

REPORT ON THE 2021 INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION ANNUAL MEETING

Overview

The 2021 annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC or Commission) was held in via webinar the week of January 25, 2021. Area 2A was represented by Caroline McKnight and Melanie Parker, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Maggie Sommer and Lynn Mattes, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Heather Hall, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife(WDFW), Frank Lockhart, Kathryn Blair, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Phil Anderson, Pacific Fishery Management Council(PFMC or Council), 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 Marking, Michael Sawin, Joel Kawahara, Paul Clampitt, and Mike Okoniewski all 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.

Verbal reports and overviews from Area 2A management entities, including NMFS, Tribes, States, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and Enforcement entities were not allotted time this year. Reports by the West Coast tribes, states and NMFS were combined, and a summary was provided to the commissioners by NMFS this year.

The IPHC staff presented the results of the stock assessment to the full group of attendees that numbered 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 third year there are indications that the 2011 and 2012 year classes are both considerably stronger than the previous five years.

The absence of a strong year class during the 2006-2010 timeframe 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 long-term harvest policy as they await the results of the ongoing Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) work to inform that decision. That said, the Commission used some the results of the MSE work to set the 2021 conservation objective of F 43% which allowed a harvest of 39 million pounds.

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 groundfish 40-10 harvest policy and overfished thresholds. Area 2A participants in the MSE process include Maggie Sommer, Tom Marking, Scott Mazzone (Quinault Indian Nation), and Joe Petersen (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

This was the third year of a four-year agreement by the Commission that includes an allocation framework with a 2A Total Constant Exploitation Yield (TCEY) of 1.65 million pounds, provided there is not a substantive conservation concern identified by the staff during the four-year period. The agreement also has a formulaic approach to setting the 2B (Canada) allocation based on several factors including the exploitable biomass and the discard mortality of fish in Alaska’s trawl fishery. The 2A TCEY agreed to value of 1.65 million pounds was again approved for use in 2021. Considerable discussion and debate occurred over the course of the meeting regarding the allotments to the catch areas in Alaska with a particular focus on Area 2C (Southeast Alaska). In the end, the Commission voted unanimously in favor of the values listed in the table below for a total of 39 million pounds net weight.

Management Area	TCEY (million lbs.)
2A	1.65
2B	7.0
2C	5.8
3A	14.0
3B	3.12
4A	2.05
4B	1.4
4CDE	3.98

Commercial Season Dates for Area 2A

- a) The Commission adopted fishing periods for 2021 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 6 March and must cease on 7 December;
- 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 Tuesday 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 (Tuesday) and close at 1800 on the third day (Thursday).

Transition of Management from IPHC to NMFS in 2A

NMFS representatives informed the IPHC that while progress is being made to transition the management of the 2A non-Indian directed fishery from IPHC to NMFS the first year of implementation is likely to occur in 2023.

PFMC
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