

GROUND FISH ADVISORY SUBPANEL REPORT ON THE ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION MEETING REPORT

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP) received an overview from Mr. Steve Keith, Deputy Director of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), and Mr. Bob Alverson and Mr. Steve Joner, GAP members and IPHC Commissioners, regarding the Annual International Pacific Halibut Commission meeting held in February.

Makah Proposal

The GAP appreciates the efforts of the Makah Tribe for its regulatory proposal to the IPHC that would create a total constant exploitation yield (TCEY) for Area 2A that supports a constant floor level fishery constant exploitation yield (FCEY) of 1.5 million pounds annually. This was designed to reduce the variability and uncertainty for all 2A fisheries. The IPHC approved the change. The GAP supported this proposal in our [November 2018 Report](#).

Directed 2A Commercial Fishery

Mr. Keith reported the IPHC added a second day to the directed commercial season this year. The derby typically opens for 10 hours on the last Wednesday in June, with subsequent openings every two weeks until the 2A quota is harvested. This year, the first derby opening would occur on Wednesday, June 26. The second 10-hour opening would occur on Thursday, June 27, in an attempt to have a longer fishing period. Subsequent derby openings would follow July 10, July 24, Aug. 7, Aug. 21, Sept. 4, and Sept. 18 per the traditional schedule. Mr. Keith said the Thursday, June 27, derby opening is not set in stone and the IPHC has heard from industry, managers and enforcement that it may not be feasible to do at this time.

Mr. Keith reported the June 26 and 27 days would be 10-hour openings on each day. The GAP noted several problems with this. First, fishermen would not choose one of the two days to fish; they would try to fish both days but there is insufficient time to fish one day, run in, offload, re-bait the tubs, then return to the fishing grounds since the fish could not be retained on board overnight. Bad weather would only complicate this and likely make the fishery *more* unsafe. At the same time, processors would have difficulty offloading all the halibut for the vessels to return to the fishing grounds. Law enforcement advisors in the room also discussed problems related to the proposed two-day opening.

The GAP suggests that, given the hazard to the fleet of back-to-back openings and issues brought up by law enforcement, the season this year remain as it has in the past: one 10-hour opening on the last Wednesday in June, with subsequent openings every two weeks. Eliminate the June 27 day this year, pending a fishery management workshop proposed to be held in June or July this year per the [NMFS report 1](#) under this agenda item.

Halibut Workshop

The GAP fully supports a workshop to consider changes to the Area 2A directed commercial fishery. We have suggested proposed analyses and changes in our [June 2017](#) and [November 2018](#) statements. To summarize, the GAP suggestions included:

1. **Retain status quo** (the derby fishery);
2. **Move to a quota/catch share-type fishery**;
3. **Instead of a 10-hour opening (derby season), replace it with a 30-day season, 20-day, 10-day or 5-day season.** The GAP understands the permit allocations may be lower under longer seasons – much lower – than they are now to account for potential overages. The current assumption on which the permit allocations are based is that not all the assigned halibut will get caught. A longer opening would likely change those assumptions and therefore decrease the per-permit assignments of halibut pounds. Further, the season may close early if the overall commercial quota is attained; and
4. **Assign the commercial halibut quota to incidental catch in the sablefish fishery.** This issue has been proposed in the Council process in the past but hasn't been considered a high priority. Analysis for all sectors – open access, fixed gear and the tier fishery – should be included.

Additionally, the GAP suggests a hybrid option of numbers 3 and 4:

5. **Allow a smaller 2A quota for the directed fishery with some of the quota going to incidental catch in the sablefish fishery.** For example, the smaller vessels, particularly the open access vessels in Area 2A that target sablefish could have an incidental halibut catch of two fish. The limit would be low enough to discourage targeting while also reducing regulatory discards. Larger vessels that can handle rougher weather could participate in the directed commercial fishery.

The GAP notes [NMFS Report 1](#) suggests tribal, state and federal fishery managers, enforcement, the Groundfish Management Team and the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program staff be involved in the workshop.

Members of the GAP should also be included, since GAP members can provide practical recommendations regarding seasons, proposed changes and how different scenarios would directly affect the industry.

PFMC
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