

REPORT ON THE 2022 INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION ANNUAL MEETING

Overview

The 2022 annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC or Commission) was held via webinar the week of January 24, 2022. Area 2A was represented by a broad contingent from the Coastal and Puget Sound Treaty Indian Tribes and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC); and by Caroline McKnight and Melanie Parker, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Maggie Sommer, Lynn Mattes, and Christian Heath, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), Heather Hall and Lorna Wargo, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Josh Lindsey, Frank Lockhart, and Kathryn Blair, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and Phil Anderson, Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC or Council).

We were fortunate to have several Area 2A stakeholders as part of our delegation. Tom and Mary Marking, Joel Kawahara, and Paul Clampitt 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.

A summary of the reports from the West Coast tribes, states and NMFS were combined into a complete national report for the United States which NMFS provided to the IPHC commissioners.

The IPHC staff presented the results of the stock assessment to the full group of attendees that numbered close to 170 people. The halibut resource is assessed using an ensemble of four models. The 2021 assessment was an update of the 2020 stock assessment. Some of the changes and new data for 2021 include: new modelled trend information from the IPHC's 2021 fishery independent setline survey (FISS) biological data from the 2021 FISS, commercial fishery sampling, and from non-directed discards. Overall, model results are consistent with those of recent stock assessments but the 2021 assessment reports less decline in spawning biomass trends which may be partly explained by mortality that was lower than limits set for 2021. The 2012 year-class is estimated to be stronger than any since 2005 and is critically important to short term-projections of stock and fishery dynamics.

The projections for the 2021 assessment are more optimistic than those from 2019 and 2020 assessments due to the increasing projected maturity of the 2012 year class. This means that there is a lower probability of stock decline for 2022 than in recent assessments as well as a decrease in this probability through 2023-24. At the fishing intensity reference level of F43 percent which allows a harvest of 42.1 million pounds, the probability of spawning biomass decline from 2022-2023 is 59 percent, decreasing to 55 percent in three years as the 2012 year-class matures.

The IPHC Secretariate provided the Commission with an update on the progress on the Management Strategy Evaluation Program with a focus on the work plan for 2021 through 2023. The Commission recommended priorities include the development of the MSE framework and to work with stakeholders to improve the methods of presenting MSE results, to understand the tradeoffs of with multi-year stock assessments and to continue to investigate size limits to understand the long-term effect of a change in the size limit, including under different understandings of size-at-age. Area 2A participants in the MSE process include Maggie Sommer,

Tom Marking, Scott Mazzone (Quinault Indian Nation), and Joe Petersen (NWIFC). The Secretariate anticipates having an update at the 2022 Interim Meeting with a final report expected at the 2023 Annual Meeting.

2A Allowable Catch

This was the last 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 2022. 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) and 2B (Canada). In the end, the Commission was in favor of the values listed in the table below for a total of 41.22 million pounds net weight. Due to increases in non-directed discard mortality, the 2A Fishery Constant Exploitation Yield (FCEY) is 1.49 million pounds for 2022, which is slightly lower than the 2021 FCEY of 1.51 million pounds. While many of the sector allocations remain the same under the FCEY, per the terms of the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s Catch Sharing Plan, an FCEY below 1.50 million pounds will reduce the allocation to the primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis to 50,000 pounds for 2022 compared to the 70,000 pounds that was allocated during the previous years of the interim agreement.

Management Area	TCEY (million lbs.)
2A	1.65
2B	7.56
2C	5.91
3A	14.55
3B	3.90
4A	2.10
4B	1.45
4CDE	4.10

Commercial Season Dates for Area 2A

- a) The Commission adopted fishing periods for 2022 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) No changes to the IPHC Regulatory Area 2A non-tribal directed commercial fishery were proposed but Commissioners confirmed the changes that were made in 2021 would remain in place for 2022. In summary, the 2022 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

During the U.S. report to Commissioners, NMFS representatives provided an update on the management transition of the 2A non-Indian directed fishery from IPHC to NMFS sharing that a proposed rule will be available soon and the transition is on target for implementation by the start of the 2023 halibut season.