and used to subsidise the annual FISS.
- c) the gathered information should be summarised and provided as an information paper to the Annual Meeting and appropriate subsidiary bodies.

RAB026-Rec.03 (para. 34) **NOTING** the importance of accurate accounting for all sources of mortality from the Pacific halibut stock, and concerns about the accuracy of the estimates for the unguided recreational fisheries in Alaska and Canada, the RAB **RECOMMENDED** that the Secretariat first summarise the information received from Contracting Parties through the annual reporting process, and that the Commission request additional detail on the methods used to derive estimates of unguided removals, including the potential sources of bias and uncertainty in those estimates.

*REQUESTS**Guidance on, and Discussion of, other Potential Applied Research Projects*

RAB026-Req.01 (para. 28) The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat continue investigations on Pacific halibut female maturity at age in different Biological Regions.

RAB026-Req.02 (para. 29) The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat set up efforts to increase documentation of sand flea occurrence during commercial fishing activities by encouraging fishing vessels to report such occurrences in logbooks, and to also relay this information to IPHC Fisheries Data Specialists (Field).

RAB026-Req.03 (para. 30) The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat collate and potentially analyse FISS data on sandflea prevalence.

RAB026-Req.04 (para. 31) The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat continue investigations on Pacific halibut juvenile stages, including the mapping of juvenile habitat throughout IPHC Convention Waters.

RAB026-Req.05 (para. 32) The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat collect information on catch rates during openers of the Pacific halibut directed fishery in IPHC Regulatory Area 2A in relation to previous trawling activities in Pacific halibut fishing grounds.

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- RAB026-Req.06 ([para. 35](#)) The RAB **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat continue to collaborate with industry on a range of research projects, noting the recent successful collaborations involving the catch-protection study. This could include facilitating the application and further innovation of catch protection devices by the commercial fishery.
- RAB026-Req.07 ([para. 36](#)) The RAB **REQUESTED** the consideration of an investigation of a floor coastwide mortality limit (e.g. a minimum Total Constant Exploitation Yield (TCEY)) be conducted as part of the MSE process to understand potential risks to the Pacific halibut stock and fisheries for this type of management procedure.