

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE REPORT ON THE
INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION'S BYCATCH WORK GROUP

At its 2010 annual meeting, the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) requested staff reconstitute the bilateral Halibut Bycatch Work Group (HBWG) to examine how impacts of bycatch from commercial non-tribal trawl fisheries can best be incorporated into halibut management, and to review progress on bycatch reduction and the target levels for reduction recommended by the original HBWG in 1991. The HBWG met on August 11, 2010, in Seattle.

The HBWG is comprised of three representatives from the Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and five representatives from the U.S.-from the National Marine Fisheries Service Alaska Region, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, NOAA General Counsel, and Area 2A (West Coast).

In reviewing the targets for bycatch reduction that were set in 1991, there was considerable discussion about the data used for Alaska prior to then being erroneous; therefore, the group agreed to review data post-1991 in its assessment of management performance. IPHC staff provided a historical overview of bycatch in commercial halibut fisheries for all management areas. Bycatch in Areas 2A, 2B, and 2C exhibited significant declines since the mid-1990s, whereas Areas 3A and 3B have remained fairly level, and a slight decline was shown for Area 4 during this time period.

Each area representative provided an overview of its management structure and process, the different commercial fisheries encountering halibut, and recent regulatory actions. For Area 2A, I described the Council's catch sharing plan and management structure for the different fisheries, and the halibut individual bycatch quota provisions adopted through Amendments 20 and 21. Both Canada and Alaska commended 2A for the actions taken to reduce halibut bycatch in the trawl fishery and for the conservation aspects of the Council's Trawl Rationalization program.

IPHC staff gave a presentation on how bycatch in areas particularly in the west could affect yield in areas to the east given the recent study on migratory patterns. While bycatch may be a contributing factor, there are many other factors to consider, so it is difficult to determine the amount of yield affected. Staff also presented different alternatives relative to incorporation of bycatch into the management process; however, the HBWG did not have sufficient time at this meeting to discuss this topic and complete all of its tasks. As a follow-up, each area was asked to write a description of current management and planned, future management changes relative to bycatch reduction, which will be presented at the Interim Meeting. The HBWG will have a conference call in late September to review progress on those reports and will meet in early December to further discuss how to incorporate bycatch mortality into halibut management.