IPHC Fishery-Independent Setline Survey (FISS) design and implementation in 2026

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PURPOSE

To provide a summary of the IPHC Fishery-Independent Setline Survey (FISS) design and implementation in 2026.

BACKGROUND

The annual IPHC Fishery-Independent Setline Survey (FISS) of the Pacific halibut stock was augmented from 2014-2019 with expansion stations that filled in gaps in coverage in the annual FISS. Prior to 2020, the standard grid of stations comprised 1,200 stations. Following the completion in 2019, expansion stations were added to the standard grid in all IPHC Regulatory Areas, now totaling 1,890 stations for the full FISS design (Figure 1), within the prescribed depth range of 18 to 732 metres (10 to 400 fathoms).

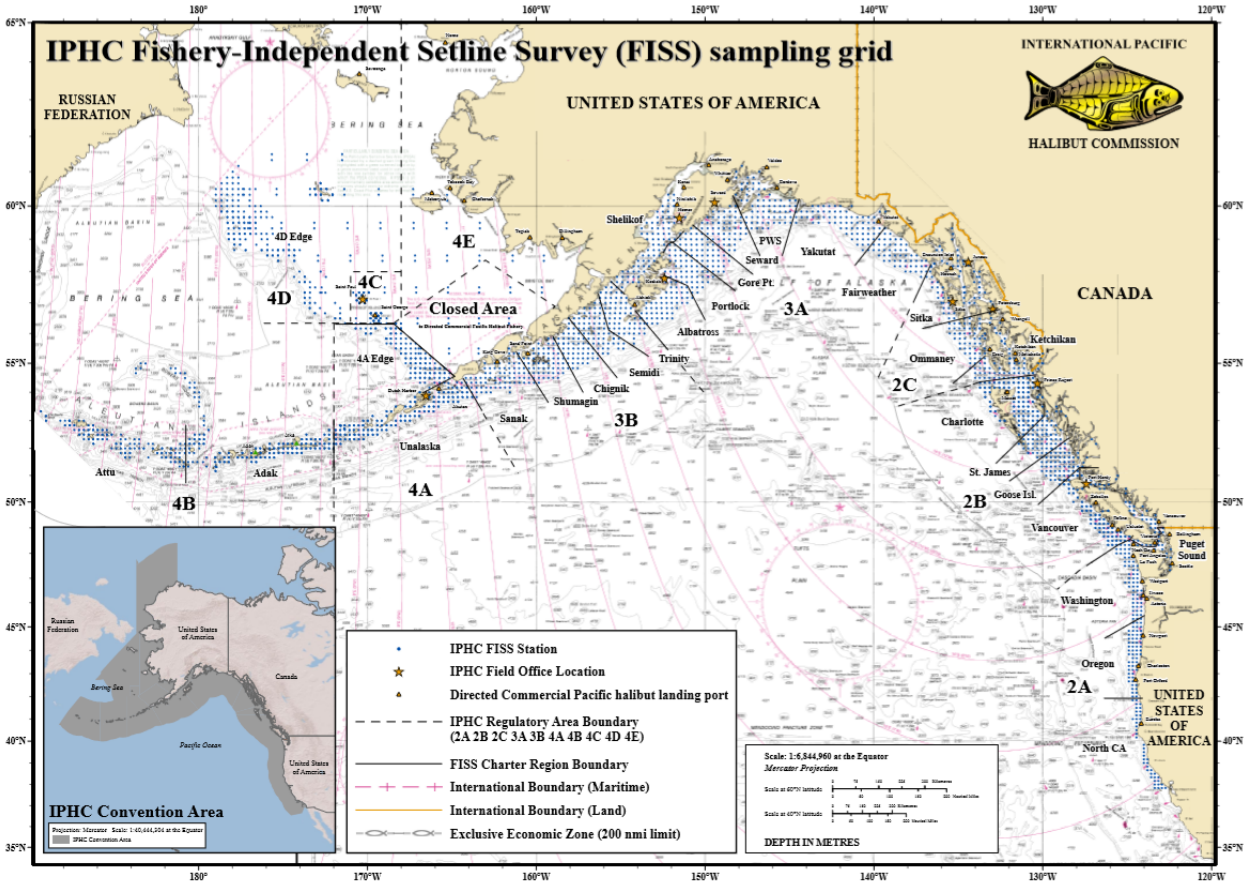

Figure 1. IPHC Fishery-Independent Setline Survey (FISS) with full sampling grid shown.

Prior to 2019, only fixed gear was used to fish FISS sets. With increasing use of snap gear in the commercial fishery, this restriction has limited the number of vessels available for the FISS. Further, any differences between snap and fixed gears (including catch rate differences and differences in fishing locations) may affect our understanding of trends in commercial fishery indices. This has motivated the need for a study comparing the two gear types with this work being done in 2019, 2020, and again in 2021. No further comparison was undertaken in 2022;

recognizing the increased use of snap gear, the IPHC Secretariat opened all bids for 2023 to both fixed gear and snap gear vessels and has continued this practice through 2026.

Beginning in 2019, individual weight data were collected coastwide from Pacific halibut caught on the FISS to eliminate questions that have arisen regarding the accuracy of estimates that depend on these weights, including weight per unit effort (WPUE) indices of density. Data from IPHC collections from commercial landings and other sources had provided evidence that the current standard length-net weight curve used for estimating Pacific halibut weights on the FISS may have been over-estimating weights on average in most IPHC Regulatory Areas, and that the relationship between weight and length may vary spatially.

2026 FISS design

On 19 December 2025 (IPHC-2025-MR-019), the 2026 FISS Tender Specifications were published to the IPHC website, with a deadline of 1 February 2026 for tenders (subsequently extended to 8 February 2026).

At the 101st Session of the IPHC Interim Meeting (IM101, 2 December 2025), the Commission adopted the Supplemented Reduced Loss design (Option 2; 692 stations) for the 2026 FISS (IPHC-2025-IM101-R). At its 102nd Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM102, 19–22 January 2026), the Commission subsequently adopted a revised 2026 FISS design, substituting the Gore Point and Fairweather charter regions for Prince William Sound and Yakutat respectively and adding the Goose Island charter region, bringing the total to 717 stations coastwide, an increase of 25 stations on the design adopted at IM101 (IPHC-2026-AM102-R).

The design (Figure 2) comprised sampling subareas within IPHC Regulatory Areas 2B, 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A and 4B, intended to balance the Commission's primary and secondary objectives for the FISS, on the understanding that vessel availability, bids received, additional bait needs, and field staff recruitment may affect operational feasibility. **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The IPHC's FISS design encompasses nearshore and offshore waters of the IPHC Convention Area (Fig. 1). The IPHC Regulatory Areas are divided into 29 charter regions, each requiring between 10 and 46 charter days to complete. FISS stations are located at the intersections of a 10 nmi by 10 nmi square grid within the depth range occupied by Pacific halibut during summer months (18 – 732 m [10 – 400 fm]). Figure 2 depicts the 2026 FISS station positions adopted at AM102, together with the IPHC Regulatory Areas, for a coastwide total of 717 stations.

Fishing vessels are chosen through a competitive bid process where up to four (4) charter regions per vessel may be awarded and typically 8-15 vessels are chosen. In 2026, the process was clearly documented on the IPHC website for accountability and transparency purposes: Vessel Recruiting - IPHC.

In 2026, six (6) vessels were chartered to complete the FISS, reflecting the reduced scale of the design adopted at AM102 (717 stations, against 1,890 stations under the full FISS design), as detailed in IPHC-2026-MR-004 Notification of IPHC Fishery-Independent Setline Survey (FISS) 2026 Contract Awards - IPHC.

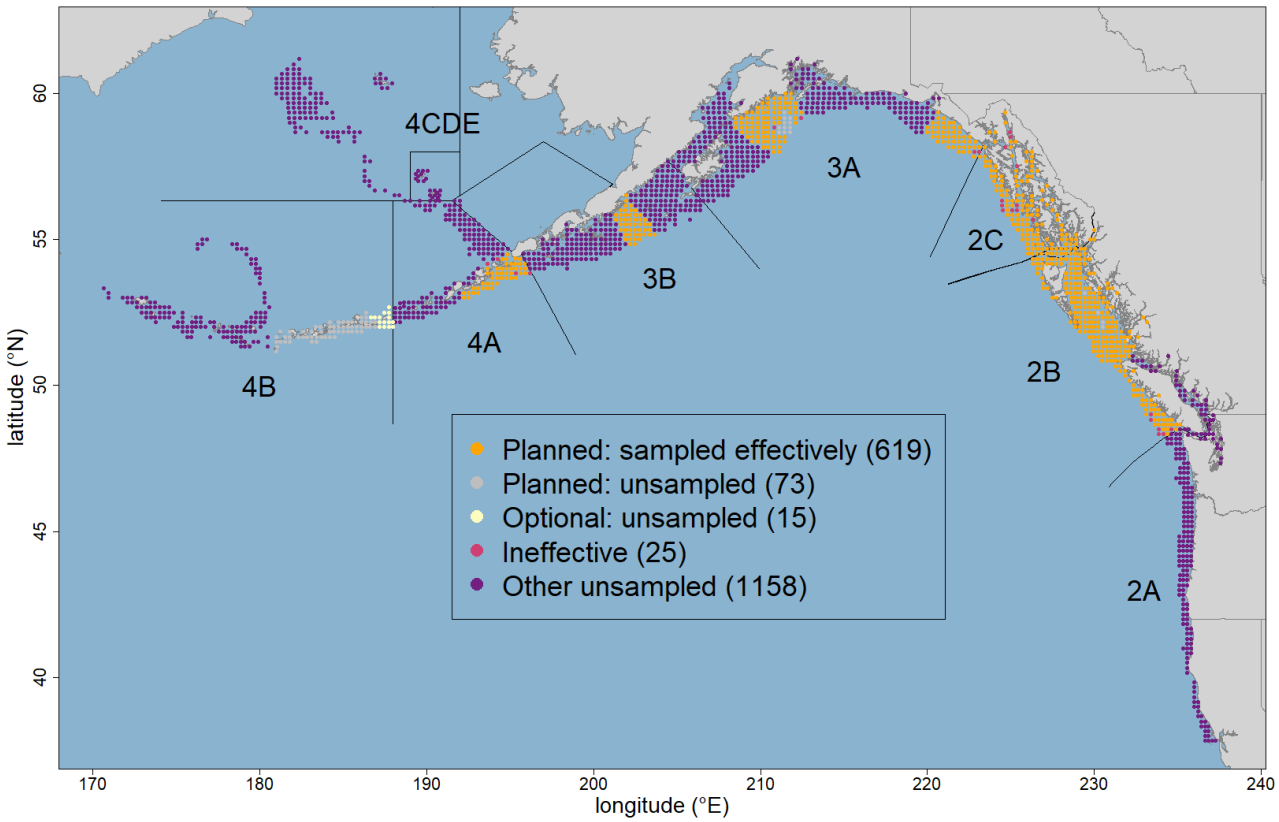

Figure 2. Map of the 2026 FISS design (717 stations, plus 15 optional stations in IPHC regulatory area 4B), approved by the Commission at AM102 on 22 January 2026. This map shows the 619 stations sampled effectively (in orange, the 73 unsampled stations (in grey), the 15 optional stations in IPHC regulatory area 4B (in yellow) and the 25 ineffective stations (in red).

Sampling protocols

IPHC Setline Survey Specialists (Field) collected data according to protocols established in the 2026 FISS Sampling Manual (IPHC-2026-VSM01).

Sampling challenges - 2026

Of the 717 FISS stations planned for the 2026 FISS season, 619 (86%) were effectively sampled.

Not sampled: A total of 73 stations initially planned for sampling in 2026 were not completed. In the Adak charter region, 58 stations were not sampled due to lack of vessel availability. In the Charlotte charter region, one (1) station was excluded because it was located within the Hecate Marine Protected Area. Additionally, three (3) stations in the St James charter region were not completed because they were in the Hecate Marine Protected Area. In the Seward charter region, 11 stations were not completed because the vessel contracted for this region encountered a significant mechanical issue that required substantial repairs.

Ineffective stations: Coastwide, twenty-five (25) stations were deemed ineffective due to orca depredation (n=5), sperm whale depredation (n=14), sand fleas (n=4), soak time (n=1), and setting and gear issues (n=1).

Bait (Chum salmon)

The minimum quality requirement for FISS bait is No. 2 semi-bright (Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute grades A through E), headed and gutted, and individually quick-frozen chum salmon. Bait usage is based on 0.17 kilograms (0.37 pounds) per hook resulting in approximately 136

kilograms (300 pounds) per eight skate station. Bait quality was monitored and documented throughout the season and found to meet the standard as described above.

Pre-season: In August 2025 (IPHC-2025-MR-011), the Secretariat solicited pre-season bait purchases of up to approximately 72.4 tonnes (159,600 lbs) of chum salmon (28.3 t in Canada; 44.1 t in the United States) to ensure a smooth start to the 2026 FISS.

RESULTS

Interactive views of the FISS results are provided via the IPHC website here:

https://www.iphc.int/data/setline-survey-catch-per-unit-effort

As in previous years, legal-sized (O32) Pacific halibut caught on the FISS were sacrificed in order to obtain biological data and were retained for sale. In addition, beginning in 2020, sub-legal (U32) Pacific halibut randomly selected for otolith sampling were also retained and sold. This helped to offset costs of the FISS. FISS vessels also retained for sale incidentally captured rockfish (*Sebastes spp*.) and Pacific cod (*Gadus macrocephalus*) as these species rarely survive the barotrauma resulting from capture. Most vessel contracts provided the vessel a lump sum payment, along with a 10% share of the Pacific halibut proceeds and a 50% share of the incidental catch proceeds.

The 2026 FISS chartered six (6) commercial longline vessels (three Canadian and three USA), during a combined 37 trips and 364 charter days (Tables 1). Otoliths were removed from 9,791 fish coastwide. Approximately 160 tonnes (353,451 pounds) of Pacific halibut, 14.72 tonnes (32,458 pounds) of Pacific cod, and 38.44 tonnes (84,737 pounds) of rockfish were landed from the FISS stations.

Table 1a. Effort and landing summary by FISS charter region and vessel for all 2026 stations and all Pacific halibut (sampled U32 and all O32).

IPHC Regulatory Area	Charter Region	Vessel	Vessel Number[1]	Charter Days[2]	Planned Stations	Effective Stations[3]	Pacific halibut Sold (t)[4]	Pacific halibut Sold (lb)[4]	Average Price USD/kg[5]	Average Price USD/lb[5]
2B	Vancouver Outside	*Vanisle*	21912	32	56	50	8	18,424	$22.04	$10.00
2B	Goose Is.	*Star Wars II*	99997	32	57	57	9	20,382	$24.19	$10.97
2B	St. James	*Vanisle*	21912	28	60	57	17	36,705	$24.64	$11.17
2B	Charlotte	*Vanisle*	21912	54	89	88	24	52,489	$23.85	$10.82
2C	Ketchikan	*Pender Isle*	27282	23	43	43	20	43,466	$23.82	$10.80
2C	Ommaney	*Pender Isle*	27282	28	52	45	31	67,483	$22.84	$10.36
2C	Sitka	*Predator*	33133	31	52	48	17	38,300	$21.52	$9.76
3A	Fairweather	*Predator*	33133	24	51	49	4	8,329	$19.95	$9.05
3A	Seward	*J-Bae*	56103	34	52	39	8	16,547	$21.18	$9.61
3A	Gore Pt.	*Kema Sue*	41033	28	48	48	8	17,127	$21.24	$9.64
3B	Chignik	*Kema Sue*	41033	25	48	48	5	11,466	$16.17	$7.34
4A	Unalaska	*Kema Sue*	41033	25	51	47	10	22,733	$16.76	$7.60
Total		**6 Vessels**		**364**	**659**	**619**	**160**	**353,451**	**$22.36**	**$10.14**

[1] Canada: Vessel Registration Number and USA: ADF&G vessel number.

[2] Days are estimated - some vessels fished two charter regions in one day.

[3] Stations that did not meet setting parameters or deemed ineffective are excluded.

[4] Net weight (head-off, dressed, washed). May not sum to correct total due to rounding.

[5] Ex-vessel price.

Table 1b. Effort and landing summary by FISS charter region and vessel for all 2026 stations and O32 Pacific halibut.

IPHC Regulatory Area	Charter Region	Vessel	Vessel Number[1]	Charter Days[2]	Planned Stations	Effective Stations[3]	Pacific halibut Sold (t)[4]	Pacific halibut Sold (lb)[4]	Average Price USD/kg[5]	Average Price USD/lb[5]
2B	Vancouver Outside	*Vanisle*	21912	32	56	50	8	17,745	$22.14	$10.04
2B	Goose Is.	*Star Wars II*	99997	32	57	57	9	18,924	$24.32	$11.03
2B	St. James	*Vanisle*	21912	28	60	57	16	35,975	$24.67	$11.19
2B	Charlotte	*Vanisle*	21912	54	89	88	23	49,634	$23.99	$10.88
2C	Ketchikan	*Pender Isle*	27282	23	43	43	19	41,975	$23.91	$10.84
2C	Ommaney	*Pender Isle*	27282	28	52	45	29	64,722	$23.06	$10.46
2C	Sitka	*Predator*	33133	31	52	48	17	36,820	$21.52	$9.76
3A	Fairweather	*Predator*	33133	24	51	49	3	7,705	$20.04	$9.09
3A	Seward	*J-Bae*	56103	34	52	39	7	15,115	$21.33	$9.68
3A	Gore Pt.	*Kema Sue*	41033	28	48	48	7	15,135	$21.43	$9.72
3B	Chignik	*Kema Sue*	41033	25	48	48	4	9,247	$17.51	$7.94
4A	Unalaska	*Kema Sue*	41033	25	51	47	5	10,253	$18.10	$8.21
Total		**6 Vessels**		**364**	**659**	**619**	**147**	**323,249**	**$22.79**	**$10.34**

[1] Canada: Vessel Registration Number and USA: ADF&G vessel number.
[2] Days are estimated - some vessels fished two charter regions in one day.
[3] Stations that did not meet setting parameters or deemed ineffective are excluded.
[4] Net weight (head-off, dressed, washed). May not sum to correct total due to rounding.
[5] Ex-vessel price.

Table 1c. Effort and landing summary by FISS charter region and vessel for all 2026 stations and sampled U32 Pacific halibut.

IPHC Regulatory Area	Charter Region	Vessel	Vessel Number1	Charter Days2	Planned Stations	Effective Stations[3]	Pacific halibut Sold (t)[4]	Pacific halibut Sold (lb)[4]	Average Price USD/kg[5]	Average Price USD/lb[5]
2B	Vancouver Outside	*Vanisle*	21912	32	56	50	0	679	$19.57	$8.88
2B	Goose Is.	*Star Wars II*	99997	32	57	57	1	1,458	$22.56	$10.23
2B	St. James	*Vanisle*	21912	28	60	57	0	730	$22.74	$10.31
2B	Charlotte	*Vanisle*	21912	54	89	88	1	2,855	$21.45	$9.73
2C	Ketchikan	*Pender Isle*	27282	23	43	43	1	1,491	$21.28	$9.65
2C	Ommaney	*Pender Isle*	27282	28	52	45	1	2,761	$17.75	$8.05
2C	Sitka	*Predator*	33133	31	52	48	1	1,479	$21.61	$9.80
3A	Fairweather	*Predator*	33133	24	51	49	0	625	$18.84	$8.54
3A	Seward	*J-Bae*	56103	34	52	39	1	1,432	$19.58	$8.88
3A	Gore Pt.	*Kema Sue*	41033	28	48	48	1	1,992	$19.84	$9.00
3B	Chignik	*Kema Sue*	41033	25	48	48	1	2,219	$10.58	$4.80
4A	Unalaska	*Kema Sue*	41033	25	51	47	6	12,480	$15.66	$7.10
Total		**6 Vessels**		**364**	**659**	**619**	**14**	**30,202**	**$17.71**	**$8.04**

[1] Canada: Vessel Registration Number and USA: ADF&G vessel number.
[2] Days are estimated - some vessels fished two charter regions in one day.
[3] Stations that did not meet setting parameters or deemed ineffective are excluded.
[4] Net weight (head-off, dressed, washed). May not sum to correct total due to rounding.

[5] Ex-vessel price.

Vessels chartered by the IPHC delivered fish to 12 different ports (Tables 2). Fish sales were awarded based on obtaining a fair market price. When awarding sales, the Commission considered the price offered, the number of years that a buyer had been buying and marketing Pacific halibut, how fish were graded at the dock (including the determination of No. 2 and chalky Pacific halibut), and the promptness of settlements following deliveries. In the case of multi-port bidding, vessel transit logistics and operational requirements were also considered. Individual sales were evaluated after each event to ensure that the buyer was meeting IPHC standards. Average prices increased from $18.04/kg in 2025 to $22.36/kg in 2026 (Tables 3). This represents a 24% increase in price.

Table 2a. FISS Pacific halibut landings by port for all Pacific halibut (sampled U32 and all O32), 2026[1,2].

Offload Port	Trips	Tonnes	Pounds	Total USD	Average Price (USD/kg)	Average Price (USD/lb)
Dutch Harbor	2	10	22,733	$172,840.89	$16.76	$7.60
Homer	3	8	17,127	$165,024.60	$21.24	$9.64
Juneau	1	2	4,223	$38,881.75	$20.30	$9.21
Petersburg	2	8	17,357	$168,028.00	$21.34	$9.68
Port Hardy	5	25	54,197	$599,413.71	$24.38	$11.06
Prince Rupert	12	77	169,400	$1,804,771.28	$23.49	$10.65
Sand Point	2	5	11,466	$84,115.20	$16.17	$7.34
Seward	5	8	18,476	$177,771.00	$21.21	$9.62
Sitka	2	10	22,167	$215,097.00	$21.39	$9.70
Tofino/Ucluelet	1	4	9,905	$91,767.60	$20.43	$9.26
Vancouver	1	2	5,447	$58,622.53	$23.73	$10.76
Yakutat	1	0	953	$8,455.68	$19.56	$8.87
Grand Total	**37**	**160**	**353,451**	**$3,584,789.24**	**$22.36**	**$10.14**

[1] Net weight (head-off, dressed, washed).
[2] Prices based on net weight.

Table 2b. FISS Pacific halibut landings by port for O32 Pacific halibut, 2026[1,2].

Offload Port	Trips	Tonnes	Pounds	Total USD	Average Price (USD/kg)	Average Price (USD/lb)
Dutch Harbor	2	5	10,253	$84,179.80	$18.10	$8.21
Homer	3	7	15,135	$147,096.60	$21.43	$9.72
Juneau	1	2	4,168	$38,386.75	$20.30	$9.21
Petersburg	2	8	17,062	$165,293.00	$21.36	$9.69
Port Hardy	5	24	52,329	$580,563.46	$24.46	$11.09
Prince Rupert	12	73	161,703	$1,733,843.68	$23.64	$10.72
Sand Point	2	4	9,247	$73,464.00	$17.51	$7.94
Seward	5	8	17,024	$164,884.00	$21.35	$9.69
Sitka	2	9	20,525	$199,466.00	$21.42	$9.72
Tofino/Ucluelet	1	4	9,541	$89,150.19	$20.60	$9.34
Vancouver	1	2	5,401	$58,132.86	$23.73	$10.76
Yakutat	1	0	861	$7,646.08	$19.58	$8.88
Grand Total	**37**	**147**	**323,249**	**$3,342,106.42**	**$22.79**	**$10.34**

[1] Net weight (head-off, dressed, washed).
[2] Prices based on net weight.

Table 2c. FISS Pacific halibut landings by port for sampled U32 Pacific halibut, 2026[1,2].

Offload Port	Trips	Tonnes	Pounds	Total USD	Average Price (USD/kg)	Average Price (USD/lb)
Dutch Harbor	2	6	12,480	$88,661.10	$15.66	$7.10
Homer	3	1	1,992	$17,928.00	$19.84	$9.00
Juneau	1	0	55	$495.00	$19.84	$9.00
Petersburg	2	0	295	$2,735.00	$20.44	$9.27
Port Hardy	5	1	1,868	$18,850.25	$22.25	$10.09
Prince Rupert	12	3	7,697	$70,927.57	$20.32	$9.21
Sand Point	2	1	2,219	$10,651.20	$10.58	$4.80
Seward	5	1	1,452	$12,887.00	$19.57	$8.88
Sitka	2	1	1,642	$15,631.00	$20.99	$9.52
Tofino/Ucluelet	1	0	364	$2,617.41	$15.85	$7.19
Vancouver	1	0	46	$489.67	$23.47	$10.65
Yakutat	1	0	92	$809.60	$19.40	$8.80
Grand Total	**37**	**14**	**30,202**	**$242,682.80**	**$17.71**	**$8.04**

[1] Net weight (head-off, dressed, washed).
[2] Prices based on net weight.

Table 3a. FISS landings (total pounds and price) of all Pacific halibut (sampled U32 and all O32) by IPHC Regulatory Area in 2026[1].

IPHC Regulatory Area	2B	2C	3A	3B	4A	Total Weight and Average Price
Tonnes	58	68	19	5	10	160
Pounds	128,000	149,249	42,003	11,466	22,733	353,451
Price USD/kg	$23.87	$22.79	$20.96	$16.17	$16.76	$22.36
Price USD/lb	$10.83	$10.34	$9.51	$7.34	$7.60	$10.14

[1] Net weight (head-off, dressed, washed)

Table 3b. FISS landings (total pounds and price) of O32 Pacific halibut by IPHC Regulatory Area in 2026[1].

IPHC Regulatory Area	2B	2C	3A	3B	4A	Total Weight and Average Price
Tonnes	55	65	17	4	5	147
Pounds	122,277	143,517	37,955	9,247	10,253	323,249
Price USD/kg	$23.97	$22.91	$21.11	$17.51	$18.10	$22.79
Price USD/lb	$10.87	$10.39	$9.57	$7.94	$8.21	$10.34

[1] Net weight (head-off, dressed, washed)

Table 3c. FISS landings (total pounds and price) of sampled U32 Pacific halibut by IPHC Regulatory Area in 2026[1].

IPHC Regulatory Area	2B	2C	3A	3B	4A	Total Weight and Average Price
Tonnes	3	3	2	1	6	14
Pounds	5,723	5,731	4,049	2,219	12,480	30,202
Price USD/kg	$21.67	$19.67	$19.59	$10.58	$15.66	$17.71
Price USD/lb	$9.83	$8.92	$8.89	$4.80	$7.10	$8.04

[1] Net weight (head-off, dressed, washed)

FISS timing

The months of June, July, and August are targeted for FISS fishing every year. In 2026, this activity took place from 22 May through 15 September. On a coastwide basis, FISS vessel activity was highest in intensity at the beginning of the FISS season (Figure 3). All FISS activity was completed by the middle of September.



Figure 3. Percent of the total FISS stations completed by IPHC Regulatory Area during each week of the year (2020-2026). Week 21 begins in late May or early June, depending on the year.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the RAB:

1) **NOTE** paper IPHC-2026-RAB027-07 Rev_1 that provides a summary of the IPHC Fishery-Independent Setline Survey (FISS) design and implementation in 2026.

APPENDICES

Nil.