

**PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

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February 1, 2002

Dr. Usha Varanasi  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Northwest Fisheries Science Center  
2725 Montlake Blvd. E.  
Seattle, WA 98112

Dear Usha:

A situation arose at the most recent International Pacific Halibut Commission (Commission) annual meeting that illustrated an opportunity to improve communication between the parties south of the Canadian border involved in managing the halibut resource in Area 2A. The purpose of this letter is to suggest mechanisms that can prevent the kind of problem experienced at the annual meeting this year from re-occurring in the future.

We came to the annual meeting with the strong expectation that the bycatch mortality estimate for Area 2A was 220,000 pounds. On the first day of the meeting, we were quite surprised to see 540,000 pounds listed in the Commission's technical documents as the deduction from the allowable catch in 2002, and the bycatch estimates from the previous six years had been revised. Even a coordination conference call the week before the meeting between many of the Area 2A delegation participants yielded no indication of what we saw on the first day of the meeting. We found ourselves quite suddenly in a reactive mode on an important issue. As a consequence, we left the meeting with a total allowable catch 320,000 pounds less than what we expected when we arrived at the meeting.

The impacts of a loss of 320,000 pounds to our small allowable catch are significant. In numerical terms, it would have increased the yield limit 24% over the amount now to be allocated between the Area 2A sectors. As an example of importance, Oregon sport charters now receive \$150 from anglers for the chance to catch an average 25-pound dressed halibut.

The reason given by the Commission as to the discrepancy between the estimates of bycatch was there were difficulties in the technical information provided to the Commission by the NMFS NWFSC, and that efforts to reconcile the difficulties proved fruitless, as repeated attempts to contact NWFSC staff by phone and email were not returned or answered. As time ran out on the deadline, Commission staff were left to use the only number they could replicate, their estimate of 540,000 pounds. Further, no one alerted anyone in the southern U.S. delegation the problem of this gap existed; even staff within NMFS at the NWR working on Pacific halibut fishery management were not aware of the situation.

To prevent such an occurrence from repeating itself, we suggest the following:

- Transmit the essential information to the Commission formally by letter, with copies to the southern U.S. principals.
- Ask in the letter for a response if any difficulties or discrepancies develop in the use of the information.
- Alert your staff to the situation that occurred this year and ask that they inform you as quickly as possible of any significant issues that could make the kind of difference in the fishery experienced this year.
- Notify the principals in the Area 2A delegation as to any such significant problems so as to facilitate a timely response, or preparation for negotiation at the next annual meeting.

On behalf of those at the 2002 annual meeting, let me express appreciation for your attention to this matter. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A black rectangular box containing a white handwritten signature in cursive script.

Executive Director

c: Mr. Ralph Hoard  
Mr. Jim Lone  
Mr. Phil Anderson  
Mr. Burnie Bohn  
Mr. Don Bodenmiller  
Ms. Michele Robinson  
Mr. Bob Alverson  
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