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## INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

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

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1 September 2017

Mr. Charles A. Tracy  
Executive Director, Pacific Fishery Management Council  
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101  
Portland, OR 97220-1384

### Re: NWFSC Observer Program

Dear Mr. Tracy:

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) wishes to call the Pacific Fishery Management Council's (PFMC) attention to the efforts of the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (Observer Program) of the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Northwest Fisheries Science Center, and to acknowledge the Observer Program's fine work this year on two important items:

- 1) The bycatch report titled "*Pacific Halibut Bycatch in US West Coast Fisheries (2002-2016)*" ([Agenda Item E.1.b, NMFS NWFSC Report 3](#)), and
- 2) The first observer deployment in the non-tribal directed commercial Pacific halibut fishery in IPHC Regulatory Area 2A.

The Observer Program staff has worked closely with the IPHC Secretariat in recent years to refine and improve the reporting of Pacific halibut mortality from fisheries targeting other species in IPHC Regulatory Area 2A. To that end, the products provided are structured to feed directly into the IPHC's accounting and data needs for stock assessment, harvest policy, and management projection calculations. The IPHC finds great value in the availability and timeliness of a permanent public record for this information. Annual meetings between the two teams of analysts have been productive and have led to several positive developments, such as the pilot program for observer coverage in 2017.

The non-tribal directed commercial Pacific halibut fishery in IPHC Regulatory Area 2A represents the last of the commercial derby fisheries that is administered by the IPHC. As noted in previous reports to the PFMC, there has been no historical at-sea monitoring of this fishery. This has produced a data gap for the IPHC, PFMC, and NMFS with regard to discard mortality of Pacific halibut and other species, including protected species. Working with the IPHC Secretariat, the Observer Program staff was able to observe 21 trips during the opening dates for the 2017 fishery. This coverage may eventually produce direct estimates of discard mortality with greater accuracy for use in IPHC, PFMC, and NMFS analyses.

The IPHC thanks the Observer Program and looks forward to a continued positive collaboration.

Sincerely,



Dr. David T. Wilson  
Executive Director, IPHC

cc: IPHC Commissioners  
Mike Burner, PFMC  
Kelly Ames, PFMC

## **References**

Jannot, J.E., Somers, K., Riley, N.B., Tuttle, V., and McVeigh, J. 2017. Pacific halibut bycatch in the U.S. west coast fisheries (2002-2016). NOAA Fisheries, NWFSC Observer Program, 2725 Montlake Blvd E. Seattle, WA 98112