

JOINT STAFF REPORT ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCOPE OF COMMERCIAL HALIBUT FISHERY WORKSHOP

At the March 2019 meeting, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) directed representatives of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Council staff (henceforth referred to as the workgroup) to confer and present information regarding the trade-offs associated with managing the non-Indian directed commercial halibut fishery through the Council process or through the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) and proposed next steps. The workgroup held a conference call on March 21 resulting in this report summarizing our discussion. In addition to the trade-offs associated with management of the directed commercial fishery, this report also describes what may be needed to manage the fishery, some ideas for the scope of a proposed stakeholder workshop, and a draft process and timeline for next steps.

Future Management of the Directed Commercial Halibut Fishery

IPHC approached the Council in June 2017 expressing safety concerns with the directed commercial halibut fishery in Area 2A as it is a derby-style fishery typically with only two or three 10-hour openings per season. The Council initially responded noting its workload and schedule and the difficulty of adding this fishery on top of other Council fishery management plan-related priorities. As the discussions progressed and IPHC proposed changes to the season structure and fishing limits, the Council received additional input from the Groundfish Management Team (GMT), Groundfish Advisory Subpanel (GAP), and the public about these proposed changes.

As the Council noted in its discussion in November 2018, there is considerable overlap between the directed commercial halibut fishery and Council groundfish fisheries relative to participants, target and incidental species, and bycatch. As such, the Council identified concerns related to season structure and economic viability of the fishery, enforcement and monitoring coordination, effects of bycatch of yelloweye rockfish, and season timing and potential conflicts with recreational fisheries.

The workgroup believes that all of these concerns are within the Council's purview to address, and the Council is likely the best positioned to facilitate the much-needed coordination among NMFS, Enforcement, the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program, and the state fishery agencies to address these concerns. The workgroup is fully aware of the Council's workload and other management priorities; however, we also note that our collective concerns will remain, and could get worse the longer these concerns are unaddressed.

Management Considerations and Transition

In deciding whether and when to transfer management of the directed commercial halibut fishery to the Council, there are some factors the Council needs to consider. IPHC currently licenses all

2A directed commercial fishery vessels, sets the seasons, develops and adopts the regulations – including vessel length based catch limits, logbook requirement, and monitors the landings relative to achievement of the fishery catch limit.

The Council’s annual halibut management process has typically focused on changes to the Council’s catch sharing plan and recreational seasons, so the Council would need to add time to its agendas to include the directed commercial fishery regulations. The GMT and GAP, likewise, would need to add time to their respective agendas to review and discuss commercial fishery regulatory changes, and NMFS would need to add the directed commercial fishery regulations into its annual halibut rulemaking process. This will also require additional coordination between NMFS West Coast Region and other NMFS’ offices, as well as with the Department of State. In addition, the Council may want to consider modifying the GAP membership to ensure participants in this fishery are adequately represented.

Under Council management, the workgroup anticipates that the Council may also want to establish a halibut permit(s), which would require substantially more time than is typically allotted during the Council’s annual halibut process. Similar to groundfish, major revisions to the directed commercial halibut fishery would likely be standalone items, whereas the annual process would continue to focus on catch sharing plan changes and annual regulations. The Council would then have the opportunity to consider whether and when to schedule those standalone items, taking into account budgetary and workload considerations, including National Environmental Policy Act analyses, through its Future Agenda Planning process.

Relative to inseason management of the directed fishery, the states would continue to receive the fish landing receipts, and preliminary discussions with IPHC staff indicate their desire to continue to collect fishery logbook data; however, it would be beneficial for NMFS to have access to the logbook data as well for analytical purposes. The states, NMFS, and IPHC already have a series of conference calls to review catches in the incidental commercial fisheries and the recreational fisheries, and develop recommendations based on projected attainment of the fishery-specific catch limits.

The workload associated with transferring management has not yet been fully scoped. Workload would include, at a minimum, the establishment of a Federal permit and the development of domestic regulations to govern the fishery. If the Council decides to transfer management of the directed commercial fishery, then the workgroup recommends scheduling a meeting with IPHC staff to initiate development of a transition plan prior to the June Council meeting (see attached draft process and timeline for Council consideration).

Stakeholder Workshop – Purpose and Scope

The workgroup discussed the need to identify the purpose of the stakeholder workshop with the understanding that the scope was dependent on the future management responsibility of the directed commercial fishery. However, if the fishery transition to Council management first requires development of a Federal permit, the first season under Council management would be a

few years away, at best. Therefore, we recommend that the stakeholder workshop this summer focus on the short-term (i.e., 2020-2022) and, if the Council decides to take on management of this fishery, consider scheduling a subsequent workshop to discuss changes for the longer term.

Workshop Purpose: To solicit input from stakeholders on short-term (i.e., 2020-2022) adjustments to the directed commercial fishery seasons (i.e., season dates, fishing periods, vessel limits).

**POTENTIAL PROCESS AND TIMELINE FOR
DIRECTED COMMERCIAL HALIBUT FISHERY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

Timeframe	Action
April 2019 Council meeting	Council to discuss whether to pursue transferring management of the directed commercial halibut fishery from IPHC to the Council and discuss next steps. Formally appoint an ad hoc workgroup to work on transition planning for the directed commercial fishery, including planning, conducting and reporting on a stakeholder workshop.
Prior to June 2019 Council meeting	Ad hoc workgroup meets with IPHC staff to develop and discuss what a plan to transition management of the directed commercial fishery from IPHC to the Council may look like.
June 2019 Council meeting	Ad hoc workgroup provide report on discussions with IPHC Council finalize scope and agenda for stakeholder workshop
Mid to Late July 2019	Stakeholder workshop Purpose: To solicit input from stakeholders on short-term (i.e., 2020-2022) adjustments to the directed commercial fishery seasons (i.e., season dates, fishing periods, vessel limits); proposed fishery changes for the longer term to be discussed at a future workshop.
September 2019 Council meeting	Ad hoc workgroup provide report on the stakeholder workshop and next steps for communications with IPHC Council consider approving for public review: 1) changes to halibut catch sharing plan, 2) proposed changes to directed commercial halibut fishery, and 3) alternative to establish a federal permit for the directed commercial halibut fishery
November 2019 Council meeting	Council consider adopting: 1) changes to halibut catch sharing plan, 2) changes to directed commercial halibut fishery, and 3) alternative to establish a federal permit for the directed commercial halibut fishery Council discuss and provide guidance on next steps for communication with IPHC Secretariat for their Interim and Annual Meetings
March 2020 Council meeting	Council review and discuss results of IPHC Annual Meeting and next steps to implement the IPHC/Council Transition Plan

PFMC
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