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IPHC NEWS RELEASE 2017-03

INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION 2017 ANNUAL MEETING (AM093)

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) completed its 93rd Annual Meeting (AM093) in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, on 27 January 2017, with Mr. Paul Ryall of Canada presiding as Chairperson. More than 330 Pacific halibut industry stakeholders attended the meeting, with over 160 more participating via the web. All of the Commission's public and administrative sessions during the meeting were open to the public and broadcast on the web.

The Commission is recommending to the governments of Canada and the United States of America catch limits for 2017 totaling 31.4 million pounds. The Commission also addressed other regulatory issues and took actions regarding the IPHC fishery-independent setline survey expansion and its harvest policy. A news release issued on 27 January 2017 announced the catch limits and fishing seasons for 2017, and that information is repeated in this news release. Documents and presentations from 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>.

The 2016 Stock Assessment and 2017 Harvest Advice

The results of the 2016 stock assessment indicate that female spawning stock biomass at the beginning of 2017 was estimated to be 41% (27–59%) of unfished levels. The level of spawning stock biomass is consistent with the recent slow increase in the primary stock abundance indices (IPHC fishery-independent setline survey WPUE indices and directed longline WPUE). Historical declining trends are attributable to changes in weight-at-age, recruitment, and catch levels.

An executive summary of the 2016 stock assessment is posted on the IPHC website at: <http://iphc.int/meetings-and-events/interim-meeting/im2016-documents.html>.

The complete report of the 2016 stock assessment is available on the IPHC website at: [http://www.iphc.int/publications/rara/2016/IPHC-2016-RARA-26-R-4.2 Assessment of the Pacific halibut stock.pdf](http://www.iphc.int/publications/rara/2016/IPHC-2016-RARA-26-R-4.2%20Assessment%20of%20the%20Pacific%20halibut%20stock.pdf).

Since 2013, the IPHC Secretariat's harvest advice has been presented in the form of a decision table that estimates the risks to stock and fishery status. The draft version of the decision table appears in paper IPHC-2017-AM093-07, posted at <http://www.iphc.int/meetings-and-events/annual-meeting.html>. The final version of the decision table for 2017, incorporating the adopted catch limits, will be published in the report of the Annual Meeting.

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Catch Limits and Fishing Periods

Catch Limits

The Commission received harvest advice for 2017 from the IPHC Secretariat, Canadian and United States harvesters and processors, and recommended the following catch limits for 2017, to the two governments:

IPHC Regulatory Area	Catch Limit (pounds)
Area 2A (California, Oregon, and Washington)	1,330,000
Non-treaty directed commercial (south of Pt. Chehalis)	225,591
Non-treaty incidental catch in salmon troll fishery	39,810
Non-treaty incidental catch in sablefish fishery (north of Pt. Chehalis)	70,000
Treaty Indian commercial	435,900
Treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence (year-round)	29,600
Sport – Washington	237,762
Sport – Oregon	256,757
Sport – California	34,580
Area 2B (British Columbia) (includes sport catch allocation)	7,450,000
Area 2C (southeastern Alaska) (combined commercial/guided sport ¹)	5,250,000
Commercial fishery (4,212,000 catch and 123,000 incidental mortality)	4,335,000
Guided sport fishery	915,000
Area 3A (central Gulf of Alaska) (combined commercial/guided sport ¹)	10,000,000
Commercial fishery (7,739,000 catch and 371,000 incidental mortality)	8,110,000
Guided sport fishery	1,890,000
Area 3B (western Gulf of Alaska)	3,140,000
Area 4A (eastern Aleutians)	1,390,000
Area 4B (central/western Aleutians)	1,140,000
Areas 4CDE	1,700,000
Area 4C (Pribilof Islands)	752,000
Area 4D (northwestern Bering Sea)	752,000
Area 4E (Bering Sea flats)	196,000
Total	31,400,000

¹The combined total includes estimated mortality from regulatory discards of sublegal Pacific halibut and lost gear in the commercial fishery, plus discard mortality in the guided sport fishery, as mandated in the U.S. Catch Sharing Plan.

Notes Regarding the Catch Limits for Specific IPHC Regulatory Areas

IPHC Regulatory Area 2A

The Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for Area 2A was accepted by the Commission and is reflected in the catch limits adopted for the Area 2A fisheries. The overall catch limit for Area 2A in 2017 is sufficient to permit non-treaty incidental harvest of Pacific halibut during the limited-entry sablefish longline fishery, under the provisions of the CSP.

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IPHC Regulatory Area 2B

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

IPHC Regulatory Areas 2C and 3A

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council's (NPFMC) CSP for Areas 2C and 3A was accepted by the Commission and is reflected in the catch limits adopted for Areas 2C and 3A. That CSP sets the allocation between the commercial and charter sport sectors in those two Regulatory Areas. Note that since 2014, the IPHC catch limits for Areas 2C and 3A include both sectors (commercial and recreational charter), plus O26 discard and lost gear mortality estimates, as noted in the table footnote above. The Area 2C commercial fishery allocation is 4,212,000 pounds for the commercial fishery catch and 123,000 pounds estimated for incidental mortality within the fishery. The Area 3A commercial fishery allocation is 7,739,000 pounds for the commercial fishery catch and 371,000 pounds estimated for the O26 incidental mortality within the fishery.

IPHC Regulatory Area 4CDE

The IPHC sets a combined catch limit for Area 4CDE. The individual catch limits for Areas 4C, 4D, and 4E reflect the 4CDE CSP adopted by the NPFMC. The CSP also 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 Periods (Season dates)

The Commission approved a season of 11 March to 7 November 2017, for the U.S. and Canadian quota fisheries. Seasons will commence at noon local time on 11 March and terminate at noon local time on 7 November 2017 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 11 March and 7 November 2017. The Saturday opening date was chosen to facilitate marketing.

In Area 2A, seven 10-hour fishing periods for the non-treaty directed commercial fishery south of Point Chehalis, Washington, are recommended: 28 June, 12 July, 26 July, 9 August, 23 August, 6 September, and 20 September 2017. 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 incidental commercial Pacific halibut fisheries concurrent with the limited-entry sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis and the salmon troll fishing seasons will be established under U.S. domestic regulations by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The remainder of the Area 2A CSP, including sport fishing seasons and depth restrictions, will be determined under regulations promulgated by NMFS. Further information regarding the depth restrictions in the commercial directed Pacific halibut fishery, and details for the sport fisheries, is available at the NMFS hotline (1-800-662-9825). The Area 2A IPHC licensing procedures did not change.

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Regulatory Changes

Charter Pacific Halibut Sector Management Measures for IPHC Regulatory Areas 2C and 3A

The Commission received a request from NPFMC to adopt charter Pacific halibut sector management measures in accordance with the NMFS CSP for Areas 2C and 3A. The NPFMC proposal is designed to keep removals by the charter fishery within the limits of the CSP. The Commission approved the following measures:

In Area 2C: 1) a one-fish daily bag limit, and 2) a “reverse slot” size limit restriction (≤ 44 inches or ≥ 80 inches).

In Area 3A: 1) a two-fish daily bag limit, 2) a maximum size limit for the second fish of 28 inches, 3) a four-fish annual limit, with a recording requirement, 3) a vessel limit of one trip per calendar day, 4) a limit of one trip per charter permit per calendar day, 5) a one-day-per-week closure of Pacific halibut charter fishing on Wednesdays throughout the year, and 6) Tuesday closures on 18 July, 25 July, and 1 August.

Head-on Pacific Halibut Landing Requirement

The Commission adopted a proposal aimed at eliminating a recently identified bias in Pacific halibut removal estimates (net weight), by requiring all commercial Pacific halibut to be landed and weighed with their heads attached for data reporting purposes and to only be subject to a 32-inch minimum size limit. An exemption was agreed upon whereby vessels that freeze Pacific halibut at sea may land their frozen fish with the head removed and remain subject to a 24-inch minimum size limit only.

Harmonize IPHC and NMFS Regulations Regarding Fishing in Multiple Regulatory Areas

The Commission adopted a proposal aimed at harmonizing IPHC and NMFS regulations regarding fishing in multiple IPHC Regulatory Areas in Alaska, specifically to clarify that retention of Pacific halibut on a vessel in excess of the total amount of unharvested IFQ or CDQ that is currently held by all IFQ or CDQ permit holders aboard the vessel for the area in which the vessel is fishing is prohibited unless the vessel has a NMFS-certified observer on board and maintains a daily fishing log only.

Use of the eLog in British Columbia

The Commission directed the IPHC Secretariat to work with DFO to incorporate the use of the electronic version of the DFO British Columbia Integrated Groundfish Fishing Log into IPHC Regulations as an acceptable logbook for use in the Area 2B commercial Pacific halibut fishery.

Other Actions

Harvest Policy Analysis

The Commission agreed that the current IPHC harvest policy is outdated and that there is a need to remove the current “blue line” reference in the harvest decision table, which reflects this outdated harvest policy. The Commission will use the “*status quo* SPR” (F46%) fishing intensity as the reference line for this and future years’ catch limit discussions, and will use its Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process to evaluate options for a modified harvest policy that separates the decisions regarding scale of the coastwide fishing intensity and the distribution of the removals among Regulatory Areas, and accounts for all sizes and sources of Pacific halibut mortality.

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The Commission also requested that the IPHC Secretariat initiate a process to develop alternative, biologically based stock distribution strategies for consideration by the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. This should also be incorporated into the MSE Program of Work.

The Commission recommended that the IPHC MSE process be accelerated so that more of the elements contained within the current Program of Work are delivered at the 94th Annual Meeting of the Commission in 2018.

Expanded Survey

The Commission approved the next in a series of expansions to its annual fishery-independent setline survey. The purpose of the expansion series is to provide more accurate and precise estimates among regulatory areas and to encompass all depths over which the stock is distributed. In 2017, the Commission's survey in Area 2A and Area 4B will be expanded.

IPHC Merit Scholarship

The Commission honored Ms. Ysabel Echeverio of Stevensville, Montana, as the 15th recipient of the IPHC Merit Scholarship. Ms. Echeverio was able to attend this Annual Meeting to accept the scholarship. Ms. Echeverio was the first recipient under the adjusted scholarship format and received an award of \$4,000 per year, renewable for up to four total years of study. New scholarships will be awarded every other year, with the next one being awarded in 2018.

Upcoming Meetings

The Commission's 2017 Interim Meeting will be held 29-30 November 2017, in Seattle, Washington in a venue accessible to the public and will be webcast. The next Annual Meeting (AM094) of the Commission will take place 22-26 January 2018 in Portland, Oregon at the Portland Suites and Executive Tower. The 95th Annual Meeting (AM095) is planned for 28 January – 1 February 2019 in Victoria, British Columbia.

Commission Membership

United States Government Commissioner Dr. James Balsiger of Juneau, Alaska, was elected Chairperson for the coming year. Canadian Government Commissioner Mr. Paul Ryall of Vancouver, British Columbia, was elected Vice-Chairperson. The other Canadian Commissioners are Mr. Jake Vanderheide of Duncan, British Columbia, and Mr. Ted Assu of Campbell River, British Columbia. The other U.S. Commissioners are Mr. Robert Alverson of Seattle, Washington, and Ms. Linda Behnken of Sitka, Alaska.

Meeting Report

The Report of the 93rd Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM093) will be published in the coming weeks and posted at the Annual Meeting page of the IPHC website: <http://www.iphc.int/meetings-and-events/annual-meeting.html>. The Report will include details on all the decisions, recommendations, and requests made by the Commission during the Annual Meeting.

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