



February 4, 2013

### **HALIBUT COMMISSION COMPLETES 2013 ANNUAL MEETING**

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC, or Commission) completed its 89th Annual Meeting in Victoria, BC on January 25, with Mr. Michael Pearson of Ottawa, ON presiding as Chair. More than 250 halibut industry stakeholders attended the meeting, with over 60 more participating via the web. All of the Commission's public and administrative sessions during this year's meeting were open to the public and broadcast on the web.

The Commission is recommending to the governments of Canada and the United States catch limits for 2013 totaling 31,028,000 pounds, a 7.5% decrease from the 2012 catch limit of 33,540,000 pounds. These catch limits are higher than recommended by the Processor Advisory Group but consistent with Conference Board recommendations. They achieve a lower coastwide harvest rate than in 2012 and move the coastwide harvest rate toward the harvest policy, while recognizing that the harvest policy is under review. In addition to setting catch limits for 2013, the Commission addressed a wide range of regulatory issues and took important actions regarding the IPHC performance review, management strategy evaluation, the structure of its advisory bodies, and bycatch management.

A news release issued January 28 announced the catch limits and fishing seasons for 2013. That information is repeated in this news release. Documents and presentations used at the Annual Meeting can be found on the Annual Meeting page of the IPHC website: <http://www.iphc.int/meetings-and-events/annual-meeting.html>.

#### **Stock Assessment and Harvest Rates**

During 2012, the assessment staff at the IPHC conducted a full review of the data, specific model equations, and the general approach used to assess the stock in recent years. The retrospective bias seen in recent assessments was found to occur because the model did not correctly account for variation in the availability of different sizes of fish in different areas. A peer review team, including the U.S. and Canadian Science Advisors, agreed that the staff's more flexible model structure could be adopted to address this problem and correct the retrospective bias. The assessment model results are now more consistent with observed fishery and survey results. As a result of changes to the assessment model, estimates of recent recruitment are much lower than previously thought.

The Pacific halibut biomass has been declining over much of the last decade as a result of decreasing size at age as well as below-average recruitment. Including 2012 data, the stock assessment estimates that the population decline has now slowed and the stock trajectory is relatively flat, with spawning biomass about 5% higher than a level which would require a reduction in harvest rate. The report of the 2012 stock assessment is available on the IPHC website at: [http://www.iphc.int/publications/rara/2012/rara2012093\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.iphc.int/publications/rara/2012/rara2012093_assessment.pdf).

As described in Information Bulletin 70 (<http://iphc.int/library/bulletins/300-ib0070.html>) and the IPHC Interim Meeting news release (<http://www.iphc.int/news-releases/306-nr20121218.html>), the IPHC staff harvest advice was reformatted this year into a decision table which provides the probabilities of risks and

benefits associated with specific harvest choices. This decision table allowed a comparison of alternative stock biomass and fishery outcomes at different increments of total removals, providing more information for consideration by the Commissioners as they set the annual catch limits.

### Catch Limits and Seasons

#### *Catch Limits*

The Commission received harvest advice for 2013 from the scientific staff, Canadian and United States harvesters and processors, and other fishery agencies, and recommends to the two governments the following catch limits for 2013:

<b>Regulatory Area</b>	<b>Catch Limit (pounds)</b>
Area 2A (California, Oregon, and Washington)	
Non-treaty directed commercial (south of Pt. Chehalis)	173,390
Non-treaty incidental catch in salmon troll fishery	30,600
Non-treaty incidental catch in sablefish fishery (north of Pt. Chehalis)	21,410
Treaty Indian commercial	314,300
Treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence (year-round)	32,200
Sport – North of Columbia River	214,110
<u>Sport – South of Columbia River</u>	<u>203,990</u>
Area 2A total	990,000
Area 2B (British Columbia) (includes sport catch allocation)	7,038,000
Area 2C (southeastern Alaska)	2,970,000
Area 3A (central Gulf of Alaska)	11,030,000
Area 3B (western Gulf of Alaska)	4,290,000
Area 4A (eastern Aleutians)	1,330,000
Area 4B (western Aleutians)	1,450,000
Area 4C (Pribilof Islands)	859,000
Area 4D (northwestern Bering Sea)	859,000
<u>Area 4E (Bering Sea flats)</u>	<u>212,000</u>
Area 4 total	4,710,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>31,028,000</b>

#### *Notes Regarding the Catch Limits for Specific Regulatory Areas*

##### *Area 2A*

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. The overall catch limit for Area 2A in 2013 is sufficient to permit non-treaty incidental harvest of halibut during the limited entry sablefish longline fishery, under the provisions of the PFMC catch sharing plan.

##### *Area 2B*

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

### *Area 4CDE*

The IPHC sets combined limit for Area 4CDE. The individual catch limits for Areas 4C, 4D, and 4E reflect the 4CDE 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 Areas 4D and 4C.

### *Fishing Season Dates*

After reviewing staff information and proposals from the harvesting and processing sectors, the Commission approved a season of March 23 – November 7, 2013 for the U.S. and Canadian Individual Quota fisheries. Seasons will commence at noon local time on March 23 and terminate at noon local time on November 7, 2013 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 take place between March 23 and November 7, 2013. The Saturday opening date was chosen to facilitate marketing. In order to provide more time for its staff to conduct the stock assessment prior to its Interim Meeting, the Commission selected the same closing date as in 2012.

In Area 2A, seven 10-hour fishing periods for the non-treaty directed commercial fishery, south of Point Chehalis, WA, are recommended: June 26, July 10, July 24, August 7, August 21, September 4, and September 18, 2013. All fishing periods will begin at 8 a.m. and end at 6 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 the limited entry sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis and the 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 regarding the depth restrictions in the commercial directed halibut fishery, and the sport fisheries, call the NMFS hotline (1-800-662-9825).

### Regulatory Changes and Issues

#### *Control of Charter Harvest in Area 2C*

The Commission received a request from the NPFMC to continue from last year the Commission's existing one-fish bag limit with a reverse-slot limit length restriction ( $\leq 45$  in or  $\geq 68$  in, head on). This proposal is intended to keep the removals by the charter fishery within the Council's Guideline Harvest Level for Area 2C. In addition, the entire carcass must be retained on board the vessel until all fillets are offloaded. To accommodate the Council request, the Commission left in place the existing reverse slot limit regulation for charter halibut fishing in Area 2C for 2013.

#### *Sport Fishery Management*

The Commission forwarded proposals for developing an Alaska sport harvest ticket and an Oregon charter tag to the respective state agencies for their consideration, since these proposals should be appropriately considered by these agencies.

#### *Other Proposals*

The Commission reviewed other proposals concerning hook requirements, preserved fish aboard vessels, careful release of fish, direct assessment of U32 fish, hook and release mortality, Area 2A biomass, and

halibut in Prince William Sound, but took no regulatory action concerning these proposals. The Commission directed staff to work with proponents of several of these proposals to accommodate the intents of the proposals to the extent practicable.

### Other Actions

#### *Performance Review*

The Commission reviewed the recommendations of the 2012 Performance Review, as well as stakeholder response and advice. The Commission has already taken action on several recommendations concerning increased openness and transparency in Commission meetings and operations. Action on other recommendations will be incorporated into ongoing work to improve the Commission's procedures and processes, including the development of scientific advice, planning and review of research, and operation of the advisory bodies. The Performance Review final report can be found on the Commission's website at: ([http://www.iphc.int/documents/review/FINAL\\_IPHC\\_Performance\\_Review-April30.pdf](http://www.iphc.int/documents/review/FINAL_IPHC_Performance_Review-April30.pdf)).

#### *Management Strategy Advisory Board and Scientific Review Board*

The Commission approved the formation of a Management Strategy Advisory Board (MSAB) to advise on the development and evaluation of candidate objectives and strategies for managing the halibut resource. The MSAB will be a cross-disciplinary group, with representatives from industry, science, fisheries management, and Commission staff. The Commission is accepting nominations for the MSAB until February 28, 2013, and the membership should be finalized by the end of March. The Commission expects the MSAB to meet for the first time in late spring of this year. Travel expenses for MSAB members will be paid by the Commission.

The Commission is also adding a new Scientific Review Board (SRB) to fulfill the need for ongoing scientific peer review of the stock assessment, harvest advice, and research. The SRB will be a small technical body of members invited by the Commission, and is expected to begin work during this year.

The two new advisory bodies are dedicated to particular organizational needs and are complementary to the existing advisory structure. They do not supplant or replace the functions of the Conference Board, Processor Advisory Group, or Research Advisory Board, but will work with them in advising the Commission.

#### *Halibut Bycatch*

The Commission expressed its continued concern about the yield and spawning biomass losses to the halibut stock from mortality of halibut in non-directed fisheries. Significant progress in reducing this bycatch mortality has been achieved in Areas 2A and 2B, using individual bycatch quotas for vessels in some fisheries. Reductions have also occurred in Alaska, and new measures aimed at improving bycatch estimation, scheduled to begin in 2013, should help to refine these estimates.

The Commission received a motion from the Conference Board concerning bycatch, which it is incorporating into the ongoing work of its Bycatch Project team and the Commission staff.

The Commission received a report from its Bycatch Project Team, which outlined its progress on its four project objectives: quantifying bycatch, documenting impacts to the fishery and resource, exploring options to mitigate impacts, and identifying options to reduce bycatch. The Project Team identified its next steps, to include refinement of the immediate term options, subsequent discussion on longer-term options, completion of a report by summer 2013, and an implementation plan for agreed-upon strategies.

*IPHC Merit Scholarship*

The Commission honoured Mr. Jamie Nightingale of Delta, BC as the 11th recipient of the IPHC Merit Scholarship.

*Upcoming Meetings*

The next Interim Meeting of the Commission will be held December 4-5, 2013 at the IPHC offices in Seattle. The next Annual Meeting of the Commission is planned for January 13-17, 2014 in the Seattle area (dates to be confirmed).

*Commission Membership*

United States Government Commissioner, Dr. James W. Balsiger of Juneau, AK, was elected Chair for the coming year. Canadian Government Commissioner Michael Pearson of Ottawa, ON, was elected Vice-Chair. The other Canadian Commissioners are David Boyes (Courtenay, BC) and Paul Ryall (Vancouver, BC). The other United States Commissioners are Ralph Hoard (Seattle, WA) and Phillip Lestenkof (St. Paul, AK).

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