

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members
FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke
Executive Director
DATE: April 9, 1999
SUBJECT: HMAP Proposals

ESTIMATED TIME
8 HOURS
(for all D-1 items)

ACTION REQUIRED

Review proposals received for Halibut Mortality Avoidance Program (HMAP) pilot programs.

BACKGROUND

HMAP

In February 1999, the Council reviewed the VBA/HMAP committee's findings and recommended that NMFS initiate regulatory action as required to implement a HMAP pilot program. The Council requested that Groundfish Forum, and others interested in developing a HMAP program, submit detailed proposals to NMFS and the Council for analysis. The Council also recommended that NMFS and the observer program work with industry to discuss monitoring and rulemaking necessary to implement a VBA program and report back to the Council at a future meeting. These same issues will be considered within the context of the Council's AFA sideboard analysis, as PSC sideboard limits for sectors as co-ops likely will function much like a VBA pool.

One proposal for a HMAP pilot program was received (Item D-1(d)(1)). The pilot proposed by Groundfish Forum is a finalized draft of what was discussed and recommended by the HMAP Committee. John Gauvin will be on hand to discuss the specifics of his proposal.

GROUNDFISH FORUM, INC.AGENDA D-1(d)(1)
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SEATTLE, WA 98199
(206) 301-9504 FAX (206) 301-9508

Mr. Richard G. Lauber
Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage AK 99601-2252

March 30, 1999

Dear Rick:

Attached is Groundfish Forum's proposed pilot for a halibut mortality avoidance program (HMAP) to allow deck sorting of halibut to reduce halibut mortality in two trawl fisheries. Our proposal has been revised following input by members and interested parties and we feel the current proposal will be a reasonable test of the potential for our recommended procedures to reduce halibut mortality.

The start date we propose for our pilots is the deep water flatfish in the GOA in April of 2000 and the July "Oflat" fishery in 2000. Understanding that the Council has already discussed our proposal and is simply awaiting a final draft, we hope the attached final proposal is sufficient for the Council to request NMFS to take whatever steps are deemed necessary for approval. From our understanding, two of the most important steps requiring regulations include the ability to create a subdivision of the halibut caps for the 2nd quarter GOA deep water flatfish and July BS/AI "Oflat" fisheries (between the pilot and non-pilot fisheries, as outlined in our proposal) and approval of a mechanism to implement an in-season adjustment to the halibut mortality rate for the pilot fishery, based on the data obtained from the first half of the pilot.

Thanks in advance for including our proposal in the materials compiled for the Council's consideration at its upcoming April meeting. Please call me if you require anything else on this subject.

Sincerely,



John R. Gauvin

RECEIVED
APR - 6 1999
N.P.F.M.C

**Groundfish Forum's halibut mortality avoidance program (HMAP)
Pilot Proposal**

April 8, 1999

Candidate fisheries for pilot: 2nd quarter GOA deep water flatfish fishery; July "Oflat" fishery in BS/AI

Purpose: Pilot will allow interested participants to formally test and refine methods to lower the mortality assigned to their halibut bycatch. Currently, most trawl fisheries are achieving mortality rates that approach 70-80%. Lower mortality and additional fishing opportunities will be achieved by HMAP's procedures. Procedures include rapidly sorting halibut as the codend is emptied, counting and measuring halibut from the tow, assessing viability, and returning halibut to the sea. Participants in the pilot program will be compensated for their efforts to reduce mortality by benefiting from the halibut mortality rate assigned to participants in the pilot.

Voluntary Participation: Companies wishing to participate must sign up to prior to the December 1999 NPFMC meeting and agree to follow all the procedures for deck sorting. In signing up, companies agree in writing to subject themselves to a list of both subjective and objective criteria to assess whether they are following the required procedures. Determinations of compliance with decksorting rules will be made by a committee set up by the participants in the pilot (HMAP pilot committee) prior to the start of fishing. HMAP pilot committee will be structured like the coop management boards currently in use in AFA coops. In signing up for the pilot, participants agree in writing to abide by the decisions of the committee (or its designated representative) for the duration of the pilot. Companies not wishing to participate can fish in the regular fishery on the halibut not assigned to the pilot.

Options for potential penalties for pilot participants deemed not to be following the HMAP rules listed below:

- A. Exclusion from pilot and reversion to regular fishery (if still open) during pilot.
- B. Exclusion from pilot and prohibition on participation in regular fishery for the remainder of opening (PSC apportionment to the GOA 2nd quarter deep water fishery or July "Oflat" fishery).

Potential limits or restrictions on participation: LLP or AFA sideboards may prevent or limit participation of some vessels in pilot. The HMAP pilot is not intended to serve as a means of circumventing or preempting other Council restrictions. Option: Vessels can participate in pilot up to sideboard limits of groundfish catch if they meet LLP requirements.

Halibut set aside for pilot and regular fisheries: The proportion of halibut assigned to the HMAP pilot will be pro rata based on catch history of participants in the appropriate fishery compared to total catch in that fishery. Participants' total groundfish catch in the 2nd quarter GOA deep water flatfish fishery 1996-1998 divided by total groundfish catch over the same period will determine the halibut assigned to the 2000 HMAP pilot in that fishery. The same method will be used to determine the fraction of halibut set aside for the July "Oflat" HMAP pilot. Assignment of halibut set aside for participants in the HMAP pilots will be made through the Council's annual specification process. There will not be an assignment of

groundfish TAC between pilot and regular fisheries in order to maximize incentives for reducing halibut mortality in the HMAP pilot.

Halibut mortality rate assignment to the pilot and regular fisheries: The halibut bycatch of vessels in the pilot fishery will be assessed at an estimated rate for the first one-half of the pilot fishery's halibut allocation. Viability data, averaged across all participants in the HMAP pilot during the first half of the pilot fishery, will be used to re-calculate the mortality from the first half of the fishery. This rate will also be used to determine the mortality rate for the second half of the pilot, but the overall effectiveness of the HMAP pilot will be assessed with the data from the entire pilot period. The regular fishery will receive the current IPHC/NMFS/Council halibut mortality rate.

Required procedures for HMAP deck sorting:

1. Tow duration time not to exceed two and fifteen minutes of bottom time. Bottom, time measured according current observer procedures. (Note: tow tonnage restrictions have been dropped from the proposal for practical reasons but tow time is likely to accomplish the same objective. Because participants gain additional fishing time by reducing mortality, it is anticipated they will keep codends small to keep viability high).
2. No sorting (other than for halibut) or processing of fish from a tow that is selected for observer sampling until deck sorting for that tow is complete and observer is in position and ready for species composition sampling.
3. Vessels must take observer coverage necessary to verify that deck sorting occurs on all tows. For larger vessels, this probably means two observers on board. For smaller vessels that will not fish around the clock, one observer at all times may be sufficient. Companies must submit a fishing plan with HMAP pilot application and applications will be reviewed by the HMAP pilot committee for feasibility.
4. Halibut must be counted and measured by census on sampled tows and viability must be assessed on all sampled tows (at least representative sample for viabilities and census if this will not increase mortality.)
5. Codends must be emptied as soon as possible. Setting another net or switching codends before deck sorting occurs is not allowed.
6. If weather conditions do not allow for reasonable safety during deck sorting, fishing during that period is assigned the IPHC/NMFS/Council halibut mortality rate. Viabilities assessed for halibut from tows where deck sorting was not possible will be used to "ground truth" deck sorting viability data.

Additional options for pilot:

Halibut savings:

Groundfish needed to fund July rockfish fishery will be deducted off the top and 2nd quarter deep water flatfish fishery (or July "Oflat" fishery) closes when any TAC constraint (minus reserve for July fishery) is attained. Unused halibut from HMAP pilot does not roll to any other quarterly apportionment.