

## GROUND FISH MANAGEMENT TEAM REPORT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE DIRECTED COMMERCIAL NON-TRIBAL HALIBUT FISHERY

The Groundfish Management Team (GMT) reviewed documents provided by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) regarding the directed non-tribal commercial halibut fishery. The IPHC is recommending modifying the open period from the current ten-hour openings, to either a five- or ten-day opening. The GMT discusses below concerns and thoughts on this proposed change.

### **Groundfish Bycatch Concerns**

As stated in September ([Agenda Item J.1.b, Supplemental GMT Report 1, September 2018](#)), the GMT has some concerns about the impact of this proposed change on bycatch of groundfish species, particularly yelloweye rockfish. The West Coast Groundfish Observer Program (WCGOP) has observed this fishery under the current management structure for only two years (2017 and 2018) at an approximate seven percent coverage rate. Due to this limited data, only one year of which is available at this time, the results of any analysis to project yelloweye rockfish bycatch impacts, or any other species, would be highly uncertain. Additionally, such a large change in management has the potential to fundamentally alter the participation in and fishing strategy of the fishery, which could further increase uncertainty of projections based on limited WCGOP data.

Currently, impacts to groundfish, except sablefish, from the directed commercial halibut fishery are included in the incidental open access (IOA) set-aside. The 2017 mortality report estimated 0.68 mt of yelloweye rockfish impacts ([Somers et al. 2018](#)). Prior to WCGOP observation, the GMT had estimated the set-aside for all IOA fisheries at 0.4 mt. If yelloweye rockfish encounters are higher than expected under a longer directed halibut fishery, there would likely be little risk to the annual catch limit (ACL), given the increase in the proposed yelloweye rockfish ACL to 48 mt for 2019-2020. However, the GMT notes that while higher yelloweye rockfish ACLs were approved to expand fisheries, many sectors will be operating under conservative management measures until we better understand yelloweye rockfish impacts under the new ACLs and annual catch targets (ACTs). The GMT notes that we are uncertain if a longer season will result in lower, or higher, bycatch of groundfish species, and it would be helpful to characterize potential uncertainty when assessing potential changes to the directed halibut fishery.

### **Management Concerns and Additional Analysis**

The GMT is the appropriate advisory body to analyze groundfish impacts in the directed halibut fishery, but may not be for some of the other issues. Any additional groundfish bycatch-related analyses will need to be considered in light of the GMT's workload. The current timeline for additional halibut analyses overlaps with GMT work on the Sablefish Management and Trawl Allocation Attainment Committee (SaMTAAC), climate change scenario planning, and groundfish workload prioritization (i.e., omnibus) work, all of which must occur prior to the March 2019 Council meeting. This may prevent GMT members from providing sufficient feedback to the Council and IPHC in time for a decision at the IPHC Annual Meeting in January 2019. A number of additional issues should be assessed to inform management decisions about a change in season length. The GMT touches on these issues below.

### ***Timing of the Season***

If the timing of the fishery changes, consideration for recreational seasons should be addressed. The dates for some recreational fisheries in Oregon have been set to try to avoid the period immediately following the directed fishery, as the recreational catches tend to be low during those times. Additionally, if the directed commercial fishery and recreational fishery are open on the same days, gear conflicts may occur. Therefore, changes to the timing of the directed fishery could affect recreational fisheries.

Recognizing the uncertainty in estimating actual participation, and fishing success, under a longer directed halibut fishery, a second opening could be necessary to obtain any remaining quota following the initial fishing period. The GMT is unclear of the proposed length of a break between the initial and any subsequent openings. A longer season, combined with a delay between openers, could increase the potential for the directed halibut fishery to conflict with recreational fisheries.

### ***Sampling***

It is unclear how biological sampling of halibut will be accommodated during a longer season and if IPHC has the resources to continue to collect sufficient biological data. Further, the GMT would like clarification on the potential need for additional resources to collect biological samples and whether this will require assistance from other management agencies. The GMT is also concerned that there has not been sufficient coordination with the WCGOP to understand how observer sampling will continue under a longer season, and whether or not sufficient resources are available to observe a longer directed halibut fishery.

### ***Hold Inspections***

Currently, participants in the directed halibut fishery are required to either not participate in a fixed gear fishery in the 72 hours prior to the directed fishery opening, or have a hold inspection. The purpose of the hold inspection is to insure that participants are not retaining halibut prior to the opening. The GMT thinks that the purpose of a hold inspection would still be valid under a longer season and supports continuation of that requirement; however, this aspect of the IPHC proposal needs to be clarified. Similarly, the GMT supports IPHC's continued coordination with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Office of Law Enforcement, the United States Coast Guard, and state enforcement staff regarding enforcement issues.

**Given these concerns, the GMT recommends delaying the implementation timeline to better assess impacts of changes to the duration of the fishery.** A delay would allow for more analysis and coordination, possibly via a workshop and/or an ad-hoc workgroup. Representatives from the NMFS, IPHC, and state management agencies, some of whom are on the GMT, would participate in said workshop/workgroup in a manner similar to the approach used during the South of Humbug process.

PFMC  
11/04/18