

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Dr. Bruce Leaman, Director
International Pacific Halibut Commission
P.O. Box 95009, University Station
Seattle, Washington 98145-2009

Dear Bruce:

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council appreciates the International Pacific Halibut Commission's invitation to open a dialogue between our agencies on charter halibut overages in IPHC Areas 2C and 3A. The Council has been addressing the overage issue since it received notice of the first GHL overage and will continue those efforts until a permanent solution to allocation issues between the commercial and charter halibut has been implemented. A summary of those actions, and our actions at the December 2006 meeting, are provided below.

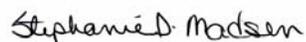
In response to a report by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) in October 2005 that the Guideline Harvest Level of 1,432,000 lb for Area 2C had been exceeded in 2004, the Council initiated an analysis to implement measures to reduce charter halibut harvests to the GHL. In April 2006, the Council adopted a 5-fish annual limit for all charter anglers in Area 2C as its preferred alternative. And in May 2006, ADF&G Commissioner McKie Campbell implemented an emergency order (EO) to prohibit charter boat operators, guides, and crew members from retaining any species of fish while paying clients are on board the vessel operated in salt water in Area 2C. These two measures were believed to have the potential to reduce harvests to the GHL. In June of 2006, NMFS recommended the Council consider rescinding its action on the 5-fish annual limit because of excessive implementation and monitoring costs.

A follow-up report was received by the Council at its December 2006 meeting, and the Council rescinded its action on the 5-fish limit, and initiated a new, more comprehensive analysis for Area 2C. ADF&G also reported at our December meeting that charter halibut harvests exceeded the Area 2C GHL by 36 percent in 2005 and are projected to exceed the GHL by more than 40 percent in 2006. The Council recommended Commissioner Campbell issue the same EO for 2007 and the Council initiated analysis of eight measures that could be selected in combination to further reduce charter halibut harvests in Area 2C. These include: (1) 1 trip per vessel per day; (2) no retention of halibut catch by skippers and crew; (3) annual catch limits of either 4 or 5 halibut; (4) 1 fish bag limit for June, July, August, or entire season; (5) trophy size limit for second fish of: i) 45 inches, ii) 50 inches, iii) 55 inches, or iv) 60 inches; (6) season closure date of i) August 15, ii) August 31, iii) September 15; (7) day of the week closure (pick a specific day); and/or (8) minimum size limit of 32 inches. Initial review of the analysis is currently scheduled for April 2006, with final action possible in June 2007. Implementation of the preferred alternative would be intended for the 2008 charter season.

Additionally, the Council is scheduled in February 2007 to review an analysis for a moratorium for the charter halibut sector, with possible final action in April 2007, and with implementation possible in 2009 if approved. Finally, the Council is developing a permanent solution for the sector by considering a suite of alternatives, including a hard allocation to the charter sector, along with possible effort controls such as those outlined above, or possible inclusion in the quota share program. No dates have been proposed on the permanent solution analysis, pending Council action on the two amendment packages described above. Also in April 2007, the Council will review a discussion paper examining the ramifications of considering a separation of the allocation ("hard cap") decision from effort control decisions, or other longer term solutions. In its discussion of an allocation to the charter sector, the Council requested that the IPHC undertake a study on mortality of hooked and released halibut in all directed fisheries, both commercial and charter. It also requested that the IPHC report charter and non-charter harvests separately in the halibut stock assessment.

Through your letter of December 1, and your attendance at our December meeting, we understand that the IPHC in January may be considering regulations to constrain recreational fisheries, or at least to constrain the guided (charter) sector to the target GHL levels. We further understand that the proposals before the IPHC include a one-fish bag limit. If the Commission decides to adopt regulations to regulate charter halibut harvest at its 2007 Annual Meeting, the Council urges that the Commission consider a suite of options that offer the potential to reduce the charter harvest while doing the least damage to the charter industry. If the Commission adopts any regulations to limit charter harvest, the Council requests that they would sunset upon the effective date of regulations adopted by the Council, or by the State of Alaska under delegation of limited authority by the Secretary of Commerce and recommendation by the Council. Jane DiCosimo will attend the January 2007 Annual Meeting on behalf of the Council and will be available to address these issues with the Commission.

Wishing you a happy new year,



Stephanie D. Madsen
Chair

Cc Council members