

REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION
ANNUAL MEETING

Mr. Phil Anderson, Council representative to the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) attended the annual meeting of the IPHC in January, where the overall halibut harvest levels for 2006 were set, including that for Area 2A (Agenda Item E.1.a, Attachment 1). Mr. Anderson will provide a brief summary of the results of the meeting.

Council Task:

1. Discuss information relative to Area 2A halibut fisheries.

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item E.1.a, Attachment 1: IPHC News Release.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
- b. Summary of Meeting
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. Council Discussion

Chuck Tracy
Phil Anderson

PFMC
02/09/06

INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

News Release



P.O. Box 95009, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98145-2009

January 23, 2006

HALIBUT COMMISSION COMPLETES 2006 ANNUAL MEETING

The International Pacific Halibut Commission completed its Eighty-second Annual Meeting in Bellevue, Washington, with Dr. James Balsiger of Juneau, Alaska presiding as Chair. The Commission is recommending to the governments of Canada and the United States, catch limits for 2006 totaling 69,860,000 pounds, a 5.37% decrease from the 2005 catch limit of 73,819,000 pounds.

The Commission staff reported on the 2005 assessment of the Pacific halibut stock which implemented only minor technical changes from the previous year. The halibut stock is healthy in the central and southern portions of the range (Areas 3A through 2A) but is believed to have declined in Areas 3B through Area 4, and lower catch limits are required in those areas. The recruitment of the 1994 and 1995 year classes appears to be relatively strong in most areas, although Area 4B is showing a notably lower level of recruitment of these same year classes compared with other regulatory areas. Recoveries of PIT-tagged halibut from the Bering Sea and western Gulf of Alaska have been very low and do not provide information sufficient to estimate exploitable biomass reliably in these areas. Such low recovery rates suggest very high biomass levels in the Bering Sea but steadily declining commercial and survey catch rates in most areas suggest that fishing mortality rates of halibut are similar to those in the central and eastern Gulf of Alaska. The Commission does not yet know why the recaptures of tagged halibut from these areas are low and is continuing to examine the problem. However, the Commission's analytic assessment and survey data for these areas continue to indicate stock declines and the requirement for reductions in harvest.

In 2005, Commission staff implemented a 22.5% harvest rate for use in Areas 2A through 3A and a rate of 20% for Areas 3B through 4E. Low levels of recruitment and a new examination of productivity in Areas 4B and 4CDE indicated that harvest rates lower than 20% were more appropriate for these areas. Accordingly, the Commission adopted catch limits based on a harvest rate of 15% for Areas 4B and 4CDE. This is the second year in a row that harvest rates for these areas have been lowered as a precautionary measure, and while additional research projects are conducted in 2006.

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Seasons and Catch Limits

The Commission received regulatory proposals for 2006 from the scientific staff, Canadian and United States harvesters and processors, and other fishery agencies. The Commission will recommend to the governments the following catch limits for 2006 in Area 2A (California, Oregon, and Washington), Area 2B (British Columbia), Area 2C (southeastern Alaska), Area 3A (central Gulf), Area 3B (western Gulf), Area 4A (eastern Aleutians), Area 4B (western Aleutians), Area 4C (Pribilof Islands), Area 4D (northwestern Bering Sea), and Area 4E (Bering Sea flats):

2006 Catch Limits

Regulatory Area	Catch Limit (pounds)
Area 2A	
Non-treaty directed commercial (south of Pt. Chehalis)	234,960
Non-treaty incidental catch in salmon troll fishery	41,464
Non-treaty incidental catch in sablefish longline fishery (north of Pt. Chehalis)	70,000
Treaty Indian commercial	472,000
Treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence (year-round)	36,000
Sport – North of Columbia River	249,152
<u>Sport – South of Columbia River</u>	<u>276,424</u>
Area 2A total	1,380,000
Area 2B (includes sport catch allocation)	13,220,000
Area 2C	10,630,000
Area 3A	25,200,000
Area 3B	10,860,000
Area 4A	3,350,000
Area 4B	1,670,000
Area 4C	1,610,000
Area 4D	1,610,000
<u>Area 4E</u>	<u>330,000</u>
Area 4 total	8,570,000
Total	69,860,000

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada will allocate the adopted Area 2B catch limit between sport and commercial fisheries.

The IPHC sets biologically-based catch limits for Areas 4A, 4B, and a combined Area 4CDE. The catch limits for Regulatory Areas 4C, 4D, and 4E reflect the catch-sharing plan implemented by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). The catch-sharing plan allows Area 4D Community Development Quota (CDQ) harvest to be taken in Area 4E.

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The catch-sharing plan implemented by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) for Area 2A was adopted by the Commission and is reflected in the catch limits adopted for the Area 2A fisheries. In Area 2A, seven 10-hour fishing periods for the non-treaty directed commercial fishery are recommended: June 28, July 12, July 26, August 9, August 23, September 6, and September 20, 2006. All fishing periods will begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 6:00 p.m. local time, and will be further restricted by fishing period limits announced at a later date.

Area 2A fishing dates for an incidental commercial halibut fishery concurrent with salmon troll fishing seasons and the incidental commercial halibut fishery during the sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis will be established under United States domestic regulations by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The remainder of the Area 2A catch-sharing plan, including sport fishing seasons and depth restrictions, will be determined under regulations promulgated by NMFS. For further information of the depth restrictions in the commercial directed halibut fishery, incidental halibut during the sablefish fishery, and the sport fisheries, call the NMFS hotline (1-800-662-9825).

After reviewing staff information and proposals from the harvesting and processing sector, the Commission voted on a season opening date of March 5. The Sunday opening date is to facilitate marketing. Therefore, seasons will commence at 12 noon local time on March 5 and terminate at 12 noon local time on November 15, 2006 for the following fisheries and areas: the treaty Indian commercial fishery in Area 2A, the Canadian Individual Vessel Quota (IVQ) fishery in Area 2B, and the United States Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) and CDQ fisheries in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E.

Regulatory Changes and Issues

The Commission approved regulations to change the sport fishery possession limits in Area 2A. The sport fishery possession limit on land will be two halibut (U.S. origin) in Washington, three daily bag limits in Oregon, and two daily bag limits in California. The sport possession limit on the water in Area 2A will be the same as the daily bag limits.

For the Area 2A fishery, the Commission passed a regulation requiring that the person completing the State fish ticket (first recipient, commercial fish processor, or buyer) record on the fish ticket whether the halibut weight is head-on or head-off fish, or record the corresponding product code.

The Commission approved recognizing in IPHC regulations the First Nation's Food Fishery in Area 2B. Also, the IPHC regulations will be changed to require the new British Columbia Integrated Fisheries logbook, replacing the requirement to complete the Halibut Fishery Logbook. Additionally, the Commission approved removing the requirement that the logbooks in Area 2B be completed not later than 24 hours after midnight local time for each day fished and prior to offload, as it will be obsolete with the new fisheries plan.

For landings in Alaska, the IPHC regulations will be revised to allow the Interagency Electronic Recording System, eLandings, as an option along with State fish tickets.

The Commission removed an obsolete regulation that requires vessel operators to record personal use halibut in the vessel's logbook within 24-hours of offload. This is not required as all halibut caught is recorded in the logbook and all halibut retained is weighed and recorded on the landing documentation whether it is sold or retained for personal use.

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The Commission agreed to add the definition of net weight of halibut to the IPHC regulations. Net weight is defined as gutted, head-off, and without ice and slime. The catch limits are always in terms of net weight and this will also be stated in the regulations.

Other Actions

The industry proposal to allow live halibut landings to processors was discussed. There was concern by the IPHC staff, NOAA Enforcement and industry on the ability of enforcement to track the movement of live halibut. Therefore, the option of butchering the halibut at the dock prior to weighing was reviewed and practical questions were raised. The Commission asked the staff to work with other agency staff to review this option and provide a recommendation at the next IPHC Annual Meeting.

The Commission supports the use of electronic logbooks and asked the staff to work with the person who proposed allowing IPHC approved electronic logbooks for U.S. and Canada. When a logbook design is completed, the Commission will review each specific logbook.

The Commission did not take action on proposals to implement a legal size limit for all fisheries, including the sport and sport charter fisheries, or to require IFQ holders in Alaska to record dogfish bycatch in logbooks, or to allow offloads to floating processors in Area 4.

The Commission did not approve the allowance for proxy fishing in Alaska.

The Commission will request that NMFS finish amending their Quota Share regulations for the Individual Fishery Quota fishery in Alaska to reference the dates of the halibut season, rather than specific dates of the year.

The Commission spent considerable time discussing the state of understanding about halibut stocks in the Bering Sea, particularly on the eastern Bering Sea shelf. The advisory bodies to the Commission recommended additional research to obtain data necessary for a better understanding of the status and productivity of halibut stocks in the area. Accordingly, the Commission approved a four-part research program to address this issue, to be initiated in 2006. The program will incorporate both a new survey of the eastern Bering Sea shelf, expansion of some segments of the existing survey program in the area, analysis of historical trawl surveys conducted by NMFS, and an estimation of the catching efficiency of the NMFS trawl gear, for halibut.

In addition, the Commission will generate a research project to address the lack of detailed knowledge of the timing of spawning migrations of halibut between Areas 2B and 2C. This project will involve tagging and deployment of halibut with pop-up satellite tags that will release during February-March of 2007. Together with information on exploitation rates from the two areas, this project should allow the staff to estimate the approximate proportions and timing of potential interceptions of halibut originating in Area 2B, that might be caught by the fishery in Area 2C in March.

The Commission honoured Mr. Tyler Jones of Bellingham, Washington as the fourth recipient of the IPHC Merit Scholarship. Mr. Jones was unable to attend the meeting because of academic commitments but has been presented with a certificate and plaque, as well as the scholarship of \$2,000 (U.S.). The Commissioners expressed their continued support for the scholarship program and commended the Scholarship Committee for their efforts in assessing the candidates.

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The Commission noted that halibut bycatch mortality in non-target fisheries was reduced slightly in 2005, and was at the lowest level since 1987, continuing the trend initiated by the 1991 Commission agreement to achieve lower bycatch mortality levels. However, the Commission agrees that further reductions are desirable and that current levels of mortality reduce yield to the directed halibut fisheries. The Commission will continue to work with agencies of the two governments to achieve reductions in halibut bycatch mortality. The Commission was also asked to send a letter to the NPFMC on the management of the sport charter fishery. The Commission deferred on this request until NOAA General Counsel completes a legal examination of the management authority.

The recommended regulations for the 2006 halibut fishery will become official as soon as they are approved by the Canadian and United States Governments. The Commission will publish and distribute regulation pamphlets.

The next Annual Meeting of the Commission is planned for Victoria, British Columbia from January 16 to 19, 2007. The Canadian Government commissioner, Dr. Laura Richards, was elected as Chair for the coming year. The United States Government commissioner, Dr. James Balsiger, was elected Vice-Chair. Other Canadian commissioners are Clifford Atleo and Gary Robinson. The other United States commissioners are Ralph Hoard and Phillip Lestenkof. Dr. Bruce Leaman is the Executive Director of the Commission.

- END -

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INCIDENTAL CATCH REGULATIONS IN THE SALMON TROLL AND FIXED GEAR SABLEFISH FISHERIES

Regulations governing incidental harvest of halibut in the salmon troll fishery and commercial sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis require the Council to adopt recommended halibut landing restrictions to allow incidental harvest while assuring quotas are not exceeded.

Salmon Troll Fishery

The halibut regulations allocate 15% of the non-Indian commercial halibut allocation in Area 2A to the salmon troll fishery as an incidental catch. Regulations (beginning in 2001) direct that the primary management objective is to harvest the incidental quota in the May/June salmon troll fishery with a secondary objective to harvest any remaining quota during July through September. The Council has successfully used landing ratios and a total trip limit to assure a manageable progression of the fishery in past years. A summary of management information for the incidental halibut fishery since the initial season in 1995 is provided in Agenda Item E.2.a, Attachment 1.

Commercial Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis

The total Area 2A halibut quota is large enough this year (over 900,000 pounds) to provide for an incidental halibut harvest in the commercial sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis. This incidental fishery is allocated that portion of the Washington sport allocation in excess of 214,110 pounds, provided a minimum of 10,000 pounds is available, up to a maximum of 70,000 pounds. In past years, the Council has successfully used landing restrictions to maintain the harvest within the allocation. A summary of management information for the incidental halibut fishery since the initial season in 2001 is provided in Agenda Item E.2.a, Attachment 1.

Council Action:

- 1. Adopt for public review a range of landing restrictions for halibut caught incidentally in the non-Indian commercial troll season that comport with the troll salmon management options and assure a reasonable utilization of the incidental catch while not exceeding the quota.**
- 2. Adopt for public review, a range of landing restrictions, including season dates for incidental halibut harvest in the commercial sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis, Washington.**

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item E.2.a, Attachment 1: Summary of Pacific Halibut Incidental Catch Management.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
- b. State Proposals for the Salmon Troll Fishery
- c. State Proposals for the Fixed Gear Sablefish Fishery
- d. Tribal Comments
- e. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- f. Public Comment
- g. **Council Action:** Adopt Public Review Options for 2006

Chuck Tracy

Jim Harp

PFMC
02/15/06

SUMMARY OF PACIFIC HALIBUT INCIDENTAL CATCH MANAGEMENT

Salmon Troll Fishery

The table below provides the number of licenses, allocation, harvest, and landing restrictions for the incidental halibut catch in the salmon troll fishery since the initial season in 1995.

Incidental Halibut Management in Area 2A Salmon Troll Fishery.

Year	Licenses Issued					Pounds of Halibut			Restriction	
	WA	OR	CA	AK-2A	Total	Allocation	May/June Harvest	Total Harvest	Halibut per Chinook	Trip Limit
1995	14	104	2	5	125	16,068	2,125	2,125	1 per each 20	None
1996	22	82	5	14	123	16,068	9,521	9,521	1 + 1 per each 15	20
1997	59	187	10	19	275	21,635	17,570	17,570	1 + 1 per each 10	20
1998	44	188	15	18	265	25,344	9,123	13,124	1 + 1 per each 8	25
1999	54	193	12	25	284	23,490	9,955	9,955	1 + 1 per each 5	35
2000	49	154	8	24	235	24,464	20,925	22,350	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2001	63	232	13	37	347	34,046	-	34,100	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2002	60	223	7	41	331	39,300	-	41,000	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2003	60	209	10	44	323	39,300	23,296	41,917	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2004	74	212	11	47	344	44,554	29,174	42,798	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2005	79	249	12	52	392	39,918	22,393	42,187	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2006	-	-	-	-	-	41,464	-	-	-	-

Commercial Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis

The table below provides the allocation, total harvest, landing restrictions, and season dates for the incidental halibut catch in the fixed-gear sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis since the initial season began in 2001.

Incidental Halibut Management in the Area 2A Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis, Washington.

Year	Pounds of Halibut		Restrictions	
	Allocation	Total Harvest	Halibut per Sablefish (dressed weight)	Season Dates
2001	47,946	26,945	2+80 lb per 1,000 lb	Aug. 15-Oct. 31
2002	88,389	66,599	2+150 lb per 1,000 lb	May 1-Oct 31
2003	70,000	65,325	2+150 lb per 1,000 lb	May 1-Oct 31
2004	70,000	67,837	2+100 lb per 1,000 lb	May 1-Oct 31
2005	70,000	68,013	2+100 lb per 1,000 lb	May 1-Oct 23
2006	70,000	-	-	-

Twenty-seven individual vessels made a total of 124 landings containing halibut in the directed sablefish fishery. The average amount of sablefish in these landings was 6,649 lbs. and the average amount of halibut was 623 lbs. (both dressed, halibut with head on). This represents an average of approximately 94% of the amount of halibut that could have been legally retained under the regulation. The overall per-landing average in last year's fishery was only 60% of the incidental halibut allowed. Several landings of halibut appear to have exceeded the allowed ratio to sablefish in the catch, and are currently under investigation. If the overage from these landings is not included in the calculation, the overall average of incidental halibut retention drops to 86% of the amount possible under the regulation

PFMC
02/15/05

SUMMARY OF PACIFIC HALIBUT INCIDENTAL CATCH MANAGEMENT

Salmon Troll Fishery

The table below provides the number of licenses, allocation, harvest, and landing restrictions for the incidental halibut catch in the salmon troll fishery since the initial season in 1995.

Incidental Halibut Management in Area 2A Salmon Troll Fishery.

Year	Licenses Issued					Pounds of Halibut			Restriction	
	WA	OR	CA	AK-2A	Total	Allocation	May/June Harvest	Total Harvest	Halibut per Chinook	Trip Limit
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1996	22	82	5	14	123	16,068	9,521	9,521	1 + 1 per each 15	20
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1998	44	188	15	18	265	25,344	9,123	13,124	1 + 1 per each 8	25
1999	54	193	12	25	284	23,490	9,955	9,955	1 + 1 per each 5	35
2000	49	154	8	24	235	24,464	20,925	22,350	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2001	63	232	13	37	347	34,046	-	34,100	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2002	60	223	7	41	331	39,300	-	41,000	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2003	60	209	10	44	323	39,300	23,296	41,917	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2004	74	212	11	47	344	44,554	29,174	42,798	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2005	79	249	12	52	392	39,918	22,393	42,187	1 + 1 per each 3	35
2006	-	-	-	-	-	41,464	-	-	-	-

Commercial Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis

The table below provides the allocation, total harvest, landing restrictions, and season dates for the incidental halibut catch in the fixed-gear sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis since the initial season began in 2001.

Incidental Halibut Management in the Area 2A Sablefish Fishery North of Point Chehalis, Washington.

Year	Pounds of Halibut		Restrictions	
	Allocation	Total Harvest	Halibut per Sablefish (dressed weight)	Season Dates
2001	47,946	26,945	2+80 lb per 1,000 lb	Aug. 15-Oct. 31
2002	88,389	66,599	2+150 lb per 1,000 lb	May 1-Oct 31
2003	70,000	65,325	2+150 lb per 1,000 lb	May 1-Oct 31
2004	70,000	67,837	2+100 lb per 1,000 lb	May 1-Oct 31
2005	70,000	68,013	2+100 lb per 1,000 lb	May 1-Oct 23
2006	70,000	-	-	-

Twenty-seven individual vessels made a total of 124 landings containing halibut in the directed sablefish fishery. The average amount of sablefish in these landings was 6,649 lbs. and the average amount of halibut was 623 lbs. (both dressed, halibut with head on). This represents an average of approximately 94% of the amount of halibut that could have been legally retained under the regulation. The overall per-landing average in last year's fishery was only 60% of the incidental halibut allowed. Several landings of halibut appear to have exceeded the allowed ratio to sablefish in the catch, and are currently under investigation. If the overage from these landings is not included in the calculation, the overall average of incidental halibut retention drops to 86% of the amount possible under the regulation

PFMC

02/15/05

TRIBAL COMMENTS ON INCIDENTAL CATCH REGULATIONS FOR THE
SALMON TROLL AND FIXED GEAR SABLEFISH FISHERIES

Mr. Chairman,

I would just like to reiterate that the tribes have expressed concern for the bycatch discard mortality of halibut for many years now.

I continue to support this proposed action to allocate incidental halibut to the non-treaty sablefish fishery because it is a step in the right direction of eliminating discard mortality.

I also support the allowance of halibut caught incidentally in the salmon troll fishery to be landed and counted in the non-Indian commercial halibut allocation as it was in 2005.

Thank you.

PFMC
03/07/06

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INCIDENTAL CATCH
REGULATIONS IN THE SALMON TROLL AND FIXED GEAR SABLEFISH FISHERIES

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) heard from Brian Culver of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and reviewed Agenda Item E.2.a, Attachment 1. The GAP endorses continuing with the status quo regulations for the retention of incidental Pacific halibut catch in the 2006 salmon troll and commercial sablefish fisheries north of Point Chehalis, Washington.

PFMC
03/06/06

SALMON ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON INCIDENTAL CATCH REGULATIONS
FOR THE SALMON TROLL AND FIXED GEAR SABLEFISH FISHERIES

The Salmon Advisory Subpanel (SAS) would like the following options for public review:

- Option 1: Status quo.
- Option 2: Beginning May 1, license holders may land no more than one Pacific halibut per each two Chinook, except one Pacific halibut may be landed without meeting the ratio requirement, and no more than 40 halibut per open period.
- Option 3: Beginning May 1, license holders may land no more than one Pacific halibut per each three Chinook, except one Pacific halibut may be landed without meeting the ratio requirement, and no more than 24 Pacific halibut per open period.

PFMC
03/06/06