



News Release

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Continuation of IPHC/USGS Electronic Tagging Project

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) began a joint tagging project during the summer of 2002, using electronic Pop-up Satellite-transmitting Archival Tags (PSATs). IPHC tagged 12 fish between northern Vancouver Is., BC, and Sanak Is., AK. USGS tagged 12 fish near the Pribilof Islands of the southeast Bering Sea. These tags are unique in appearance: the body of the tag is shaped like a microphone ~6½" (17cm) long, and attaches to the fish by a 7" (18cm) leader, secured by a titanium dart embedded in the flesh below the dorsal fin.



Electronic satellite tags record the temperature and depth experienced by the 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 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 remains on the fish, serving as a conventional "spaghetti" tag. Most tag bodies have released, but 2 fish tagged in the Pribilofs still carry the tag body, as do 6 fish tagged by USGS in 2001. A total of 26 halibut are at liberty bearing only the leader. Pending funding, 24 additional fish may be tagged in the Bering Sea during 2003. The 2001 tagging can be distinguished from latter tagging in that the latter 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 (see reverse).

Rewards are offered for all returned PSATs and leaders. 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 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 landing. In addition, fishers who hold IFQ should be aware that **the weight of PSAT-tagged fish should NOT be deducted from the fisher's halibut IFQ**. The presence of the dart will likely prompt the buyer to "#2" the fish, but the fisher may sell it provided that the fisher possesses halibut IFQ, without quota penalty.

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When you catch a satellite-tagged halibut:

1. Record the date, capture location, sex, and the fork-length of the halibut.
2. Ideally, we wish to remove the otoliths (earbones) from the fish to determine its age. If the fish is being landed at a port staffed by an IPHC port sampler, please present the fish to the port sampler during offload so the otoliths can be removed.
3. *If you do not possess halibut IFQ:* If the fish carries a tag body, remove the tag by cutting the leader about 1½" (4cm) below the point at which leader attaches to the tag body; **do not pull on the tag**. Retain the tag body. Leave the 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.
4. *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 when 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.
5. 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**.

The PSATs are 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. The leader that remains on the fish after the tag body has released may then serve to indicate whether the fish eventually return to the feeding grounds where they were tagged, or move to different regions of the fishery.

Questions? Please contact Tim Loher at (206) 634-1838 (ext. 212), or via email at tim@iphc.washington.edu. Regular updates can be found on the IPHC website, at:

<http://www.iphc.washington.edu/staff/tim/Research/Psat/PSATupdate.html>

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