

News Release



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IPHC Commission Staff Releases Preliminary 2002 Commercial Catch Limit Recommendations Totaling 74.08 Million Pounds

The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) and its Staff have reviewed results of the 2001 halibut stock assessment analysis. The resulting Staff recommendations totaling 74.08 million pounds are a 1.2% increase from the 2001 coast-wide quota of 73.18 million pounds. The table below presents the 2001 catch limits and the Staff recommended 2002 catch limits for each regulatory area. The changes in the assessment results for 2001 include increases in the Area 2A/B (Washington-Oregon/B.C.) recommendations, resulting from a revised estimate of total abundance in the two areas from the 2001 assessment. The recommended limit for Area 2C (southeast Alaska) reflects the assessment's lower estimate of available yield. Changes to the underlying survey data for Area 3A (central Gulf of Alaska) resulted in a higher yield estimate for this area. We continue to approach harvest from the western portions of the halibut range (Areas 3B and 4) with caution because of the absence of an analytical stock assessment and the limited knowledge base for these areas. The biomass in these areas has accumulated from lower historical exploitation and cannot be expected to persist at such historical levels under maximum permissible exploitation rates. Therefore, we recommend only a slightly increased catch limit for Area 3B (western Gulf of Alaska). We recommend a lower catch limit for Area 4B because of persistent declines in survey catch rates and a revised estimate of halibut habitat in this area. Recommended catch limits for other sub-areas of Area 4 remain as in 2001.

Weight at age for halibut in the central portion of the range increased slightly in 2001 over the very low values of recent years. However, recruitment of year classes born between 1989 and 1993 appears to be poor. While the 1994 year class appears to be stronger and at about the average level of the 1980s, these fish are still several years from making significant contribution to the exploitable biomass. The outlook for the recruitment beyond the 1994 year class is for lower recruitment in response to oceanographic conditions. Stock biomass projections over the near future continue to indicate a decline from the record high levels of recent years.

These recommendations, along with public and industry views on them, will be considered by IPHC Commissioners and their advisors at the IPHC Annual Meeting in Seattle, Washington, USA, during January 22-25, 2002. These recommendations are preliminary and may be updated for the annual meeting, as final data are included in the assessment, but are not expected to change significantly.

Proposals concerning changes to catch limits should be submitted to the Commission by December 31, 2001. Catch limit proposal forms are available on the Commission's web page (<http://www.iphc.washington.edu>) or via fax (206-632-2983) from the Commission office. Additional details about the Annual Meeting can also be found on the web page.

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**2002 IPHC Staff Preliminary Catch Limit Recommendations for Halibut
(millions of pounds, net weight)**

Regulatory Area	2001 Catch Limit	2002 Staff Recommended
2A	1.14 ¹	1.31 ¹
2B	10.51	11.75
2C	8.78	8.50
3A	21.89	22.63
3B	16.53	17.13
4A	4.97	4.97
4B	4.91	3.34
4CDE	4.45	4.45 ²
Total	73.18	74.08

¹ Area 2A recommendations include all removals designated in the PFMC catch-sharing plan

² Individual regulatory quotas for Areas 4C, 4D, and 4E are designated by the NPFMC catch-sharing plan

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