Presentation purpose

• Report out on progress of the bycatch project that the IPHC commissioners approved at the 2012 Annual Meeting

• Outline the Bycatch Project Team recommendations for longer term options to address bycatch

• Propose next steps to implement longer term options
Background

• Halibut bycatch impacts on resource health and fishery yields have long been a topic of importance for the IPHC

• Canada and the US have undertaken several collaborative initiatives focused on bycatch, e.g.,
  – 1991 – recommended bycatch reduction targets, monitoring program changes, and bycatch estimation work to member governments
  – 2010 – summarised progress against reduction targets and examined effective bycatch tools

• However, challenges remain:
  1. An estimated 8-10 million lbs of bycatch mortality annually which reduces CEYs
  2. Outstanding concerns and questions regarding the adequacy of monitoring for numerous fisheries
  3. Immediate and long term impacts of bycatch on conservation of the resource

• The move to a coastwide assessment which recognises halibut migration has also renewed concerns about the impacts of bycatch in one area on available harvest in other areas
Background

• In recognition of the ongoing impacts of bycatch and the questions about how impacts are accounted for in the harvest policy, the IPHC approved a project to address bycatch concerns at the 2012 Annual Meeting

• The project is led by a Project Team including all US and Canadian Commissioners, with support from Science advisors and IPHC staff

• Bycatch Project team members as of December 2013 (new commissioners will be added moving forward):

  Sylvie Bérubé, co-chair
  Michael Pearson, Commissioner
  David Boyes, Commissioner
  Paul Ryall, Commissioner
  Robyn Forrest (ex-officio)

  David Witherell, co-chair
  Jim Balsiger, Commissioner
  Chris Oliver, Interim Commissioner
  Ralph Hoard, Commissioner
  Loh-Lee Low (ex-officio)

Gregg Williams (IPHC staff support)
The bycatch project has the following objectives:

1. To gain a better understanding of the amount of halibut bycatch occurring in each regulatory area;

2. To gain a better understanding of the impact of bycatch on the conservation and allocation of the halibut resource and on the available harvest;

3. To explore options for reducing the overall level of halibut bycatch; and

4. To explore options for mitigating the impact of bycatch in one regulatory area on the available harvest in other regulatory areas.
Last year’s Annual Meeting

• Project Team summarised the impacts of bycatch on conservation of the stock and on allocation, e.g.,
  – Reduced yield, spawning biomass, and egg production
  – Upstream bycatch reducing available harvest in downstream areas

• Project Team outlined a series of outstanding issues and gaps related to bycatch, e.g.,
  – Bycatch amounts remain high in some regulatory areas, even when corrected for the size of the bycatch fisheries.
  – Lack of national party / regulatory area accountability for U26 bycatch
  – Lack of national party / regulatory area accountability for uncertainty associated with bycatch estimates
  – As a result of limited understanding of migration, area-specific impacts due to migration are not fully accounted for
Last year’s Annual Meeting

• Commissioners agreed to implement several “immediate term” actions to improve understanding of bycatch

1. Identify and analyze options for incorporating uncertainty arising from bycatch estimates in the stock assessment, and factoring uncertainty into the catch levels established for each regulatory area
   • Current Status – In progress. Sensitivity analyses were conducted for stock assessment. Inclusion of bycatch-related uncertainty in regulatory area catch levels not complete – staff have proposed this be addressed through the MSE process

2. Develop simulation studies examining uncertainty in the estimated downstream impacts of bycatch
   • Current Status - In progress. Staff have proposed this be addressed through the MSE process

3. Account for U26 bycatch mortality in the development of harvest scenarios at a coastwide and regulatory area level
   • Current Status - in progress. Staff have proposed this be addressed through the MSE process

4. IPHC staff review the 2013 monitoring program implemented for Alaska
   • Current Status – Pending. Awaiting NMFS summary of program information in June 2014.

5. Determine monitoring levels and bycatch estimates for shrimp trawl and crab pot fisheries in 2B
   • Current Status – Complete. Results summarised in bycatch report.
Last year’s Annual Meeting

• Commissioners also agreed to discuss a series of longer term options for reducing and mitigating bycatch:

  1. Establishing updated Canada and US bycatch reduction targets
  2. Authorising currently prohibited gear types to retain and sell halibut
  3. Defining minimum standards for catch monitoring and reporting / implementing 100% monitoring
  4. Establishing individual vessel accountability for all halibut bycatch
  5. Time and area closures – e.g., identifying areas which might be designated as nursery grounds
  6. (a) Defining areas with high bycatch as “areas of special concern” and reducing their catch limits accordingly
     (b) Adjusting catch limits upwards in areas that have minimised bycatch and implemented high standards of monitoring
  7. “Other options to reduce halibut bycatch mortality in Alaska”

• Current Status - Public comment on all these longer term options was invited in November-December 2013 for the Interim Meeting. The Project Team has discussed the public’s feedback and their initial recommendations to Commissioners are outlined here.
Public feedback – who did we hear from?

• Comment period: Nov. 11 – 27, then extended Dec 5 – 18

• Comment demographics
  – 68 total comments
  – 56 from US, 11 from Canada, 1 unknown
  – 15 comments from organizations, including several advisory bodies; 53 from individuals
  – Majority of comments from commercial halibut fishers
  – 10 submissions from the sport sector
  – 3 submissions from First Nations organisations
  – A single (group) comment from the Alaskan trawl industry, representing five organizations
Public feedback – common and notable recommendations

- Enhance real time communication on bycatch within fleets to encourage bycatch avoidance
- Focus on employing proven methods for reducing bycatch and providing the incentives/tools for harvesters to minimise bycatch (individual accountability with bycatch quotas and accompanying 100% monitoring requirements most often noted, incenting gear conversion from trawl to pot for P Cod also noted)
- Have halibut Prohibited Species Caps float with halibut abundance
- Examine other sources of halibut mortality such as sublegal releases in the directed commercial fishery and recreational fishery releases
- Domestic agencies play the lead role in managing bycatch fisheries and must be engaged in discussions on bycatch reduction
- Explore changes to on-deck sorting procedures for halibut bycatch to minimise mortality rates by releasing before delivery below deck
- More information required on migration dynamics and implications of changes to the minimum size limit
Public feedback – perspectives on options

• **Option 1 (updated bycatch reduction targets):** widespread support, want timelines for reductions

• **Option 2 (authorise prohibited gear):** universal opposition from directed halibut fishers, though some support for donating retained catch; numerous comments about need for further detail

• **Option 3 (minimum monitoring standards/levels):** widespread support, need reliable bycatch estimates, include consideration of dockside monitoring requirements, not just at sea

• **Option 4 (individual vessel accountability for bycatch):** widespread support, citing demonstrated success elsewhere when combined with high monitoring and no permitted sale of bycatch

• **Option 5 (closures):** fewer comments, generally supported, one suggestion for expansion of use of in season bycatch hotspot closures

• **Option 6 (catch limit adjustments):** few comments, mixed support

• **Option 7 (Alaska proposal):** ideas generally not supported, comments on the need for more detail and the importance of supporting assertions with facts and analysis

• *The full list of comments and a more detailed summary of comments from the Interim Meeting is available at the IPHC website: [http://www.iphc.int](http://www.iphc.int)*
Project Team perspectives

- In considering recommendations on the longer term options, the Project Team noted that:

  - Some of the longer term options represent specific management actions or tools while others are broader commitments or principles
    - E.g., updated bycatch targets are a broader commitment, whereas individual vessel accountability, closures, etc are tools that can be used to help achieve targets

  - Some of the management decisions implicated by the longer term options are under the authority of domestic agencies while others are within the IPHC’s authority.
    - Domestic agencies can: implement bycatch reduction targets (option 1), define and implement monitoring standards/levels (option 3), require individual vessel accountability (option 4), close areas to halibut bycatch fisheries (option 5)
    - IPHC can: define authorised gear (option 2), define but not implement minimum monitoring standards/levels (option 3), close areas to directed halibut fishing (option 5), and make adjustments to catch limits (option 6)
    - IPHC has also made bycatch recommendations on other topics like reduction targets and monitoring programs to national governments in the past (e.g., 1991)
Proposed Next Steps

In the immediate term (i.e., coming months):

1. Complete revisions to the bycatch report in response to Project Team and public feedback

2. Organise an initial meeting between IPHC Commissioners and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to facilitate discussion and collaboration on potential bycatch reduction targets, management measures, and monitoring programs that fall under the Council’s authority.
Proposed Next steps

Over the next year:

1. Discuss the development of a broader strategy or set of principles for addressing bycatch, including exploration of concepts such as:
   - National accountability (e.g., for all removals, for the uncertainty in bycatch estimates)
   - Advancing utilisation of proven bycatch reduction methods
   - Potential incentives to harvesters to minimise bycatch
   - The role of monitoring standards for directed and non directed fisheries
   - Options for mitigation of actions in one area that result in negative impacts to the stock and/or available harvest in another regulatory area
   - Ongoing collaboration and communication between the IPHC and domestic management processes to support bycatch reduction
   - How to prioritise bycatch reduction efforts

2. Discuss a plan for examining the magnitude and impacts of other sources of halibut mortality such as wastage.
Thank you

Questions?