

# North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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May 20, 2016

Paul Ryall  
International Pacific Halibut Commission  
2320 W. Commodore Way Suite 300  
Seattle, WA 98199-1287

Dear Mr. Ryall:

Thank you for providing comments on behalf of the IPHC on the Council's Halibut Management Framework in your letter dated February 25<sup>th</sup>.

At its April meeting, the Council reviewed the progress made by agency staff and scientists, including from the IPHC, on the development of abundance-based approaches to setting prohibited species catch (PSC) limits for halibut in the Bering Sea Aleutian Islands region, and improvements in the estimation of Discard Mortality Rates (DMRs) in the groundfish fisheries under the Council's jurisdiction. We appreciate the participation by the IPHC in these efforts and are encouraged by the constructive progress, as these initiatives are important to both the Council and the IPHC.

The Council's Halibut Management Committee, comprised of the three U.S. Commissioners and three Council members, also held its first meeting in April. The purpose was largely organizational. However, we did discuss the IPHC's letter of February 25<sup>th</sup>, including the comments and recommendations related to the Halibut Management Framework.

The next iteration of the Halibut Management Framework will incorporate changes made by the Council, based on input from stakeholders and the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee, and will update the progress made on various initiatives. We agree that separating research and management items currently listed together as research priorities will improve the organization of the document as well as the focus of various projects and their purpose.

As the IPHC's letter notes, NOAA is updating its National Bycatch Reduction Strategy. The Council, along with other Regional Fishery Management Councils and U.S. stakeholders, will provide comments on the draft strategy and will work with development of regional action plans in coordination with NOAA. We believe it is the regional action plans which will provide the best opportunity to consider how our work meshes with the broader bycatch strategy. At this point it is not clear how this national strategy interacts with our specific authorities and responsibilities over halibut bycatch management, and we will inform the IPHC when that is more apparent.

With respect to formalizing and improving communications between the two bodies, the Council continues to believe that this is an important matter to pursue. However, if the Commission believes that it is most important to hold meetings of both full bodies, then identifying issues and setting an agenda for such a meeting can be accomplished through discussion by the Directors, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of both bodies. Creating a separate Joint Protocol Committee to set an agenda is not necessary. And while no authority exists for decisions or actions to be made jointly by the two bodies, we believe there is value in discussing issues of importance to the Council and the Commission.

Along with our Executive Director and Vice-Chair, I would be glad to discuss an appropriate time and possible agenda items for another meeting of the NPFMC and the IPHC.

Alaska's subsistence, recreational, charter, and commercial halibut and groundfish fisheries are well-managed by the Council, the State of Alaska, the IPHC and NOAA. The Council will continue its efforts to improve management, in coordination with the IPHC. I look forward to further discussions with you and with the IPHC generally as these efforts unfold.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dan Hull". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dan Hull  
Chairman

cc: Bruce Leaman  
Jim Balsiger