

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council and Commission Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke  
Executive Director



DATE: September 30, 1998

SUBJECT: Multi-Agency Ecosystem Research

In 1997, the International Pacific Halibut Commission embarked on a three-year fisheries oceanography project. The motivation for this project was the observation that trends in the recruitment and growth of halibut were not explainable on the basis of stock size alone. Further, these observed trends appeared to parallel trends noted in numerous other marine populations of the North Pacific. Most notably, a reduction in growth and surge in recruitment in halibut began around the late 1970s at the time of a climatic regime shift across the North Pacific. The Halibut Commission has long been at the forefront of the debate about the relative influences of the environment and fishing pressure ("Thompson-Burkenroad" debate) on fish populations. With its nearly unequaled data collections, the Commission had an opportunity to contribute significantly to the growing interest in ecosystem research and to benefit from advances in understanding the nature of ecosystem variability.

The Commission does not have the wherewithal to engage in a full-fledged fisheries oceanography field study comparable to large agency based programs such as FOCI or CalCOFI. Instead, a qualified individual was retained to form collaborations with other researchers and their agencies and to represent the Commission at meetings on ecosystem research in the North Pacific. A summary of the collaborative work the IPHC has conducted to date and its relationship to the various research agencies will be presented by Steve Hare, IPHC staff.