

News Release

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HALIBUT COMMISSION COMPLETES 2010 ANNUAL MEETING

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) completed its Eighty-sixth Annual Meeting in Seattle, WA, with Dr. James W. Balsiger of Juneau AK presiding as Chair. The Commission is recommending to the governments of Canada and the United States catch limits for 2010 totaling 50,670,000 pounds, a 6.4% decrease from the 2009 catch limit of 54,080,000 pounds.

The Commission staff reported on the 2009 Pacific halibut stock assessment which implemented a coastwide estimation of biomass, with apportionment to regulatory biomass based on the data from the annual Commission assessment survey. For 2010, the Commission staff recommended a 20% harvest rate for use in Areas 2A through 3A. The Commission staff expressed concern over continued declining catch rates in Area 3B and recommended a reduction of the harvest rate for this area to 15%, similar to that used for the Bering Sea (Areas 4A, 4B, and 4CDE). Catch limits adopted for 2010 were lower for most regulatory areas except Areas 4B and 4CDE, for which the recommended catch limits increased approximately 15 and 3 percent, respectively. Decreased catch limits reflect stock biomass declines as the exceptionally strong 1987 and 1988 year classes pass out of the fishery. Recruitment from the 1999 and 2000 year classes is estimated to be above average but the lower growth rates of fish in recent years means that these year classes are recruiting to the exploitable stock very slowly.

Seasons and Catch Limits

The Commission received regulatory proposals for 2010 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 2010 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):

2010 Catch Limits

Regulatory Area	Catch Limit (pounds)
Area 2A	
Non-treaty directed commercial (south of Pt. Chehalis)	141,865
Non-treaty incidental catch in salmon troll fishery	25,035
Treaty Indian commercial	253,072
Treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence (year-round)	30,428
Sport – North of Columbia River	192,699
<u>Sport – South of Columbia River</u>	<u>166,901</u>
Area 2A total	810,000
Area 2B (includes sport catch allocation)	7,500,000
Area 2C	4,400,000
Area 3A	19,990,000
Area 3B	9,900,000
Area 4A	2,330,000
Area 4B	2,160,000
Area 4C	1,625,000
Area 4D	1,625,000
<u>Area 4E</u>	<u>330,000</u>
Area 4 total	8,070,000
Total	50,670,000

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada (DFO) will allocate the 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 and Area 4C Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) and CDQ to be fished in Area 4D.

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. Due to the mechanisms in the PFMC catch-sharing plan and the adopted total Area 2A catch limit there will not be a non-treaty incidental halibut fishery during the limited entry sablefish longline fishery. The IPHC licensing regulations will be amended to reflect this change.

The Commission surveyed the Area 2A directed commercial/incidental halibut fishery license holders for their preferred starting date for the directed commercial fishery. There was a range of views on starting dates with most harvesters supporting opening during June and largest proportion favored June 30. In Area 2A, seven 10-hour fishing periods for the non-treaty directed commercial fishery are recommended: June 30, July 14, July 28, August 11, August 25, September 8, September 22, 2010.

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 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, 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 6 for the U.S. and Canadian Individual Quota fisheries, and Treaty tribal fisheries in Area 2A. The Saturday opening date is to facilitate marketing. Therefore, seasons will commence at 12 noon local time on March 6 and terminate at 12 noon local time on November 15, 2010 for the following fisheries and areas: the Canadian Individual Vessel Quota (IVQ) fishery in Area 2B, and the United States 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 6 – November 15, 2010.

Regulatory Changes and Issues

The Commission approved changing the Area 2A IPHC license requirements to stipulate that persons fishing in Subarea 2A-1 as members of U.S. treaty Indian tribes are not required to have an IPHC vessel license. The tribal fisheries have their own licensing requirements and IPHC does not therefore require that tribal vessels to be licensed.

IPHC regulations had required that a vessel number be recorded on state fish tickets. The Commission changed this regulation to reflect that the vessel number is the state, federal, or tribal vessel number (i.e., not the IPHC vessel number). In addition, the Commission approved that Washington tribal tickets could be used when permitted by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and that the same IPHC regulations that applied to State fish tickets would apply to tribal tickets.

The Commission deleted an obsolete regulation that the IPHC license number be recorded on State fish tickets. This regulation was removed as Area 2A is the only area that IPHC licenses are required and the IPHC number is not currently recorded or needed on State fish tickets.

The Commission approved updating the Cape Spencer Light coordinates to the 2009 U.S. Coast Guard Light List (changed from the 2003 U.S. Coast Guard Light List of 58°11'54"N, 136°38'24"W) to 58°11'56"N, 136°38'26"W.

Other Actions

The catch in sport fisheries and enforcement of sport fishing regulations, particularly for charter vessels, were discussed at length. There was support in concept for the development of a harvest tag or ticket for improved data collection in all recreational halibut fisheries in Alaska and for accurate and

timely accounting. The Commission will send letters to the NPFMC and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game acknowledging this support.

The Commission received an industry proposal to change the Alaska sport fishing filleting requirements. Although the Commission took no action to change the regulations for 2010 they did direct the staff to form an industry and agency work group to review the regulations to determine if a regulation proposal could be developed for next year that met enforcement needs and assisted the industry.

The Commission and advisory boards discussed halibut bycatch management. The staff was asked to reconvene the Bycatch Work Group, that had met in 1991, to examine how impacts of bycatch can best be incorporated into halibut assessment and management, as well as to review progress on bycatch reduction and the target levels for reduction identified in 1991.

The Commission expressed its desire to see implementation of effective management measures for the Alaskan sport charter fishery, in consideration of the Guideline Harvest Level of 788,000 pounds defined for this fishery. The Commission will therefore monitor the implementation of the NMFS proposed catch-sharing plan and has directed its staff to develop alternative control measures for consideration at the Commission's 2011 meeting, should the catch-sharing plan not be implemented in a timely manner.

The Commission honoured Mr. Parker McLelland of Port Townsend, WA and Mr. Ryder Whitmire of Anchorage AK as the seventh and eighth recipients of the IPHC Merit Scholarship. Both individuals were unable to attend the meeting due to class requirements but were previously presented with the scholarships 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 2010 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 Victoria B.C. from January 25-28, 2011. The Canadian Government Commissioner, Dr. Laura J. Richards, of Nanaimo B.C., was elected Chair. The United States Government Commissioner, Dr. James W. Balsiger, of Juneau AK, was elected Vice-Chair for the coming year. Other Canadian Commissioners are Larry Johnson (Parksville, 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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Bruce M. Leaman, Executive Director
Phone: (206) 634-1838
FAX: (206) 632-2983
Web: www.iphc.washington.edu