

## REPORT ON THE 2019 INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION ANNUAL MEETING

### Overview

The 2019 annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (Commission) was held in Victoria, Canada the week of January 28<sup>th</sup>. Area 2A was represented by Melanie Parker (CDFW), Maggie Sommer and Lynn Mattes (ODFW), Michele Culver and Heather Hall (WDFW), Ryan Wulff, Frank Lockhart, Kathryn Blair, and Keeley Kent (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. The Canadian and U.S. attendees were all mindful of the Commission's failure to reach agreement on catch levels in 2018 as they entered this year's process.

The management entity representatives were joined by several stakeholder group representatives, both harvesters and processors, including two from California, two from Oregon, and four from Washington all of whom participated either on the Conference Board or the Processor Advisory Group.

The management entities were provided an extensive opportunity to provide reports directly to the Commissioners during their business meeting. The reports were primarily a review of our 2018 fisheries but also discussed the IPHC staff proposal to lengthen the fishing periods provided to the directed fishery. Several concerns with the proposal that were discussed at the November Council meeting were conveyed to the IPHC in a letter dated November 21, 2018 and were elaborated upon in a follow-up letter from Michele Culver on December 19, 2018.

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 there are early indications that the 2011 and 2012 year classes may be showing some strength. In addition, there is "hope" that the 2014 year class may also have experienced success similar to the 2014 year class of sablefish noting that it will be several more years before anything is known about that year class.

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. Each year has been somewhat ad-hoc in terms 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 Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process. Among the objectives of the MSE is to establish a harvest policy including 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).

## 2A Allowable Catch

Relative to the 2A Total Constant Exploitation Yield (TCEY), the Treaty Indian Tribes, led by the Makah Tribe, developed and submitted a proposal to have the 2A TCEY (i.e., total mortality limit) set at 1.65 million pounds for a minimum of three years. This is similar to the 20-year average for 2A. After bycatch and incidental mortalities are subtracted from the TCEY, the fishery catch limit (i.e., FCEY) is 1.5 million pounds in 2019. This is an increase from recent 2A catch limits of 1.19 in 2018 and 1.33 in 2017. The proposal had been analyzed by IPHC staff and found not to pose a conservation concern for the resource. The proposal received support from 2A stakeholders and ODFW and WDFW. The proposal also received early support from U.S. Commissioners Chris Oliver, Assistant Administrator of NOAA Fisheries, and Bob Alverson.

The proposal was first presented to the Commission by Makah Tribal Council member Patrick Depoe during a plenary session, and later in the meeting it was presented to both the Conference Board and the Processor Advisory Board. There was significant debate by both groups and eventual support by both groups for the 2019 catch limit, but not for the portion of the proposal that would have set a multi-year harvest limit.

On Friday, February 1, the Commission approved by unanimous vote the 2A TCEY of 1.65 million pounds. The Commission noted its intent to have this TCEY in place for four years (2019-2022) absent a substantive conservation concern. In addition, the Commission reiterated its expectation that the Management Strategy Advisory Board have initial proposed long-term strategies for stock conservation and distribution (i.e., catch sharing among regulatory areas) prepared for the IPHC annual meeting in 2021.

2019 Pacific Halibut	Distributed mortality limits (TCEY) (net weight*)	
	Metric tons (t)	Pounds (lb)
IPHC Regulatory Area		
Area 2A (California, Oregon, and Washington)	748.43	1.65M
Area 2B (British Columbia)	3,098.04	6.83M
Area 2C (southeastern Alaska)	2,875.78	6.34M
Area 3A (central Gulf of Alaska)	6,123.50	13.50M
Area 3B (western Gulf of Alaska)	1,315.42	2.90M
Area 4A (eastern Aleutians)	879.97	1.94M
Area 4B (central/western Aleutians)	657.71	1.45M
Areas 4CDE (Bering Sea)	1,814.37	4.00M
Total	17,513.20	38.61M

The unanimous vote of the Commission was a notable change from last year when it failed to reach agreement on the TCEY levels for the catch areas. At issue was the overall allocation of the harvestable catch between the two countries. The Commissioners worked extremely hard to come up with a methodology that included consideration of the percentages each country has received in recent years coupled with the estimates of biomass distribution resulting from the annual setline survey. It was a major accomplishment and one that bodes well for the future of the Commission process.

#### Commercial Season Dates

The IPHC recommended an overall fishing period (season) of 15 March – 14 November 2019 for all commercial Pacific fisheries in Canada and the USA. In IPHC Regulatory Area 2A, the tribal commercial fisheries and the incidental Pacific halibut fisheries will occur within these dates, and the non-tribal directed commercial fishery will consist of 10-hour derby fishing periods, including but not limited to 26 June, 10 July, 24 July, 7 August, 21 August, 4 September, and 18 September.

During the CB debate discussion there was a proposal to start the fishery in May. However, during the commission's deliberations, Commissioner Alverson noted that the issue of when to start the fishery should be part of the broader discussion relative to the structure of the fishery.

#### Area 2A Directed Fishery Structure (Excerpts from the IPHC meeting record in quotations)

“**NOTING** the indication made to the PFMC in a letter dated 25 January 2019, that the IPHC Secretariat would welcome the opportunity to further address the safety concerns in the fishery, and to examine other potential management options for the fishery such as an IFQ or limited entry, as well as its management responsibilities, the Commission **RECOMMENDED** that this workshop take place, given the desire for the IPHC to move full management of the fishery from the IPHC (an international fisheries management body) to the relevant domestic agencies.”

“**NOTING** the concerns expressed by Canada about the safety issues related to the current management of this derby fishery, the Commission **EXPRESSED** its hope that there will be a proposal for an alternative management approach that addresses safety concerns by the time the Commission reconvenes at next year's annual meeting. If no resolution is in hand by then, the IPHC expects to re-examine what steps it can take to address the issue, including moving to longer fishing periods.”

In consideration of the Commission record of discussion on this fishery, it is recommended that the PFMC should discuss next steps at the March meeting relative to a potential workshop to discuss changes the structure of the directed fishery and the management roles and responsibilities between the IPHC and PFMC.