

News Release

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P.O. Box 95009, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98145-2009

New IPHC/USGS Electronic Satellite Tagging Project

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) announce a joint tagging project that will take place throughout the eastern north Pacific during 2002, using electronic Pop-up Satellite Transmitting Archival Tags. IPHC will tag 12 fish from northern Vancouver Is., BC, through Sanak Is., AK. Collaborators at USGS will tag 12 additional fish near the Pribilof Islands of the southeast Bering Sea. These tags are very unique in appearance: the body of the tag is shaped much like a microphone, with a total body length of ~6½" (17cm). The tag attaches to the fish by a 7" (18cm) black plastic leader, secured using a titanium dart embedded just below the dorsal fin.



Rewards are offered for all returned tags. A **\$500** reward will be given for the return of each satellite tag body. An IPHC tagging program baseball cap (or \$5) will be offered for returning catch information and the plastic leader from any halibut that no longer carries the tag body. Any vessel that does not hold halibut IFQ can land and retain a satellite tagged fish, as long as the halibut with the tag leader still attached is reported to IPHC at the time of landing. In addition, commercial fishers that hold halibut IFQ should be aware that the weight of any **satellite-tagged fish should NOT be deducted from the fisher's halibut IFQ**. The presence of the titanium dart in the flesh will likely prompt the buyer to "#2" the fish, but the fisher is free to sell the fish, provided that the fisher possesses halibut IFQ, without any quota penalty.

When you catch a satellite-tagged halibut:

1. Record the date, capture location, sex, and the fork-length of the halibut.
2. *If you do not possess halibut IFQ:* Remove the satellite tag body (if the fish still carries one) from the leader by cutting the leader about 1½" (4cm) below the point at which it attaches to the tag body; **do not pull on the tag**. Retain the tag body. Leave the tag leader attached to the fish and report the capture at time of landing to IPHC at **(206) 634-1838** or to an **IPHC port sampler**. The IPHC has port samplers at the following ports during the halibut fishing season: Newport, OR; Bellingham, WA; Vancouver, Port Hardy, and Prince Rupert, BC; Petersburg, Sitka, Juneau, Seward, Homer, Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, Adak, and Saint Paul, AK.

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3. *If you possess halibut IFQ:* Remove the tag by removing the metal dart from the halibut's flesh or by cutting the nylon leader at skin-level; **do not pull on the tag**. Removing the entire metal dart is preferred, since we do not want the dart to remain in the fish as it is processed. *If you do not possess halibut IFQ:* Do not remove the leader from the fish until after it has been landed and reported to IPHC.
4. Retain the tag and/or leader, and contact the IPHC at **(206) 634-1838**. Or, turn in the tag and information (and fish, if possible) to an **IPHC Port Sampler**.

In addition to the tags to be released in 2002, 11 fish that were tagged by USGS in 2001 are still at liberty. Of these, 6 carry the entire tag assembly, while 5 carry only the black leader. The 2001 tagging can be distinguished from 2002 by the fact that the 2002 tags and leaders are labeled with IPHC return information, while the 2001 tags and leaders are not. Tagged fish should be treated the same regardless of what tag-type they carry.

Electronic satellite tags record the temperature, depth, and light levels experienced by the tagged fish. The tags are programmed to release from the fish on a pre-determined date, float to the surface, and emit a satellite signal that indicates their position and downloads all of the environmental data. The result is a record of the fish's final location, along with environmental data throughout the time at liberty. After the tag body has released, the leader will remain on the fish, acting like a normal "spaghetti" tag. The satellite tags will be used to study seasonal migrations, and to learn more about the physical conditions that fish typically experience during the tagging period. In particular, the Commission wishes to examine the direction and distances that fish travel between their summer feeding grounds and winter spawning areas, as we continue to assess the possible impacts that an extended season might have on various regions of the fishery and on the halibut population. All tags will be programmed to release during mid-January of 2003, during the height of the annual spawning period. This will allow us to determine the possible spawning site associated with each fish without the need for winter fishing to retrieve tags, and with complete coverage of the entire north Pacific. Since there is complete satellite coverage over the entire hemisphere, we will be able to determine the final tag location regardless of where the fish have moved, even if those regions are outside of the species' known range. The leader that remains on the fish after the tag body has released may then serve to indicate whether the fish eventually returns to the feeding ground where it was originally tagged, or moves to a different region of the fishery.

Questions? Please contact Tim Loher at (206) 634-1838 (ext. 212), or via email at tim@iphc.washington.edu. As the project progresses, regular updates and additional information will be placed on the research page of the IPHC website, at:

<http://www.iphc.washington.edu/staff/tim/Research/ProjectSummaries.htm>

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Bruce M. Leaman
Executive Director
Phone: (206) 634-1838
Fax: (206) 632-2983
Web: www.iphc.washington.edu