

IPHC Memo

To: Research Advisory Board
From: Executive Director
Date: November 14, 2001
Re: Report of September 29, 2001 meeting

Attending: David Boyes, Arne Fuglvog, Gary Williamson, John Woodruff, Rob Wurm (a.m.),
IPHC staff

Absent: Dean Adams (illness), Blake Tipton (schedule conflict)

A draft research proposal was distributed to the RAB prior to the meeting. The morning session was devoted primarily to a roundtable discussion of RAB's views on outstanding research issues to be examined and priorities for IPHC research. The following summary of this discussion focuses primarily on the research topics identified by the Board, with some rationale for their importance.

1. Tagging program. RAB views the tagging program as a high priority item. Three potential benefits were identified: developing a view of stock status that is independent from the population model; developing an improved method of assigning quotas for Areas 3B and 4 that is not dependent on linking the assessment of Area 3A, via surveys, to the process of yield determination in 3B and 4; and, gaining improved and current understanding of movements among and within regulatory areas. RAB members had a number of questions about the proposed program and wanted to be assured that the technology was fully functional, reliable, and would provide the benefits projected. [*A larger presentation and discussion of the proposed tagging program was held in the afternoon session later in the meeting and will be summarized later in this report*]
2. Harvest policy and catch limit setting. RAB was concerned about the substantial variation in quotas in recent years and desires as great a degree of stability in catch limits as possible. In that regard, the Board felt that any research on harvest policy that would achieve this greater stability was desirable. However, the Board also stressed that the policy must be communicated clearly and understood by the industry. The Board felt that a 'refresher course' on the current policy would be desirable and a detailed explanation of any changes would be mandatory. The project concerning medium term forecasting was also regarded as an important tool for communicating expectations of stock dynamics to the industry.

3. Season extension. RAB and the industry remain concerned about potential deleterious affects of mariculture fish on the markets for wild halibut. Noting that the staff will be updating its report on the potential for extending the current season for the 2001 Annual Meeting. RAB requested that the staff explore all possibilities for season extension, even if the extension was not for the stock as a whole. *[A fuller discussion of season extension accompanied the RAB's discussion of an in-progress draft of the staff's report in the afternoon session.]*
4. Chalky fish. RAB commended the staff for work undertaken but stressed that chalky fish remains a costly issue for the industry. Recognizing that some joint work with AFDF may address treatment or mitigation of chalkiness in fish after landing, the Board's primary interest was in the prediction of chalkiness and timely communication of occurrences to the industry. The Board also endorsed the staff's effort to work with industry in developing a web-based clearinghouse for information on occurrences of chalkiness, as well as background scientific information.
5. Bycatch mortality. Two issues were important to RAB: continuing to achieve reduction of bycatch mortality in other fisheries; and, research to ensure that seabird avoidance devices are developed that are amenable to operation and appropriate for the size of vessel deploying them. Continued cooperative research with the trawl sector on excluder devices for groundfish trawls was endorsed. RAB was also concerned about accountability and ensuring that discard mortality rates used in bycatch control were accurate and timely. The Board also wants the staff to ensure that the viability criteria be as objective as possible and not liable to variable interpretation by observers.
6. Areas 2A/2B and 3B/4 linkages. The Board expressed concern about linking the quota setting between the regulatory areas in these two regions. Stand-alone assessments are the desired goal, particularly so for Areas 2A and 2B. The Board recognized that decisions concerning these southern areas have a significant international component. The Board was also queried whether there were recruitment and movement issues among these areas that compromised the assessments or setting catch limits. While it recognized the data limitations for assessing Areas 3B and 4 independently of Area 3A, the Board expressed its view that the sooner these western areas could be treated independently, the better.
7. Changes in commercial gear. The Board concurred that the make-up of gear used by the fleet had changed since the inception of IQ fisheries. This was also coupled with some changes in when and where the gear is deployed. Views on whether this has had a significant effect on the consistency of the index of relative abundance derived from the logbook statistics were varied but the Board believed that staff should examine the issue of changing gear more closely.
8. Stock identification and fine-scale movements. The RAB would like to have a more detailed understanding of stock structure throughout the range of halibut. Although the current view is that the halibut stock is a single reproductive unit, the Board wants to know if there is any more detailed structure that is relevant to management strategies. Fine-scale

movements, as they relate to recruitment sources and potential area-specific impacts of harvest are also of concern. In particular, understanding of stock distribution and movements during the winter is required.

SUMMARY

Staff and the Board were in general concurrence on those issues which merit research attention. However, the Board wished additional effort put into understanding the potential for season extension, particularly to have the staff examine reproductive status and timing among areas to determine if there are components of the stock that can be considered non-migratory among regulatory areas and upon which a small fishery could be based. The Board endorsed the general direction of staff-proposed research but recognized that not all projects could be financed this year. The tagging program was regarded as a high-priority item, with harvest policy, season extension, medium term forecasting, stock identification, gear changes, distribution of prior hook injuries, and chalky fish as important secondary programs.

TAGGING PROGRAM AND SEASON EXTENSION

The afternoon session was largely devoted to a detailed explanation of the tagging program and a discussion of an in-progress draft report on season extension.

The design of the tagging program, nature of the tags, injection site, holding and shedding experiments, detection systems and potential benefits were presented to the Board. Staff outlined the magnitude of the tagging and detection efforts. Board members provided a great deal of feedback concerning sizes of fish to be tagged, validation of tag retention, winter tagging, and cooperation with processors in setting up detection systems. In particular, the Board wanted the staff to ensure that the technology was sound, that tag shedding (if any) was well-estimated, and that sufficient landings could be scanned to produce reliable results. Staff spent considerable time describing the nature of this experiment, the differences from previous tagging programs, and why this program should provide more reliable estimates of exploitation and movement among areas.

An in-progress draft of a report on potential season extension was distributed. More detailed tag return data were included but some inconsistencies among the previous reports of tag recoveries remain to be resolved. Staff committed to producing a new and complete summary of recoveries in the final report. While the precise magnitude of migrations is uncertain, the Board recognized that the fundamental decision facing the Commission was whether it would endorse fishing in transboundary (e.g. Areas 2A/2B/2C) tock elements. Accordingly, the Board requested that staff focus its efforts on developing a more detailed understanding of winter distribution of halibut with a view to determining whether there were non-migrating stock components, upon which a fishery could be based.