

**PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL (PFMC) REPRESENTATIVE
REPORT ON PACIFIC HALIBUT CATCH APPORTIONMENT METHODOLOGY**

Several members of the Pacific Fishery Management Council's Halibut Managers' Workgroup attended the International Pacific Halibut Commission's (IPHC) workshop on apportionment on September 4, 2008, in Bellevue, Washington. At the workshop, IPHC staff reviewed the results of an ongoing PIT tag study, explained the coastwide stock assessment methodology, and discussed their rationale for using the survey CPUE to apportion the coastwide stock amongst the halibut management areas.

From the data presented, there are signs indicating that the halibut stock in areas 2A, B, and C, are being fished at too high of rate. Of particular concern is the reduction in the average age of fish and the decrease in the number of age 20+ halibut. In addition, IPHC staff has seen a drastic reduction in the overall size-at-age in all areas. The IPHC staff also presented the summary of the PIT tag recoveries and emphasized the effects of immigration of halibut from other areas into Area 2.

From our perspective, Area 2A is unique to other areas in several ways, suffers from a lack of data compared to other management areas, and the information presented at the workshop results in several concerns regarding the apportionment methodology being proposed by the IPHC staff. Our most significant concerns are identified below:

1. Out of 299 PIT tags in 2A, 4 have been recovered, 1 in Area 2A and 3 in Area 2B. We do not believe that this information is informative nor does it support the contention that Area 2A halibut are subjected to harvest rates as high as 40%.
2. The "q" value for area 2A is lower than areas to the north; the coastwide stock assessment uses an average "q" thereby underestimating the Area 2A biomass.
3. The Area 2A annual setline survey is done after more than 80% of the annual harvest has taken place. This could result in lower CPUE's rates and underestimate the biomass in Area 2A.
4. Hook competition for bait (e.g., from spiny dogfish) is greater in Area 2A, which could also affect survey CPUE.
5. The average age of halibut in Area 2A is higher than the average age in Area 2B.
6. The estimated harvest rate of halibut in Area 2A is likely higher than what is actually taking place.
7. At the workshop, IPHC staff presented a comparison of IPHC survey data with information collected in the NMFS trawl survey off Alaska; however, NMFS trawl survey data for Area 2A were not included.

Based on the information shared at the workshop, I recommend:

1. The Pacific Council request the NMFS Northwest Fisheries Science Center provide a data summary of the halibut catch in the NMFS trawl survey for the past several years, including a description of the area swept in the survey relative to time for the SSC's review in November;

2. The Halibut Managers Workgroup request a meeting with IPHC staff and discuss the data that was presented at the workshop and discuss our concerns and ideas on how the apportionment should be made to Area 2A. In addition, the Halibut Managers Workgroup should discuss addressing scientific assumptions relative to the data available to assess the status of the Area 2A halibut resource; and
3. The Halibut Managers Workgroup report back to the Council at the November meeting and make the appropriate recommendations for Council input to the IPHC prior to the IPHC interim meeting.