

Chairman Hull remarks to IPHC Commissioners, 1/24/2018

I want to provide some general comments on the letter I received from the Commission last Wednesday. The Council will review this letter at our February meeting and may decide to respond more formally.

I'll start by reaffirming for you that the changes the Council made in October to the purpose and need statement of the BSAI ABM analysis do not change the interpretation of the objectives of that analysis. As the maker of the motion stated, "the change is intended to clarify the current jurisdiction and accurately reflect the authority the Council and IPHC currently operate under. This jurisdictional alignment is similar to what the agency recommended during development of AM 111 (the BSAI Chinook bycatch management package). It does not signal or represent a change in intent by the Council." I listened to the audio tapes of the meeting and the Council's discussion and subsequent approval of the motion confirm that the Council believes that the language does not change the objectives.

Moving on Mr. Chairman, I know I speak for the entire Council in expressing my appreciation for the Commission's continued interest in providing scientific expertise in the ABM analysis from Dr. Hicks (who is also on our BSAI PT), as well as the continued participation by Dr. Stewart on our SSC, and others such as Dr. Ray Webster, in other arenas.

The Council is keenly interested in the IPHC stock assessments and the related science that informs our halibut management program decisions. Additionally, there are other areas of current IPHC research, including the MSE, that are important for us to track. These include development of a harvest policy and target SPR; understanding movement rates of halibut between regulatory areas and how that variability affects abundance by area; potential revision to the current 32" size limit; understanding the footprints of all the fisheries that take halibut, and other uncertainties identified in the stock assessment documents.

In my view it's also important for the Council to understand how that science informs the Commissioners' decisions to set catch limits by regulatory area and coastwide, because these decisions can result in direct or indirect impacts in the Council process.

We will continue to work on ABM of PSC limits in the BSAI, improvements in the estimation of bycatch mortality, and other issues important to both the IPHC and the Council, as outlined in our Halibut Management Framework. If the Council wishes, it can consider whether information in the 2017 annual stock assessment calls for a new focus or additional work. For example, the Council could consider identifying an ABM approach to halibut PSC limits in the GOA as a priority, closely following final action on ABM in the BSAI. While I'm certain that the entire Council wishes that progress on these issues would come more quickly, unfortunately that's not the nature of our process. In addition, under the current federal budget situation the Council and the agencies lack the staff resources and other funding to take on more analytical work.

Finally, the letter highlights once again the differences in some policy objectives between the two bodies. The Council's objective is to balance the harvest or incidental catch of halibut among all user groups, and the Commission's objective is essentially to optimize the harvest for the directed fleet. That does create some conflict between the two bodies. I encourage the Commissioners to keep that in mind when you consider our complementary and coordinated efforts in management. Despite this difference in policy objectives there is still plenty of opportunity to make meaningful progress in science and management that is beneficial to the resource and all users, and the 2017 stock assessment underscores the need to continue those efforts.