

News Release

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HALIBUT COMMISSION COMPLETES 2011 ANNUAL MEETING

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) completed its Eighty-seventh Annual Meeting in Victoria, B.C., with Dr. Laura J. Richards of Nanaimo B.C. presiding as Chair. The Commission is recommending to the governments of Canada and the United States catch limits for 2011 totaling 41,070,000 pounds, an 18.9% decrease from the 2010 catch limit of 50,670,000 pounds.

The Commission staff reported on the 2010 Pacific halibut stock assessment, comprised of a coastwide estimation of biomass with apportionment to regulatory area biomass based on the data from the annual Commission standardized stock assessment survey. For 2011, the Commission staff recommended a 21.5% harvest rate for use in Areas 2A through 3A and a 16.1% harvest rate for Areas 3B through 4. The Commission staff expressed concern over continued declining catch rates in most areas and recommended aggressive action to reduce harvests. In particular, staff recommended that the Commission shift its harvest control rule to implement the full reductions in catch limits identified by the stock assessment, rather than the partial (50%) reductions used in previous years. The decline of the stock due to both natural declines in recruitment, lower growth rates, and higher than target harvest rates in most areas has motivated this change in the harvest recommendations. Catch limits adopted for 2011 were lower in the central regions of the stock (Areas 2C and 3) but significant recent reductions in catch limits for Areas 2A and 2B appear to have resulted in improvements to stock condition in those areas.

Seasons and Catch Limits

The Commission received regulatory proposals for 2011 from the scientific staff, Canadian and United States harvesters and processors, and other fishery agencies. The Commission faced very difficult decisions on the appropriate harvest from the stock and recognized the economic impact of the reduced catch limits recommended by its scientific staff. However, the Commission believes that conservation of the halibut resource is the most important management objective and will serve the best economic interests of the industry over the long term. Accordingly, the Commission is recommending to the governments the following catch limits for 2011 in Area 2A (California, Oregon, and Washington), Area 2B (British Columbia), Area 2C (southeastern Alaska), Area 3A (central Gulf), Area 3B (western Gulf), Area 4A (eastern Aleutians), Area 4B (western Aleutians), Area 4C (Pribilof Islands), Area 4D (northwestern Bering Sea), and Area 4E (Bering Sea flats):

2011 Catch Limits

Regulatory Area	Catch Limit (pounds)
Area 2A	
Non-treaty directed commercial (south of Pt. Chehalis)	159,380
Non-treaty incidental catch in salmon troll fishery	28,126
Treaty Indian commercial	293,200
Treaty Indian ceremonial and subsistence (year-round)	25,300
Sport – North of Columbia River	216,489
<u>Sport – South of Columbia River</u>	<u>187,506</u>
Area 2A total	910,000
Area 2B (includes sport catch allocation)	7,650,000
Area 2C	2,330,000
Area 3A	14,360,000
Area 3B	7,510,000
Area 4A	2,410,000
Area 4B	2,180,000
Area 4C	1,690,000
Area 4D	1,690,000
<u>Area 4E</u>	<u>340,000</u>
Area 4 total	8,310,000
Total	41,070,000

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada (DFO) will allocate the Area 2B catch limit between sport and commercial fisheries.

The IPHC sets biologically-based catch limits for Areas 4A, 4B, and a combined Area 4CDE. The catch limits for Regulatory Areas 4C, 4D, and 4E reflect the catch-sharing plan implemented by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). The catch-sharing plan allows Area 4D Community Development Quota (CDQ) harvest to be taken in Area 4E and Area 4C Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) and CDQ to be fished in Area 4D.

The catch-sharing plan implemented by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) for Area 2A was adopted by the Commission and is reflected in the catch limits adopted for the Area 2A fisheries. Due to the mechanisms in the PFMC catch-sharing plan and the adopted total Area 2A catch limit there will not be a non-treaty incidental halibut fishery during the limited entry sablefish longline fishery.

In Area 2A, seven 10-hour fishing periods for the non-treaty directed commercial fishery are recommended: June 29, July 13, July 27, August 10, August 24, September 7, September 21, 2011. All fishing periods will begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 6:00 p.m. local time, and will be further restricted by fishing period limits announced at a later date.

Area 2A fishing dates for an incidental commercial halibut fishery concurrent with salmon troll fishing seasons will be established under United States domestic regulations by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The remainder of the Area 2A catch-sharing plan, including sport fishing seasons and depth restrictions, will be determined under regulations promulgated by NMFS. For further information of the depth restrictions in the commercial directed halibut fishery, and the sport fisheries, call the NMFS hotline (1-800-662-9825).

After reviewing staff information and proposals from the harvesting and processing sector, the Commission approved a season opening date of March 12 for the U.S. and Canadian Individual Quota fisheries, and Treaty tribal fisheries in Area 2A. The Saturday opening date is to facilitate marketing. Therefore, seasons will commence at 12 noon local time on March 12 and terminate at 12 noon local time on November 18, 2011 for the following fisheries and areas: the Canadian Individual Vessel Quota (IVQ) fishery in Area 2B, and the United States IFQ and CDQ fisheries in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E. All Area 2A commercial fishing including the treaty Indian commercial fishery will fall within March 12 – November 18, 2011.

Regulatory Changes and Issues

The Commission approved the staff recommendation eliminating the use of LORAN-C coordinates as a position option in fishing logbooks, as the LORAN system has been decommissioned.

Control of Charter Harvest in Area 2C

The catch of halibut in sport fisheries and the enforcement of domestic allocation limits, particularly for charter vessels, were discussed at length. The Commission recognizes that U.S. agencies wish to adhere to domestic allocation limits but effective controls remain to be implemented through a Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) in 2012. Noting that the CSP for Area 2C fisheries is not yet approved, the Commission recommends regulatory action designed to restrict charter harvest of halibut in Area 2C to the Guideline Harvest Level approved by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. The Commission recommends continuation of a one-fish daily bag limit with an additional restriction that the retained fish must be no larger than 37 inches (total length) and a requirement to retain the frame until landing, if halibut are legally filleted at sea.

The Commission received a number of regulatory and catch limit proposals after the deadlines for submission and did not consider these proposals. Participants are reminded that future proposals should be received by Commission deadlines if they are to be considered by the Commission and its advisory bodies

Commission staff was directed to review the potential for the use of tags as an accounting tool, by area and fishery, for all non-commercial removals of halibut. If this measure is considered feasible, staff will develop a regulatory proposal for consideration at the Commission's 2012 annual meeting.

The Commission also directed its staff to analyze the biological impacts of incrementally reducing or eliminating the current minimum commercial size limit of 32 inches, and provide the analysis for the Commission's 2012 Annual Meeting.

Other Actions

Halibut Bycatch Project Team

The Commission and its advisory boards discussed halibut bycatch management and received a report from its Halibut Bycatch Work Group. The Commission remains concerned about the yield lost to the halibut fishery as a result of bycatch mortality in other fisheries. Accordingly, the Commission established a Halibut Bycatch Project Team, led by a Commissioner from each country, to gain better understanding of the amounts and potential impacts of halibut bycatch mortality in other fisheries. Further, this Team will explore whether options for reducing this bycatch mortality can be implemented and whether mitigating the impacts of bycatch mortality in one area on the available harvest in other areas is possible.

Performance Review

The United States and Canada share the view of the continued importance of the Convention and seek to build upon the success of this international arrangement, and its continued relevance and effectiveness. In recent years, many such international organizations have undertaken reviews of their performance in relation to the goals of their conventions. The two governments wish to undertake a similar review over the next year. The review will assess the performance of the Commission against the goals set out by the Convention, using a team of external experts in fisheries science and international governance. The team will review stock trends and current stock status in reference to relevant reference points and assess the extent to which the Convention's central objective is being met. In addition, the team will review the Commission's governance and advisory processes to determine whether these processes are adequate to advance the objectives of the Commission. The team will also attend the 2012 Annual Meeting, for the purpose of contacting advisory bodies. The team will provide a report to the Commission in the spring of 2012.

IPHC Merit Scholarship

The Commission honoured Ms. Candace Schaack of Cold Bay, AK as the ninth recipient of the IPHC Merit Scholarship. She was unable to attend the meeting due to class requirements but was previously presented with the scholarship of \$2,000 (U.S.). The Commissioners expressed their continued support for the scholarship program and commended the Scholarship Committee for their efforts in assessing the candidates.

The recommended regulations for the 2011 halibut fishery will become official as soon as they are approved by the Canadian and United States governments. The Commission will publish and distribute regulation pamphlets.

The next Annual Meeting of the Commission is planned for Anchorage, AK from January 24-27, 2012. The United States Government Commissioner, Dr. James W. Balsiger, of Juneau AK, was elected Chair. The Canadian Government Commissioner, Dr. Laura J. Richards, of Nanaimo B.C., was elected Vice-Chair for the coming year. Other Canadian Commissioners are Gary Robinson and Acting Commissioner Paul MacGillivray (Vancouver, B.C.). The other United States Commissioners are Ralph Hoard (Seattle, WA) and Phillip Lestenkof (St. Paul, AK). Dr. Bruce M. Leaman is the Executive Director of the Commission.

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