INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

News Release

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

July 13, 2004

Bering Sea IPHC/USGS Electronic Tagging Project

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) will be tagging halibut along the Aleutian Islands this summer, using Pop-up Satellite-transmitting Archival Tags (PSATs). Twenty-four fish will be tagged: 12 near Adak Is. and another 12 near Attu Is. These tags are unique in appearance: the body of the tag is shaped like a microphone ~6½" (17 cm) long, and attaches to the fish by a 7" (18 cm) leader, secured by a titanium dart embedded in the flesh below the dorsal fin (see below).

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 transmits data to a land-based facility. The result is a record of the fish's final location, along with environmental data collected throughout the time at liberty. After the tag body has released, the leader remains on the fish, serving as a conventional "spaghetti" tag. Tagging in 2004 represents continuation of a tagging program that was begun in 2002, and while most of the tag bodies from previous deployments released successfully, fishers may capture fish from earlier years that are still carrying the leader. Both tag bodies and the spaghetti-leaders should bear tag information directing fishers to return tags to the IPHC.

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, otoliths (earbones) from the fish should be removed in order 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 that the otoliths can be removed. 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, and Saint Paul, AK.
3. *If you do not possess halibut IFQ:* If the fish carries a tag body, remove the tag by cutting the leader about 1½" (4 cm) below the point at which the leader attaches to the tag body; **do not pull on the tag**. Retain the tag body so it may be turned in. 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**
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 the dart should not 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 examine population structure within the Bering Sea and attempt to determine the relative independence of that stock component.

For further information, please contact Dr. 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