

News Release



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HALIBUT COMMISSION COMPLETES 2007 ANNUAL MEETING

The International Pacific Halibut Commission completed its Eighty-third Annual Meeting in Victoria, B.C., with Dr. Laura J. Richards of Nanaimo, B.C. presiding as Chair. The Commission is recommending to the governments of Canada and the United States, catch limits for 2007 totaling 65,170,000 pounds, a 6.7% decrease from the 2006 catch limit of 69,860,000 pounds.

The Commission staff reported on the 2006 Pacific halibut stock assessment which implemented a coastwide estimation of biomass, compared with previous assessments which assessed stock biomass for each individual IPHC regulatory area. The total stock biomass identified by the coastwide assessment is approximately the same as the sum of that from the regulatory area assessments. However, the Commission believed that further examination of options for partitioning the coastwide biomass estimate into estimates of biomass for each regulatory area was required before it adopted the new approach. Accordingly, the Commission relied on the previous methodology of separate regulatory area assessments as the basis for determining catch limits. Lower catch rates in the eastern area of the halibut stock prompted the Commission to recommend more restrictive catch limits for this portion of the stock. Pending recruitment from the 1994 and 1995 year classes appears to be relatively strong in most areas, although Area 4B is showing a notably lower level of recruitment of these same year classes compared with other regulatory areas.

For 2007, the Commission continued with a 22.5% harvest rate for use in Areas 2A through 3A and a rate of 20% for Areas 3B through 4E. Low levels of recruitment and lower estimated levels of productivity in Areas 4B and 4CDE continued to support harvest rates lower than 20% for these areas. Accordingly, the Commission adopted catch limits based on a harvest rate of 15% for Areas 4B and 4CDE. The IPHC conducted additional research projects in Areas 4CDE during 2006 and the results provided an improved assessment base for these areas, however the survey catch rate on the eastern Bering Sea shelf is still estimated to be low, compared with other commercial fishing areas.

Seasons and Catch Limits

The Commission received regulatory proposals for 2007 from the scientific staff, Canadian and United States harvesters and processors, and other fishery agencies. The Commission will recommend to the governments the following catch limits for 2007 in Area 2A (California, Oregon, and Washington), Area 2B (British Columbia), Area 2C (southeastern Alaska), Area 3A (central Gulf), Area 3B (western Gulf), Area 4A (eastern Aleutians), Area 4B (western Aleutians), Area 4C (Pribilof Islands), Area 4D (northwestern Bering Sea), and Area 4E (Bering Sea flats):

2007 Catch Limits

Regulatory Area	Catch Limit (pounds)
Area 2A	
Non-treaty directed commercial (south of Pt. Chehalis)	227,955
Non-treaty incidental catch in salmon troll fishery	40,227
Non-treaty incidental catch in sablefish longline fishery (north of Pt. Chehalis)	70,000
Treaty Indian commercial	461,000
Treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence (year-round)	33,000
Sport – North of Columbia River	239,636
<u>Sport – South of Columbia River</u>	<u>268,182</u>
Area 2A total	1,340,000
Area 2B (includes sport catch allocation)	11,470,000
Area 2C	8,510,000
Area 3A	26,200,000
Area 3B	9,220,000
Area 4A	2,890,000
Area 4B	1,440,000
Area 4C	1,866,500
Area 4D	1,866,500
	<u>367,000</u>
<i>Area 4E</i>	8,430,000
 <i>Area 4 total</i>	
Total	65,170,000

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada (DFO) will allocate the adopted Area 2B catch limit between sport and commercial fisheries.

The IPHC sets biologically-based catch limits for Areas 4A, 4B, and a combined Area 4CDE. The catch limits for Regulatory Areas 4C, 4D, and 4E reflect the catch-sharing plan implemented by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). The catch-sharing plan allows Area 4D Community Development Quota (CDQ) harvest to be taken in Area 4E.

The catch-sharing plan implemented by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) for Area 2A was adopted by the Commission and is reflected in the catch limits adopted for the Area 2A fisheries. In Area 2A, seven 10-hour fishing periods for the non-treaty directed commercial fishery are recommended: June 27, July 11, July 25, August 8, August 22, September 5, and September 19, 2007. All fishing periods will begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 6:00 p.m. local time, and will be further restricted by fishing period limits announced at a later date.

Area 2A fishing dates for an incidental commercial halibut fishery concurrent with salmon troll fishing seasons, and the incidental commercial halibut fishery during the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis, will be established under United States domestic regulations by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The remainder of the Area 2A catch-sharing plan, including sport fishing seasons and depth restrictions, will be determined under regulations promulgated by NMFS. For further information of the depth restrictions in the commercial directed halibut fishery, incidental halibut during the sablefish fishery, and the sport fisheries, call the NMFS hotline (1-800-662-9825).

After reviewing staff information and proposals from the harvesting and processing sector, the Commission approved a season opening date of March 10. The Saturday opening date is to facilitate marketing. Therefore, seasons will commence at 12 noon local time on March 10 and terminate at 12 noon local time on November 15, 2007 for the following fisheries and areas: the Canadian Individual Vessel Quota (IVQ) fishery in Area 2B, and the United States Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) and CDQ fisheries in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E. All Area 2A commercial fishing including the treaty Indian commercial fishery will fall within March 10 – November 15, 2007.

Regulatory Changes and Issues

The Commission approved regulations to change the California sport fishery possession limit as part of the catch sharing plan. The sport fishery possession limit on land and on the water in California will be one daily bag limit.

For Area 2B, the Commission adopted a regulation to allow the retention of halibut in sablefish trap gear during the halibut IQ season, provided that harvesters had obtained halibut quota shares for the mortality and retention of halibut. This was passed to assist DFO with the Integrated Groundfish Fisheries Plan, which is a three-year pilot program. The regulation will be reviewed at the 2009 IPHC Annual Meeting to determine if retention of halibut in sablefish traps should continue to be allowed.

For Alaska, the Commission agreed to revise the regulation which prohibits the processing or mutilation of sport caught halibut that prevents the determination of the minimum size or number of fish. The regulation change limits the application to on board the catcher vessels only, so that halibut may be subsequently cut up as necessary off of the vessel.

The Commission agreed to change the recording date from December 1 to November 1 for the CDQ managers to report the amount of sublegal-sized halibut retained in Area 4E and 4D CDQ fisheries.

IPHC regulations require that halibut caught in the commercial fishery that are not retained shall be immediately released outboard of the roller and returned to the sea with minimum of injury. The Commission agreed to revise the regulation to allow halibut to be measured on board the vessel to determine if they meet the legal-size limit and to then be returned to the sea with minimal injury.

The Commission noted that Guideline Harvest Levels (GHL) approved by the NPFMC for the charter/guided recreational halibut fishery in Areas 2C (southeast Alaska) and 3A (central Gulf of Alaska) were exceeded in recent years, substantially so in Area 2C (over 40% higher than the GHL in 2006). Commission staff initiated dialogue with the NPFMC to determine what control measures would be enacted by the Council to constrain harvest to the GHLs in 2007. The NPFMC indicated that, although it is committed to management of this fishery to the GHL limits, it would not be able to

complete analyses and develop a regulatory framework to effect control of this fishery until 2008. The Commission, with the support of its advisory bodies, therefore passed a regulation for a one-fish halibut bag limit for sport guided charter fishing in Area 2C from June 15 - July 31, 2007 and for Area 3A from June 15 - 30, 2007. These bag limit regulations will be effective until the implementation by the U.S. government of domestic regulations to achieve halibut mortality reductions consistent with those that would be achieved by the IPHC recommendations. The Commission takes this action with some reluctance but believes the action to be necessary, given the magnitude by which the charter/guided catches exceeded the GHM limits and the belief that such overharvesting puts at risk the achievement of IPHC management goals for the halibut stock.

Other Actions

The Commission spent considerable time discussing migration, coastwide stock assessment versus closed-area stock assessment, and apportionment among regulatory areas. The Conference Board and Commission staff recommended a workshop be held to allow the industry and agencies to better understand the coastwide stock assessment model. The Commission staff was tasked with determining the best method for the workshop and review, in consultation with the respective agencies.

In addition, the Conference Board requested a report on the effects of hook straightening and careful release in relation to halibut viability. The Commission staff will complete a report prior to next year's Annual Meeting. The Commission will continue its research in Areas 4B and 4CDE, which was also highlighted by the Conference Board.

The Commission honoured Mr. Dylan Hardie of Courtenay, B.C. as the fifth recipient of the IPHC Merit Scholarship. Mr. Hardie was presented with a certificate and plaque, as well as the scholarship of \$2,000 (U.S.). The Commissioners expressed their continued support for the scholarship program and commended the Scholarship Committee for their efforts in assessing the candidates.

The recommended regulations for the 2007 halibut fishery will become official as soon as they are approved by the Canadian and United States Governments. The Commission will publish and distribute regulation pamphlets.

The next Annual Meeting of the Commission is planned for Oregon, at or near Portland, from January 22 to 25, 2008. The United States Government Commissioner, Dr. James W. Balsiger of Juneau AK, was elected Chair for the coming year. The Canadian Government Commissioner, Dr. Laura J. Richards of Nanaimo B.C., was elected Vice-Chair. Other Canadian Commissioners are Clifford Atleo (Port Alberni, B.C.) and Gary Robinson (Vancouver, B.C.). The other United States Commissioners are Ralph Hoard (Seattle, WA) and Phillip Lestenkof (St. Paul, AK). Dr. Bruce M. Leaman is the Executive Director of the Commission.

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