

INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

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ESTABLISHED BY A CONVENTION BETWEEN CANADA

AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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10 March 2017COMMISSIONERS:
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Mr. Dan Hull, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501

Dear Mr. Hull:

Thank you for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's (the Council) letter following your February meeting, at which IPHC staff presented the preliminary results of the Commission's Annual Meeting.

The report of the IPHC Annual Meeting [*Report of the 93rd Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM093)*], IPHC-2017-AM093-R] has now been finalized and is available from the IPHC website at the following link: <http://www.iphc.int/meetings-and-events/annual-meeting/documents.html>. Documents and presentations from the meeting are also available at the same link.

In this letter we would like to update the Council on key decisions and other topics of interest to the Council from the IPHC Annual Meeting, including:

1. IPHC Regulations
2. IPHC-NPFMC meeting
3. Minimum size limit
4. TCEY – FCEY

1. IPHC Regulations

The Commission approved the following regulatory actions relevant to Pacific halibut fishing in Alaska:

- Accepted the Council's catch sharing plans for Regulatory Areas 2C and 3A and for Regulatory Area 4CDE, which are reflected in the catch limits adopted for those areas.
- Adopted the charter management measures for Regulatory Areas 2C and 3A recommended by the Council, as appropriate to the adopted catch limits.
- Approved a commercial fishing season of 11 March to 7 November 2017 for the quota fisheries in Alaska.
- Adopted a proposal aimed at eliminating a recently identified bias in Pacific halibut removal estimates by requiring all commercial Pacific halibut to be landed and weighed with their heads attached for data reporting purposes, and to only be subject to a 32-inch minimum size limit. An exemption was agreed upon whereby vessels that freeze Pacific

halibut at sea may land their frozen fish with the head removed and remain subject to a 24-inch minimum size limit only.

- Adopted a proposal aimed at harmonizing IPHC and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regulations regarding fishing in multiple IPHC Regulatory Areas in Alaska.

The 2017 IPHC Regulations have been accepted and implemented by both the United States and Canada, and are posted on the IPHC website at the following link: <http://iphc.int/basic-texts-of-the-commission.html>.

2. IPHC-NPFMC meeting

In consideration of a potential joint IPHC-NPFMC meeting, the Commission adopted the following recommendation:

*“NOTING the importance of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) working cooperatively with the IPHC on Pacific halibut management, the Commission **RECOMMENDED** that the existing ad-hoc meetings between the NPFMC and the IPHC be formalised into a standing body that meets regularly to provide direction to the development of a coordinated relationship between both parties. Such a body should consist of IPHC Commissioners (from both the USA and Canada) and the NPFMC leadership.” [Paragraph 6 of the Annual Meeting report]*

The Commission agrees that such a meeting might be most conveniently held in conjunction with the June 2017 Council meeting in Juneau, Alaska. We also agree that an informal teleconference between the leadership of the two bodies in March would be useful to discuss the planning for the joint meeting. As you note in your letter, we agree that periodic informal meetings of Commission and Council leadership are a very useful forum for overall communication and joint planning.

3. Minimum size limit

The Commission notes the Council’s interest in the minimum size limit for the commercial Pacific halibut fishery:

*“The Commission **NOTED** that the NPFMC ... remains interested in addressing the bycatch issue and has requested that the IPHC continue to investigate a decrease in the minimum size limit as one measure to reduce halibut bycatch in the directed fishery.” [Paragraph 95 of the Annual Meeting report]*

The IPHC Secretariat is currently engaged in this investigation and plans to present its updated size-limit analysis to the IPHC’s Scientific Review Board (SRB) in June. The Commission will review the Secretariat’s analysis and the SRB’s assessment at its work meeting in September, in order to present it at the IPHC Interim Meeting in November. We propose to present our analysis to the Council at your December meeting.

4. TCEY – FCEY

The Commission notes that it will be shifting to a Total Constant Exploitation Yield (TCEY)-based harvest advice framework for consideration of catch limits for 2018:

*“NOTING that the Commission has indicated its interest in clearer accounting for all mortality ... the Commission **RECOMMENDED** that the presentation of harvest advice be changed to be based on the TCEY, which includes all O26 commercial, sport, personal use/subsistence, bycatch and wastage removals, for the 2018 Annual Meeting cycle, as a step towards more comprehensive and responsible management of the*

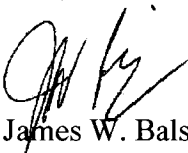
resource that will result in the negotiation of Regulatory Area-specific catch limits based on TCEYs.” [Paragraph 30 of the Annual Meeting report]

Currently, catch limits are expressed as Fishery Constant Exploitation Yield (FCEY). The Commission notes that it will continue to calculate the FCEY values required by the terms of existing catch sharing plans and the regulatory processes of the United States of America and Canada.

The Commission wishes to express its appreciation for your participation in its Management Strategy Advisory Board (MSAB), and notes the nomination of Craig Cross to replace you on the Board. We expect to act on nominations of new members in time for the next scheduled MSAB meeting (9-11 May 2017).

In closing, the IPHC welcomes the opportunity to work more closely with the Council on Pacific halibut matters. We look forward to the potential joint meeting of our two bodies in Juneau in June.

Sincerely,



Dr. James W. Balsiger
Chairperson
International Pacific Halibut Commission

cc: IPHC Commissioners
Dr. Wilson, Executive Director IPHC
Mr. Oliver, Executive Director NPFMC