



OUTCOMES OF THE 93RD SESSION OF THE IPHC ANNUAL MEETING (AM093)

PREPARED BY: IPHC SECRETARIAT (30 MAY 2017)

PURPOSE

To provide the outcomes of the 93rd Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM093) relevant to the NPFMC.

BACKGROUND

The 93rd Session of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) Annual Meeting (AM093) was held in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada from 23 to 27 January 2017. A total of 334 public participants registered for the Session as well as 161 via the webcast. The following are a subset of the complete regulations and recommendations for action arising from the AM093. The report of the 93rd Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting, can be download from the IPHC Website: <http://iphc.int/meetings-and-events/annual-meeting/documents.html>.

REGULATIONS

(note: appendix references are those from the AM093 Report)

IPHC Pacific halibut fishery regulations, Section 13. Size Limits

The Commission **ADOPTED** a proposal aimed at eliminating a recently identified bias in Pacific halibut removal estimates (net weight), by requiring all commercial Pacific halibut to be landed and weighed with their heads attached for data reporting purposes and to be subject to the 32-inch minimum size limit (IPHC-2017-AM093-PropA), which supersedes Section 13 of the IPHC Pacific halibut fishery regulations. An exemption was agreed upon whereby vessels that freeze Pacific halibut at sea may possess and land their frozen fish with the head removed subject to the 24-inch minimum size limit if possessed or landed with the head removed ([Appendix VI](#)).

IPHC Pacific halibut fishery regulations, Section 18. Fishing Multiple Regulatory Areas

The Commission **ADOPTED** a proposal aimed at harmonising IPHC and NMFS regulations regarding fishing in multiple regulatory areas in Alaska ([Appendix VII](#)), which supersedes Section 18 of the IPHC Pacific halibut fishery regulations.

During the course of the Annual Meeting (AM093) the Commission made a number of specific requests and recommendations regarding Pacific halibut. Relevant sections from the report of the meeting are provided in [Appendix A](#) for consideration and [Appendix B](#).

APPENDICES

[Appendix A](#): Outcomes of the 93rd Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM093) relevant to the NPFMC

[Appendix B](#): AM093 Report Sections on the 'Agency Reports' from the NPFMC and NMFS.

APPENDIX A

Outcomes of the 93rd Session of the IPHC Annual Meeting (AM093) relevant to the NPFMC (note: appendix references are those from the AM093 Report)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Update on actions arising from the 92nd Annual Meeting, IPHC Work Meeting and the 92nd Interim Meeting

AM093–Rec.01 ([para. 6](#)) **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.

Draft Pacific halibut apportionment and catch tables (2017)

AM093–Rec.04 ([para. 29](#)) **NOTING** that the IPHC Secretariat and the IPHC Scientific Review Board (SRB) have demonstrated that Ebio is outdated and inconsistent with current assessment results, and that numerous elements of the current harvest policy are reliant on Ebio, and that the Commission has agreed that the current harvest policy is considered to be outdated (IPHC–2016–IM092–R, items 21, 22), the Commission **RECOMMENDED** that reference to all elements of the current harvest policy reliant on Ebio, as well as the use of the Blue line, be eliminated subsequent to the close of the 93rd Session of the Commission. The “*status quo* SPR” (F_{46%}) may serve as an interim “hand rail” that allows all participants to gauge this and future years’ catch limit discussions in comparison to previous years.

AM093–Rec.05 ([para. 30](#)) **NOTING** that the Commission has indicated its interest in clearer accounting for all mortality, and that Canada has put forward catch limit allocation principles proposing that catch limits include all sources of mortality for each regulatory area, 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.

IPHC Management Strategy Evaluation

AM093–Rec.06 ([para. 38](#)) **NOTING** that the term “apportionment” has connotations broader than stock distribution that are not reflective of its meaning in the IPHC context, the Commission **RECOMMENDED** that it be replaced with the terms “stock distribution” or “stock distribution model(ing)”.

AM093–Rec.07 ([para. 39](#)) The Commission **RECOMMENDED** that the IPHC Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process be accelerated so that more of the elements contained within the current Program of Work are delivered at the 94th Annual Meeting of the Commission in 2018. The IPHC Secretariat is directed to mobilise carryover funds from “core operations” to ensure the accelerated delivery schedule.

Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) updates

AM093–Rec.09 ([para. 110](#)) **NOTING** that the Commission had previously requested the IPHC Secretariat to examine bycatch reduction by the Amendment 80 sector versus

other sectors in the Bering Sea, by regulatory area (see AM92.10), which was yet to be undertaken, the Commission **RECOMMENDED** that the IPHC Secretariat undertake a detailed examination of changes in bycatch levels among all gears/sectors, and for results to be presented to the Commission at its 93rd Interim Meeting (in November 2017).

IPHC Performance Review: Planning for the 2nd IPHC Performance Review

AM093–Rec.13 ([para. 153](#)) The Commission **RECOMMENDED** that the IPHC Secretariat finalise the draft performance review terms of reference and criteria to conduct the review, and implement the 2nd Performance Review throughout 2017, for presentation to the Commission at its 94th Annual Meeting in 2018.

REQUESTS

IPHC Management Strategy Evaluation

AM093–Req.02 ([para. 40](#)) The Commission **REQUESTED** that the IPHC Secretariat initiate a process to develop alternative, biologically based stock distribution strategies for consideration by the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. This should also be incorporated into the MSE Program of Work.

Regulatory proposals for 2017

IPHC-2017-AM093-PropB: IPHC Closed Area - removal

AM093–Req.03 ([para. 51](#)) **NOTING** the detailed information gathered and presented to the Commission in support of the removal of the IPHC Closed Area (PropB), as detailed in paper IPHC-2017-AM093-INF03 on the following topics:

- Past considerations
- History of boundaries
- Bycatch
- Nursery grounds
- Other nearby closed areas
- Impacts of allowing directed Pacific halibut fishing

the Commission **REQUESTED** further information be provided on whether the area is a nursery ground for Pacific halibut, by examining juvenile abundance from data sources including but not limited to observer programs and the NMFS trawl surveys, and comparing this information with the impact of the directed fishery operating in nearby areas, as well as the non-directed fisheries currently operating within the Closed Area.

North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC)

AM093–Req.05 ([para. 99](#)) The Commission **REQUESTED** that the NMFS provide a report of juvenile Pacific halibut catch rates in the commercial fisheries versus scientific trawl surveys. The IPHC Secretariat shall facilitate this request for presentation at the 93rd Interim Meeting in November 2017.

Appendix B

AM093 Report Section on the NPFMC Report (paragraph numbers refer to the AM093 Report)

8.0 AGENCY REPORTS

8.3 Regulatory Areas 2C/3/4 (Alaska)

8.3.1 North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC)

92. The Commission **NOTED** agency report IPHC-2017-AM093-AR09, from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC), which provided a summary of NPFMC actions related to Pacific halibut management in 2016.
93. The Commission **NOTED** that the target for implementation of electronic monitoring (EM) in Alaska is February, 2018. The EM program currently includes 90 vessels and data are being collected from those vessels and integrated.
94. The Commission **NOTED** that the NPFMC is considering a program allowing CDQ groups in Area 4CDE to lease additional halibut quota for use by residents operating vessels < 51 feet in length, in years where the halibut catch limits are low. The issue is scheduled for initial review in February 2017, with possible implementation in 2018.
95. The Commission **NOTED** that the NPFMC has postponed further consideration of a Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) for Gulf of Alaska fisheries that would include bycatch of halibut, in large part due to a lack of progress on alternative plans. 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.
96. The Commission **EXPRESSED** its disappointment that bycatch reduction measures in U.S. waters were not moving more quickly, but recognised that some progress had been made in recent years.
97. The Commission **NOTED** concerns about the relatively low observer coverage in the Gulf of Alaska and the reported differences in species composition from observed versus unobserved vessels. Observer coverage on the fixed-gear fleet was approximately 18% in 2016 and estimates of variance will be available for the first time in June of 2017.
98. The Commission **NOTED** that a lowest practicable level of bycatch mortality has not yet been defined, and that efforts by the Amendment 80 fleet and other voluntary bycatch reduction plans may inform a definition of what level of bycatch is possible while maintaining a groundfish harvest.
99. The Commission **REQUESTED** that the NMFS provide a report of juvenile Pacific halibut catch rates in the commercial fisheries versus scientific trawl surveys. The IPHC Secretariat shall facilitate this request for presentation at the 93rd Interim Meeting in November 2017.
100. The Commission **NOTED** that Abundance-Based Management (ABM) of Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits for Pacific halibut is being investigated by a working group of NPFMC, Alaska Fishery Science Center (AFSC), NMFS Alaska Regional Office and the IPHC Secretariat. A public meeting will occur at the February 2017 NPFMC meeting to solicit feedback from stakeholders. It is expected that alternatives for analysis will be presented at the April NPFMC meeting. The earliest possible implementation of an ABM framework would be 2019, and PSC limits would likely remain the same in the interim.
101. The Commission **ENDORSED** the NPFMC's Catch Sharing Plans (CSP) for Areas 2C and 3A, as well as for Area 4CDE.
102. The Commission **ENDORSED** the NPFMC's recommended charter recreational fishery management measures for Regulatory Area 2C appropriate to the adopted Regulatory Area 2C

catch limit for 2017. These measures include: 1) a one-fish daily bag limit, and 2) a reverse slot limit of less than or equal to 44 inches or greater than or equal to 80 inches.

103. The Commission **ENDORSED** the NPFMC's recommended charter recreational fishery management measures for Area 3A appropriate to the adopted Area 3A catch limit for 2017. These measures include: 1) a two-fish daily bag limit, with a maximum size limit of 28 inches on one of the two fish; 2) a four-fish annual limit, with a recording requirement; 3) one trip per vessel per day; 4) one trip per charter halibut permit per day; 5) a Wednesday closure for the entire season; and 6) three Tuesday closures between 18 July and 1 August 2017.

104. The Commission **NOTED** that the U.S.A. delegation highlighted concerns from guided sport groups regarding the increase in Area 2C and Area 3A of assisted unguided sport fishery operations, and that this is a matter for the NPFMC to consider further.

8.3.2 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS-Alaska Region)

105. The Commission **NOTED** agency report IPHC-2017-AM093-AR10, from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS-Alaska Region), which provided a summary of NMFS actions related to Pacific halibut management in 2016 off the coast of Alaska.

106. The Commission **NOTED** that current bycatch is less than the PSC limits in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands, and it is uncertain if the bycatch could be reduced further in some sectors.

Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) updates

107. The Commission **NOTED** information paper IPHC-2017-AM093-INF02, which provided an update on the Amendment 80 bycatch reduction program, permitted under a NMFS Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) that allows deck sorting of Pacific halibut in the trawl fisheries.

108. The Commission **NOTED** the Pacific halibut bycatch reduction tools being used by the Amendment 80 fleet, which include changing fishing targets, use of excluder devices, test tows, communication among vessels, weekly bycatch calls, and deck sorting. Vessels use these tools to meet the annual and quarterly standards of their cooperative agreements. Failure to meet the standards could result in a substantial monetary penalty pursuant to the participants' contractual arrangements.

109. The Commission **NOTED** that 12 vessels participated in the deck-sorting EFP in 2016 compared to nine vessels in 2015. This resulted in a total net savings of 289.9 t (639,120 lbs) of Pacific halibut compared to 175.6 t (387,132 lbs) in 2015.

110. **NOTING** that the Commission had previously requested the IPHC Secretariat to examine bycatch reduction by the Amendment 80 sector versus other sectors in the Bering Sea, by regulatory area (see AM92.10), which was yet to be undertaken, the Commission **RECOMMENDED** that the IPHC Secretariat undertake a detailed examination of changes in bycatch levels among all gears/sectors, and for results to be presented to the Commission at its 93rd Interim Meeting (in November 2017).