

UPDATE ON THE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY EVALUATION PROCESS FOR PACIFIC HALIBUT

The International Pacific Halibut Commission's (IPHC) Management Strategy Advisory Board (MSAB) focused its efforts to evaluate the coastwide fishing intensity in support of developing a long-term harvest strategy policy in 2019 and will be examining stock distribution on a regional scale beginning in 2020. Over the course of the last year, the MSAB refined its goals and objectives, reviewed alternative harvest control rules, and discussed a process and timeline to examine regional stock distribution.

It is important to note that IPHC staff have defined "biological regions" for halibut that uses the management boundaries for their management areas. As such, "Region 2" combines IPHC Management Areas 2A, 2B, and 2C. I have pointed out that combining areas from both the U.S. (2A and 2C) and Canada (2B) effectively creates a region that may be as challenging to apportion as the entire coastwide area. Additionally, representatives from Area 2C have expressed concern with the "fixed allocations" for 2A and 2B in the interim effectively leaving less halibut available for 2C if those allocations are taken off the top of the Region 2 catch limit.

One idea that representatives from all areas within Region 2 have put forward is to combine 2C with 3A or Region 3. IPHC staff have acknowledged that Area 2C has halibut that appear to be from both Regions 2 and 3, depending on the time of year, so the rationale for combining 2C with either 2B or 3A is equally supported by their tagging data and seasonal migrations. 2C and 3A representatives also indicated that there is considerable overlap in their fishing fleets and management structure. It is also recognized, however, that while this change might be more practical for management of 2C, there will still need to be a mechanism to address "within Region 2" apportionment for 2A and 2B.

Per the direction provided by IPHC in 2018, the MSAB will present its recommendations for an alternative harvest strategy and initial distribution results for the Commission's consideration at the Annual Meeting in 2021.

A more detailed summary of the MSAB's discussions and recommendations are available on the IPHC website: <https://iphc.int/uploads/pdf/msab/msab014/iphc-2019-msab014-r.pdf>