

REPORT ON THE 2020 INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION ANNUAL MEETING

Overview

The 2020 annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (Commission) was held in Anchorage, Alaska the week of February 3. Area 2A was represented by Caroline McKnight and Melanie Parker (CDFW), Maggie Sommer and Lynn Mattes (ODFW), Heather Hall (WDFW), Frank Lockhart, Kathryn Blair (NMFS), Phil Anderson (PFMC), and there was a broad representation from the Coastal and Puget Sound Treaty Indian Tribes and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

We were fortunate to have several Area 2A representatives as part of our delegation. Tom and Mary Markings, Jonathon Sawin, and Mike Okoniewski all made the trip to Anchorage and actively supported our meeting objectives on the Conference Board and the Processor Advisory Board. Their participation was very important in these two advisory bodies and greatly contributed to our success.

Reports by the west coast tribes, states and NMFS were combined, and a summary was presented to the commissioners by NMFS this year. The USCG and NOAA's OLE also provided reports to the Commission.

The IPHC staff presented the results of the stock assessment to the full group of attendees that numbered something close to 150 people. The halibut resource is assessed using an ensemble of four models. The last strong year class was in 2005 although for the second year there are indications that the 2011 and 2012 year classes are showing some strength.

The lack of a strong year class results in the models indicating a high degree of likelihood that the overall biomass will decline with the current exploitation rates associated with recent overall removals. The Commission has been struggling in recent years without having an agreed to harvest policy as they await the results of the ongoing Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) work to inform that decision. Each year has been somewhat ad-hoc in terms of settling on the desired spawning potential ratio associated with the total removals that have been approved.

The Commission is well down the road with their MSE process. Among the objectives of the MSE is to establish a harvest policy that includes setting harvest parameters when the stock falls below the desired stock status, and setting a floor in terms of abundance. It is similar to our 40-10 harvest policy and overfished thresholds. Area 2A participants in the MSE process include Michele Culver, Tom Marking, Scott Mazzone (Quinault Indian Nation), and Matt Damiano (NWIFC). Future topics for the Commission's Management Strategy Advisory Board may include work to investigate and provide advice on approaches for accounting for the impacts of bycatch in one Regulatory Area on harvesting opportunities in other Regulatory Areas.

2A Allowable Catch

Last year the Commission agreed to a four-year allocation framework that included a 2A Total Constant Exploitation Yield (TCEY) of 1.65 million pound provided there wasn't a substantive conservation concern identified by the staff during the four-year period. With the results of this year's stock assessment indicating further abundance declines in northern areas, there was

considerable discussion regarding staying the course with last year’s agreement. In contrast to the area in the north, particularly in the areas adjacent to the Gulf of Alaska and the Aleutian Chain, Area 2A’s survey results were positive with double digit increases in weight per unit of effort and number of fish per unit of effort. This, in part, led to general support to maintain the 2A TCEY at the 1.65 level consistent with the four-year agreement.

Considerable discussion and debate occurred regarding the rest of the catch areas. In the end, the Commission voted 4 yes (2 from the U.S. and 2 from Canada) and 2 no (1 U.S. and 1 from Canada) in favor of the values listed in the table below.

Management Area	TCEY (million lbs.)	FCEY (million lbs.)
2A	1.65	1.50
2B	6.83	6.00
2C	5.85	4.26
3A	12.2	9.06
3B	3.12	2.41
4A	1.75	1.41
4B	1.31	1.10
4CDE	3.90	1.73

Commercial Season Dates for Area 2A

- a) The Commission adopted fishing periods for 2020 as provided below, thereby superseding the relevant portions of Section 9 of the IPHC Pacific halibut fishery regulations and specifying that: a) All commercial fishing for Pacific halibut in all IPHC Regulatory Areas may begin no earlier than 14 March and must cease on 15 November;
- b) The IPHC Regulatory Area 2A non-tribal directed commercial fishery may take place during specific fishing periods of 3 days’ duration, beginning on the fourth Monday in June, with fishing period limits (vessel quota) to be determined and communicated by the IPHC Secretariat. The Commission indicated their intent that these fishing periods would open at 0800 on the first day (Monday) and close at 1800 on the third day (Wednesday).