

News Release



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REPORT OF THE 94TH SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION ANNUAL MEETING (AM094)

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) completed its 94th Annual Meeting (AM094) in Portland, OR, U.S.A. on 26 January 2018. More than 200 Pacific halibut stakeholders attended the meeting, with approximately 100 more participating in web broadcasts of the meeting. The Report of the AM094, associated meeting documents, and presentations are available at the IPHC website (<https://iphc.int>).

The 2017 Stock Assessment and 2018 Harvest Advice

Sources of mortality: In 2017, total removals were below the 100-year average, and have been stable near 42 million pounds (19,050 t) from 2014 to 2017. In 2017, 83% of the total removals from the stock were retained, compared to 80% in 2016.

Fishing intensity: The 2017 mortality from all sources corresponds to a point estimate of Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR) = 40% (there is a 75% chance that fishing intensity exceeded the IPHC's reference level of 46%). In order to reach the interim reference level, catch limits would need to be reduced for 2018. The Commission does not currently have a coastwide limit fishing intensity reference point.

Stock status (spawning biomass): Current female spawning biomass is estimated to be just above 200 million pounds (90,700 t), which corresponds to only a 6% chance of being below the IPHC threshold (trigger) reference point of SB_{30%}, and less than a 1% chance of being below the IPHC limit reference point of SB_{20%}. Therefore, no adjustment to the target fishing intensity is required, and the stock is not considered to be 'overfished.' Projections indicate that the target fishing intensity is likely to result in similar but declining biomass levels in the near future.

Stock distribution: Regional stock distribution has been stable within estimated credibility intervals over the last five years. Region 2 (IPHC Regulatory Areas 2A, 2B, and 2C) currently represents a greater proportion, and Region 3 (IPHC Regulatory Areas 3A and 3B) a lesser proportion, of the coastwide stock than observed in previous decades.

The complete reports of the 2017 stock assessment and 2018 harvest advice are available on the IPHC website at <https://iphc.int/venues/details/94th-session-of-the-iphc-annual-meeting-am094> (please see papers IPHC-2018-AM094-08 through -11).

Catch Limits and Fishing Periods

Catch Limits

The Commission did not agree on new Pacific halibut catch limits for 2018, and therefore the catch limits adopted in 2017 remain in place for 2018. Both Contracting Parties, Canada and the United States of America, indicated at the Annual Meeting their intention to pursue lower domestic catch limits for 2018 via their national regulatory processes.

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Canada, via Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has announced the implementation of the following catch limits for fisheries in IPHC Regulatory Area 2B:

IPHC Regulatory Area 2B	Catch limit (pounds)	Catch limit (metric tons)
Commercial Total Allowable Catch	5,295,995	2402.25
Recreational Total Allowable Catch	927,990	420.93

Details of catch limits and management measures implemented by the United States of America, via NOAA-Fisheries for IPHC Regulatory Areas in U.S. waters will be noted in subsequent IPHC news releases, once available.

Fishing Periods (Season dates)

The Commission adopted fishing periods for 2018 as provided below, thereby superseding Section 8 of the IPHC Pacific halibut fishery regulations:

- a) IPHC Regulatory Area 2A (Non-Treaty Direct Commercial): 27 Jun, 11 July, 25 July, 8 August, 22 August, 5 September, 19 September 2018.
- b) Canadian and U.S. quota-share fisheries in IPHC Regulatory Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E: Opening: 24 March – Closing: 7 November 2018.

IPHC Regulatory Area 2A fishing dates for incidental commercial Pacific halibut fisheries concurrent with the limited-entry sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis and the salmon troll fishing seasons will be established under U.S. domestic regulations by NMFS. The remainder of the IPHC Regulatory Area 2A Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) allocations, including sport fishing seasons and depth restrictions, will be determined under regulations promulgated by NMFS. Further information regarding the depth restrictions in the commercial directed Pacific halibut fishery, and details for the sport fisheries, is available at the NMFS hotline (1-800-662-9825). The IPHC Regulatory Area 2A licensing procedures did not change.

Regulatory Changes

The IPHC adopted a number of regulatory changes to update and clarify existing regulations, including:

- A change to allow the use of leased IFQ by CDQ organizations in IPHC Regulatory Areas 4B, 4C, 4D and 4E
- A change to allow the use of pot gear for directed Pacific halibut fishing in areas where such gear is allowed by Contracting Party domestic regulations.
- Clarifications to the regulations for landing catch with the head on, reflecting the experience gained since this regulation was first adopted in 2017.

A complete summary of the regulatory actions taken by the IPHC for 2018 can be found in the report of the 94th Annual Meeting, posted on the IPHC website.

Other Actions

Harvest Strategy Policy

The IPHC provided direction to the Management Strategy Advisory Board (MSAB) for further work on harvest strategy policy development, including consideration of both scale – the level of removals from the stock – and distribution – how the catch is distributed across the range of the stock.

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Expanded fishery-independent setline survey (FISS)

The IPHC approved the next in a series of expansions to its annual fishery-independent setline survey. The purpose of the expansion series is to provide more accurate and precise estimates among regulatory areas and to encompass all depths over which the stock is distributed. In 2018, the setline survey in IPHC Regulatory Areas 2A, 2B, and 2C will be expanded beyond the standard grid of setline survey stations fished each year.

Upcoming Meetings

The IPHC's 2018 Interim Meeting will be held 27-28 November 2018, in Seattle, Washington. The next Annual Meeting (AM095) will take place 28 January-1 February 2019 in Victoria, British Columbia. The IPHC's 96th Annual Meeting (AM096) is planned for 27-31 January 2020 in Sitka, Alaska.

Commission Membership

Canadian Government Commissioner Mr. Paul Ryall was elected Chairperson for the coming year. United States Government Commissioner Dr. James Balsiger was elected Vice-Chairperson.

The other Canadian Commissioners are Mr. Jake Vanderheide and Mr. Ted Assu. The other U.S. Commissioners are Mr. Robert Alverson and Ms. Linda Behnken.

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