

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members
FROM: Chris Oliver *DS for*
Executive Director
DATE: November 26, 2010
SUBJECT: Groundfish Management

ESTIMATED TIME 8 HOURS ALL D-1 ITEMS
--

ACTION REQUIRED

Review discussion paper on GOA Halibut PSC Limits.

BACKGROUND

At its December 2009 meeting, the Council requested a discussion paper on the process for changing the halibut Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) and the BSAI. In February 2010, the Council reviewed a NMFS discussion paper that described how halibut PSC limits are established and may be revised in both areas. The Council requested separate discussion papers for each area, and set a discussion paper for GOA halibut PSC limits as its first priority; it has not set a timeline for a BSAI halibut PSC limit discussion paper.

In June 2010, the Council briefly reviewed a preliminary discussion paper that provided 1) information identified in the GOA Groundfish FMP as necessary to change the halibut PSC limits and 2) preliminary data summaries. The Council identified additional issues to clarify. All of these referenced reports, including an expanded data summary, were mailed out to you on November 19. The December addendum to the discussion paper is attached as Item D-1(b)(1). Two errata tables for the discussion paper are attached as Item D-1(b)(2).

The Council identified its intent to bifurcate potential Council action for determining whether and how to revise GOA halibut PSC limit(s). These actions include: 1) simple measures to reduce halibut bycatch in near term and; 2) an action list of industry approaches to reduce halibut bycatch in the long term.

The Council may choose to 1) take no action; 2) initiate an amendment (EA) to the GOA Groundfish FMP to revise the PSC setting process to mirror the regulatory process as in the BSAI, as needed and include alternatives to the status quo halibut PSC limits in the analysis (RIR/IRFA); 3) initiate a separate analysis of halibut PSC limits to support the harvest specifications EA for 2012/2013; or 4) include an analysis of halibut PSC limits in the next harvest specifications EA. The earliest that GOA halibut PSC limits could be revised is for the 2012 fishing year, if so desired.

Should the Council wish to move ahead with this issue, it should identify: 1) a problem in the fishery, 2) goals and objectives for addressing the problem, and 3) a reasonable range of management alternatives for analysis. If the Council chooses to take no action to initiate a separate analysis, it always has the option to incorporate halibut PSC limit reductions in other proposed actions, as it did with BSAI Amendment 80

(150 mt) and the GOA rockfish program (24 mt). Even under no action, more widespread (mandatory or voluntary) use of halibut excluder devices could result in fewer halibut taken as bycatch in groundfish fisheries, thus leading to 1) potential increases in halibut abundance if not reallocated and commercial longline fishery catch limits and/or 2) increased GOA groundfish target harvests.