



IPHC Fishery Regulations:

Commercial Fishing Periods (Sect. 9) – limited retention outside the commercial fishing period in IPHC Regulatory Area 2B

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Directed Commercial ☐ Recreational ☐ Subsistence ☐ Non-directed commercial ☒ All ☐
All Regulatory Areas ☐ All Alaska Regulatory Areas ☐ All U.S. Regulatory Areas ☐
2A ☐ 2B ☒ 2C ☐ 3A ☐ 3B ☐ 4A ☐ 4B ☐ 4C ☐ 4D ☐ 4E ☐

PURPOSE

To propose a three-year pilot program authorizing limited retention of legal-sized Pacific halibut caught incidentally as bycatch outside the Pacific halibut commercial fishing period in year-round hook & line and trap groundfish fisheries in IPHC Regulatory Area 2B (Canada).

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

This regulatory proposal requests that the Commission authorize a three-year pilot permitting a limited retention of legal-sized Pacific halibut caught incidentally as bycatch during the closed period (i.e., early December to early March) in year-round hook & line and trap groundfish fisheries in IPHC Regulatory Area 2B (Canada). Any Pacific halibut landed under the pilot program would be counted against the IPHC Regulatory Area 2B (Canada) commercial TAC and the total amount of Pacific halibut that could be landed would be capped at 2% of Regulatory Area 2B (Canada) commercial TAC.

During the Pacific halibut closed period (early December to early March), groundfish hook & line and trap vessels licenced to fish for sablefish, rockfish and dogfish must release any Pacific halibut caught incidentally while targeting these non-Pacific halibut groundfish species. This catch must be recorded in the DFO-approved logbook and is verified through the 100% at-sea monitoring program in place.

As a condition of licence, these vessels must acquire sufficient individual vessel quota (IVQ) to cover the fishing mortality associated with this catch and release of Pacific halibut. This requirement creates the incentive for vessels to fish responsibly and minimize their incidental catch of Pacific halibut. However, it is also imposing a penalty on these vessels that is creating hardship. This is particularly true for the smaller fishing operations targeting rockfish. The rockfish fishery is one of the “entry” fisheries on Canada’s Pacific coast; it is a fishery where younger fishermen can get a start, get experience, build their businesses and eventually expand into other fisheries (such as Pacific halibut). Many of these operations have been forced to curtail and, in some instances, stop fishing from early December to early March.

The purpose of this proposal is to maintain the management measures in place that create the incentive for non-Pacific halibut hook & line and trap groundfish vessels to fish responsibly and minimize their incidental catch of legal-sized Pacific halibut while giving them the ability to avoid

or minimize penalties, provided they conduct their fishing operations in a responsible manner. The proposal should also help minimize discard mortality and wastage of legal-sized Pacific halibut.

The data and analysis of discarded legal sized Pacific halibut data during the closed period for 2022-2024 indicates less than 500 pieces were recorded per year. However, this is only a brief window in time and may not fully reflect past levels of activity by non-Pacific halibut hook & line and trap groundfish vessels. As such, it is proposed that a maximum of 2% of IPHC Regulatory Area 2B commercial TAC be permitted to be retained by non-Pacific halibut hook & line and trap groundfish vessels during the closed period. However, the actual amount of Pacific halibut quota available may be less, as it will be contingent on what remains at the directed Pacific halibut fishery. The trial program will also include caps at the vessel level to prevent targeting on Pacific halibut.

All Pacific Region commercial groundfish fisheries have several additional management measures in the form of caps to ensure the sustainable and equitable harvest of each stock. These include: sector-specific caps, area-specific caps, landings caps, vessel caps and trip limits. Each cap is consulted on prior to the beginning of each season, and some can be managed as “soft caps”, which are able to be amended in-season (if all fishing sectors agree to said amendment). These caps limit the amount of quota that can be transferred between fishing sectors, the amount of quota that can be permanently or temporarily held by a licence, the amount of non-directed catch that can be retained/landed in directed fisheries, and the amount of catch that can be landed of a given species for each trip.

A three-year pilot program will allow for a full evaluation of the trial, with analysis and review being conducted both in season and post season each year. If the evaluation indicates that the pilot is not performing as intended, it should be modified to address the identified concerns or halted.

Pacific halibut are managed cooperatively between Canada and the United States of America (USA) through the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC). Each year, the IPHC conducts scientific surveys and a coastwide stock assessment, then makes recommendations on catch limits for the two countries. A level of harvest within each of the management areas along the Pacific coast is agreed upon through annual meetings with the IPHC. Once Canada has received its harvest allocation, it is the responsibility of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) to ensure that the harvest assigned to Canada is not exceeded.

DFO manages fisheries in accordance with the roles and responsibilities outlined in the Fisheries Act. Key priorities for fisheries management in Canada include environmental sustainability, economic viability, and the inclusion of stakeholders in decision-making processes. DFO uses Integrated Fisheries Management Plans (IFMPs) to guide the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. The IFMPs, along with Conditions of License (COLs), are developed by DFO Fisheries Management, and are informed by consultations with stakeholder groups and First Nations through advisory processes.

The Canadian commercial groundfish fisheries are managed through an individual transferable quota (IVQ) system with limited entry into the fishery whereby individual fish harvesters have responsibility for all fish caught, both landed and released at sea. Responsibility means ensuring that the harvester has acquired the appropriate license, that each license specifies sufficient quota for all quota species that have been caught, and that COLs regarding catch monitoring

are met. In IVQ fisheries, the control scheme relies entirely on each licensed vessel taking only its allocated share; therefore, information on all catch (retained or released) is necessary for the proper management of the fishery.

All Pacific commercial groundfish fisheries have mandatory logbooks and 100% catch monitoring, both at-sea and at the time of offloading. This is required to provide a full and reliable accounting of all catches in the groundfish fisheries. At the core of this program is the individual accountability and responsibility by an individual fish harvester. At-sea monitoring is primarily conducted via an electronic monitoring (EM) system, comprised of closed-circuit cameras that record the catch retrieval and release process, gear sensors that record the deployment and retrieval of fishing gear, and GPS systems that record the location of each fishing event. Additionally, after the completion of each fishing trip, the logbook records are audited against both the at-sea and dockside offload records for accuracy. If the comparisons do not meet the standards, additional review may be required at a cost to the licence holder. This helps to create incentive for accurate fishing records, which ensures the sustainable management of fishery resources.

SUGGESTED REGULATORY LANGUAGE

The proponent did not provide specific regulatory language that would implement this pilot program; therefore, any necessary regulatory text would be developed by the Commission, in consultation with relevant management authorities, if the proposal is approved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Commission:

- 1) **NOTE** regulatory proposal IPHC-2026-AM102-PropC2 that proposes a three-year pilot program authorizing limited retention of legal-sized Pacific halibut caught incidentally as bycatch outside the Pacific halibut commercial fishing period in year-round hook & line and trap groundfish fisheries in IPHC Regulatory Area 2B (Canada).