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IPHC INFORMATION BULLETIN 2017-05

**2017 VESSEL OBSERVER COVERAGE IN THE DIRECTED COMMERCIAL FISHERY IN IPHC REGULATORY AREA 2A**

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) identified concerns regarding data validation for IPHC Regulatory Area 2A as documented in the 2016 Report of Assessment and Research Activities (IPHC 2017<sup>1</sup>). The IPHC currently does not have access to direct estimates of sublegal discards in the Pacific halibut fishery in Regulatory Area 2A due to the lack of observer coverage. Further, the IPHC must rely on logbook-reported discards of legal Pacific halibut and is unable to determine accurate weight-per-unit-effort estimates when legal discards occur due to trip limits. In order to obtain more accurate estimates of both Pacific halibut mortality and associated catch rates, the IPHC is working with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to implement observer coverage for this fishery to fill these important data gaps. This observer coverage will also provide direct data on discards of non-Pacific halibut species, including any protected species, to NMFS, the Pacific Fishery Management Council, and the State agencies, an improvement upon the current process of extrapolating these data from the annual IPHC fisheries-independent setline survey. The IPHC is looking forward to working with Regulatory Area 2A permit holders and NMFS staff on meeting this need and successfully implementing the observer program for the 2017 Regulatory Area 2A directed commercial fishery.

At present, the Regulatory Area 2A Pacific halibut commercial fishery is conducted as a ‘derby,’ with one to three 10-hour directed openers (two openings being most common), until the catch limit has been estimated to be caught. It is likely a similar pattern will take place in 2017; therefore, NMFS-trained observers will be deployed for 28 June, 12 July, and potentially 26 July.

Vessels selected for observer coverage during all Pacific halibut openers in 2017 received a letter and instructions from NMFS detailing the requirements for this valuable and necessary observer coverage. Part of the necessary requirements include notifying NMFS at least 24 hours in advance of leaving port for fishing so that an observer may accompany the trip, and obtaining a Coast Guard safety inspection decal through a dockside examination. Selected vessels are responsible for providing accommodations and food for the observer. NMFS also provided information regarding insurance carried by the observer provider company and encouragement for vessels to discuss this and other insurance questions with their insurance provider. IPHC and NMFS are aware of the time-sensitive nature of the 10-hour derby-style fishery. Where possible, the sampling protocol will be structured to reduce the potential of slowing down operations while collecting the required data.

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<sup>1</sup>[IPHC \(Goen, J., Erikson, L.M., and Stewart, I.J.\) 2017. Incidental Mortality of Pacific halibut in the directed commercial halibut fishery \(Wastage\). Int. Pac. Halibut. Comm. Report of Assessment and Research Activities 2016. IPHC-2016-RARA-R: 41-49](#)

Information collected through the observer program will be used to monitor catch and bycatch and to understand the population status and trends of fish stocks and protected species, as well as the interactions between them.

The individual vessel information collected will be kept confidential as required under U.S. law (Section 402(b) of the MSA (16 U.S.C. 1881a(b)) and regulations at 50 C.F.R. Part 600, Subpart E). Only aggregated data that follows confidentiality rules will be reported.

The observer can share the collected data with the license holder only. If the license holder is interested in having a copy of the data collected, they must request it from the observer after completing the trip.

Should you have additional questions or concerns, the observer program can be contacted toll free at 866.780.8064, or you can email questions to the program at [nwfsobserverprogram@noaa.gov](mailto:nwfsc.observerprogram@noaa.gov).

At the IPHC, please contact Jamie Goen ([jamie@iphc.int](mailto:jamie@iphc.int) and 206.634.1838 ext. 7666) or Lara Erikson ([lara@iphc.int](mailto:lara@iphc.int) and 206.634.1838 ext. 7663) if you need further information.