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INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

ESTABLISHED BY A CONVENTION BETWEEN CANADA
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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September 8, 2014

Agenda Item K.1.b
Supplemental IPHC Report
September 2014

Ms. Dorothy M. Lowman, Chair
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101
Portland, Oregon 97220-1384

RE: Agenda Item K.1: 2015 Pacific Halibut Regulations

Dear Chair Lowman:

The staff of International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) notes the Council's upcoming actions regarding proposed changes to Pacific halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP). We have the following comments for your consideration.

1. The IPHC staff supports recommending to the IPHC Commission that California Department of Fish and Wildlife be added to the definition of "authorized officer" in IPHC regulations.
2. Estimates of halibut abundance on scales smaller than IPHC regulatory areas can vary substantially. The IPHC's standardized 10 nmi survey grid is designed to sample efficiently, and at the same rate, across a broad range of depth and habitats. However, this sampling approach is not appropriate for estimating abundance at fine spatial scales, where catch rates can be greatly influenced by only a small number of stations, or the exact locations of those stations. The relative variation in the annual Area 2A survey index of abundance has averaged approximately double that of other areas. The IPHC has also observed greater interannual variability at the extremes of the halibut stock's geographical range, such as in Areas 2A and 4D. Figure 1 shows variation in survey catch rates for IPHC survey sub-areas of Area 2A over the 2004-2013 period; it is apparent in this figure that these sub-areas vary substantially and not in concert within a given year. This variation is the primary reason that the Commission does not recommend the use of survey estimates for sub-area understanding of interannual changes in halibut abundance at a fine spatial scale.
3. After discussions with the Council and stakeholders, the IPHC expanded its survey area in 2013 to include waters off northern California (to 40° N). Catch-rates in this area were lower than those in southern Oregon and close to the mean rates observed across all stations in Area 2A and those in Washington/northern Oregon waters (Figure 1). As noted in the public comments, the FCEY for 2014 (based on current IPHC harvest policy) was estimated at 0.72 Milb, compared to a 0.62 Milb FCEY for Area 2A when the expanded survey area was not included. We would like to point out this was not a change in the estimated stock size (the total stock size actually decreased from 2013 to 2014) but represents the assignment of a bigger 'slice' of the coastwide pie for Area 2A. Because

of the movement of halibut, the stock must be considered as a coastwide entity and the densities of fish in all areas affect the availability of fish across the entire stock range. Specifically, we estimated, based on the expanded survey, that a greater proportion of the coastwide stock (2.4%) was present in 2A in 2013 relative to what we would have estimated (2.1%) without that survey.

The increase in FCEY came from commensurate reductions in all other areas, in proportion to their estimated stock size (e.g., Area 3A was 0.04 Milb lower), rather than a unique increase in Area 2A. All the fish available for harvest, based on the current harvest policy and the other removals not included in the FCEYs, were fully accounted for in the FCEYs across all areas in both cases. It is worth noting that the Commission adopted a 0.96 Milb FCEY for 2A - substantially more than the current harvest policy estimate, and a greater fraction of the total TCEY than indicated by survey-based apportionment, even after accounting for the removals being set above the current harvest policy at the coastwide level.

4. The IPHC further extended the survey area in 2014 to include waters to 39°N. Apportionment calculations for this year's process will account for the additional area surveyed, and the results will depend on the final estimated catch-rates for all regions within 2A.

We appreciate the work of the Council and state agencies in initially addressing the management of halibut in the South of Humbug Mountain Subarea. We are concerned that all parties adhere to the provisions of the CSP for Area 2A in order to achieve the Commission's management goals for this area, and urge the Council to enact measures that will bring the California sport catch into compliance with the CSP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Leaman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bruce M. Leaman
Executive Director

cc: IPHC Commissioners

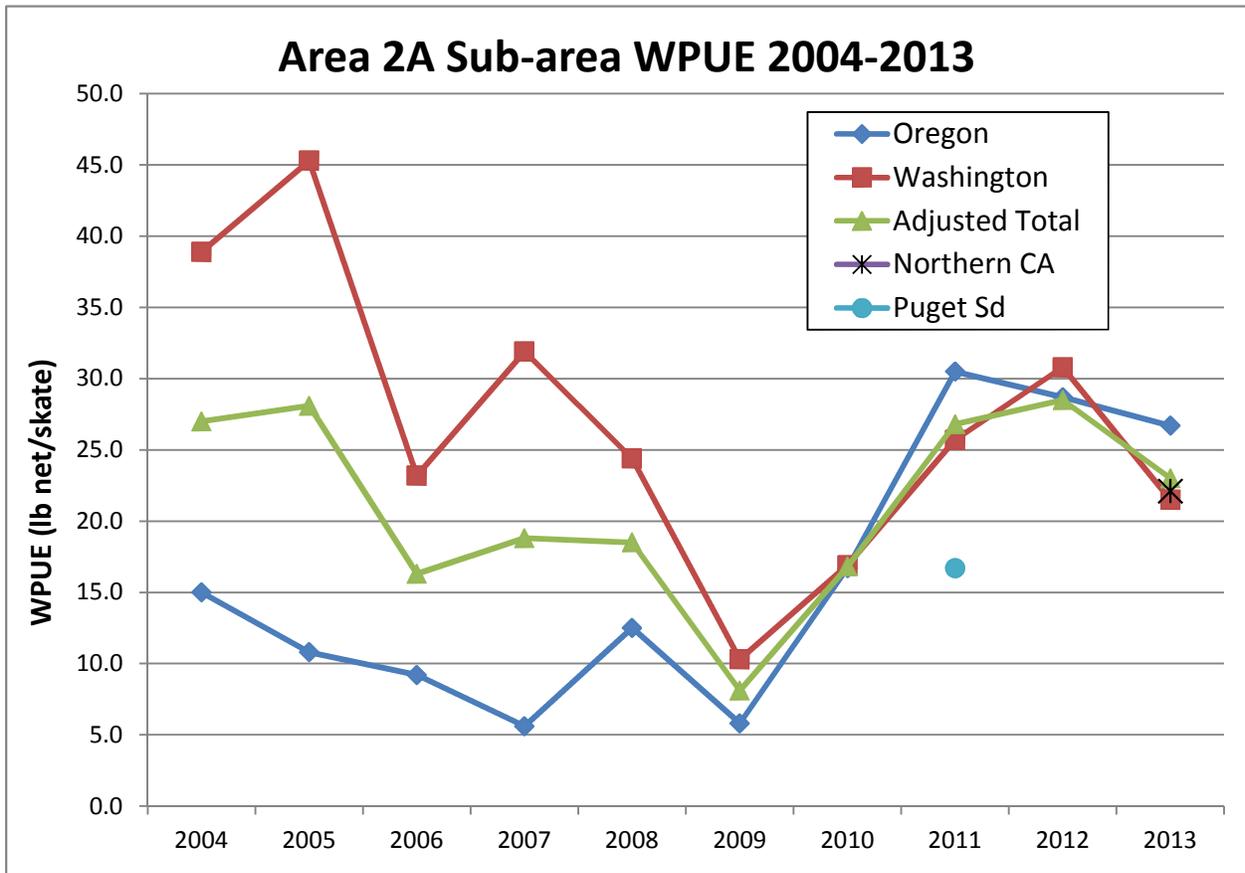


Figure 1. IPHC survey catch rates (WPUE, lb/skate) by sub-areas within IPHC Regulatory Area 2A, 2004-2013.