

INITIAL REVIEW DRAFT

Regulatory Impact Review/ Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for Proposed Regulatory Amendment

Halibut IFQ Leasing by CDQ Groups

February 2017

For further information contact: Sarah Marrinan, North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 W 4th Ave, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 271-2809

Abstract: This Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis examines proposed management measures that would apply exclusively to the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) for Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*), and Community Development Quota (CDQ) groups fishing in the BSAI. The proposed action under consideration in this analysis includes allowing CDQ groups to lease commercial halibut IFQ from quota share (QS) holders in times of low halibut catch limits in Area 4B and Area 4CDE. Under this proposed action, any leased halibut IFQ would be available for use by the halibut CDQ fleet on vessels less than or equal to 51 feet length overall (with a halibut CDQ permit and a CDQ hired master permit), subject to the group's internal halibut management. The purpose of this action is to keep CDQ residents fishing in years where the halibut CDQ may not be large enough to present a viable fishery for participants.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADF&G	Alaska Department of Fish and Game
AKFIN	Alaska Fisheries Information Network
APICDA	Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association
BSAI	Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands
BBEDC	Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation
CBSFA	Central Bering Sea Fisherman's Association
CDQ	Community Development Quota
CVRF	Coastal Villages Region Fund
E.O.	Executive Order
EA	Environmental Assessment
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
FMP	fishery management plan
FR	<i>Federal Register</i>
FRFA	Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis
GOA	Gulf of Alaska
IFQ	Individual Fishing Quota
IRFA	Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis
LOA	length overall
Magnuson-Stevens Act	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
NAICS	North American Industry Classification System
NSEDC	Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation
NMFS	National Marine Fishery Service
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NPFMC	North Pacific Fishery Management Council
PPA	Preliminary preferred alternative
RFA	Regulatory Flexibility Act
RIR	Regulatory Impact Review
SBA	Small Business Act
TAC	total allowable catch
U.S.	United States
QS	Quota share
YDFDA	Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	5
1.1	Purpose and Need.....	6
1.2	History of this Action	6
1.3	Description of Management Area	7
2	DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES	9
2.1	Alternative 1, No Action	10
2.2	Alternative 2, Allow Halibut IFQ Leasing by CDQ Groups	10
2.3	Alternatives and Options Considered but Not Further Analyzed.....	11
3	REGULATORY IMPACT REVIEW	13
3.1	Management Authority.....	13
3.2	Purpose and Need for Action.....	14
3.3	Alternatives.....	14
3.4	Methodology for Analysis of Impacts	15
3.5	Background on the CDQ Halibut Fishery.....	15
3.5.1	CDQ Allocations	17
3.5.2	Harvest Flexibility (CDQ/ IFQ).....	20
3.5.3	The Halibut CDQ Fleet.....	21
3.6	Background on the Halibut IFQ Fishery.....	27
3.6.1	Area 4 IFQ Allocation and Harvest.....	27
3.6.2	The Area 4 Halibut IFQ Fleet	29
3.7	Analysis of Impacts: Alternative 1, No Action	37
3.8	Analysis of Impacts: Alternative 2, Allow CDQ Groups to Lease Halibut IFQ	38
3.8.1	Potential Benefits	38
3.8.2	Potential Costs	41
3.8.3	Policy Considerations.....	42
3.8.3.1	Consistency with IFQ Program Goals	42
3.8.3.2	From Whom Will the CDQ Groups Lease?	44
3.8.4	Potential Market Effects	45
3.8.5	Option 1: Defining 'Low Catch Limit'.....	47
3.8.6	Option 2: Leased Area 4D IFQ May Be Fished in Area 4E	49
3.8.7	Option 3: Cooling Off Period for Lease of QS	50
3.8.8	Option 4: Limit to the Duration of Leasing	54
3.8.9	Option 5: Limit to the Size of Leasable QS.....	55
3.8.10	Other Management and Enforcement Considerations	56
3.8.10.1	Vessel IFQ Caps	56
3.8.10.2	Overage/ Underage Provision.....	56
3.8.10.3	Certification	57
3.8.10.4	Cost Recovery	57
3.9	Summation of the Alternatives with Respect to Net Benefit to the Nation.....	58
4	INITIAL REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY ANALYSIS.....	60
4.1	Introduction.....	60
4.2	IRFA Requirements	60
4.3	Definition of a Small Entity.....	61
4.4	Reason for Considering the Proposed Action	63
4.5	Objectives of Proposed Action and its Legal Basis.....	63
4.6	Number and Description of Directly Regulated Small Entities	64
4.7	Recordkeeping, Reporting, and Other Compliance Requirements	64
4.8	Federal Rules that may Duplicate, Overlap, or Conflict with Proposed Action.....	65

4.9	Description of Significant Alternatives to the Proposed Action that Minimize Adverse Economic Impacts on Small Entities	65
5	PACIFIC HALIBUT ACT CONSIDERATIONS	66
5.1	Northern Pacific Halibut Act.....	66
6	PREPARERS AND PERSONS CONSULTED	67
7	REFERENCES	68

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Current vessel QS class specifications for the halibut IFQ fisheries	12
Table 2	Annual halibut CDQ allocation by regulatory area (all units in net headed and gutted pounds), 2008 through 2016	19
Table 3	Count and harvest of vessels landing halibut CDQ by vessel length overall, 2009 through 2015	22
Table 4	Diversification of ex vessel revenue for vessels that participate in the halibut CDQ fishery by LOA, 2009 to 2015.....	24
Table 5	Of the 444 vessels that landed halibut CDQ between 2009 through 2015, other fisheries these vessels participated in, by LOA	26
Table 6	Area 4B IFQ allocation and harvest, 2000 through 2015	28
Table 7	Area 4C and Area 4D IFQ allocation and harvest, 2000 through 2015	29
Table 8	Number of vessels that have participated in Areas 4B, 4C, and/ or 4D halibut IFQ fishing that are within 10% of the vessel IFQ cap, 2000 through 2015.....	34
Table 9	Halibut QS holders in Area 4B, 4C, and 4D by QS area and registered address, 2015.....	46
Table 10	Prices for halibut QS transfers by regulatory area, 2005 through 2014.....	47
Table 11	Adopted catch limits and commercial catch (including IPHC research catch; in pounds, net weight) for Area 4B and Area 4CDE, 2008 through 2016.....	49
Table 12	Area 4B QS transfers, 2000 through 2016	52
Table 13	Area 4C QS transfers, 2000 through 2016	52
Table 14	Area 4D QS transfers, 2000 through 2016.....	53
Table 15	Percent of QS pool transferred in 5-year increments, Area 4B, 4C, and 4D	53
Table 16	Number of QS holders and IFQ characteristics for Area 4B, based on IFQ that would be issues if Area 4B catch limit dropped to 1 million pounds	56

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Timeline of Council action	7
Figure 2	Regulatory areas for halibut in Alaska.....	8
Figure 3	Western Alaska CDQ communities and groups	17
Figure 4	Halibut CDQ/ IFQ allocation in the regulatory Areas 4B, 4C, 4D and 4E	18
Figure 5	Halibut CDQ and IFQ harvest flexibility in Areas 4CDE	20
Figure 6	Count of unique vessels landing Area 4B, 4C, and 4D halibut IFQ, 2000 through 2015.....	30
Figure 7	Count of unique vessels landing Area 4B, 4C, and 4D halibut IFQ by vessel length overall, 2009-2015.....	31
Figure 8	Percent of halibut IFQ that is landed on a vessel, of which the vessel owner is also the registered QS holder, 2000 through 2015.....	33
Figure 9	Percent of Area 4B, 4C, and 4D halibut catcher vessel IFQ landed with a hired master, 2000-2015	36
Figure 10	Halibut IFQ catch limits and harvest for Area 4B	40
Figure 11	Halibut IFQ catch limits and harvest for Area 4C/D.....	41

1 INTRODUCTION

This document analyzes proposed management measures that would apply exclusively to the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) for Pacific halibut (*Hippoglossus stenolepis*), and Community Development Quota (CDQ) groups fishing in the BSAI. The proposed action under consideration in this analysis includes allowing CDQ groups to lease commercial halibut IFQ from quota share (QS) holders in times of low halibut catch limits in Area 4B and Area 4CDE. Under this proposed action, any leased halibut IFQ would be available for use by the halibut CDQ fleet on vessels less than or equal to 51 feet length overall (with a halibut CDQ permit and a CDQ hired master permit), subject to the group's internal halibut management. Implementation of the management measures evaluated in this analysis does not require an amendment to a Fisheries Management Plan; however, they would require an amendment to implementing Federal regulations and likely require changes to International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) regulations.

This document is a Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (RIR/IRFA).¹ An RIR/IRFA provides assessments of the economic benefits and costs of the action alternatives, as well as their distribution (the RIR), and the impacts of the action on directly regulated small entities (the IRFA). This RIR/IRFA addresses the statutory requirements of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the National Environmental Policy Act, Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982, Presidential Executive Order 12866, and the Regulatory Flexibility Act. An RIR/IRFA is a standard document produced by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Alaska Region to provide the analytical background for decision-making.

¹ The proposed action has no potential to effect individually or cumulatively on the human environment. The only effects of the action are economic, as analyzed in this RIR/IRFA. As such, it is categorically excluded from the need to prepare an Environmental Assessment.

1.1 Purpose and Need

The CDQ program, as specified by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), is intended to provide western Alaska communities the opportunity to participate and invest in BSAI fisheries, to support economic development in western Alaska, to alleviate poverty and provide economic and social benefits for residents of western Alaska, and to achieve sustainable and diversified local economies in western Alaska (§305(i)).

The recent years of low halibut abundance and the resulting low catch limits in regulatory Area 4, have hindered most CDQ groups' ability to create a viable halibut fishing opportunity for their residents. Given the social and cultural dependence on this species, as well as the economic importance it renders for small vessel fishing operations, the purpose of this action would be to alleviate the adverse impacts of decreasing available halibut resource on Western Alaskan communities. The intention is to work towards the goals of the CDQ program without compromising the goals of the IFQ program.

The Council adopted the following purpose and need statement in December 2015:

The Community Development Quota (CDQ) Program was established to provide an opportunity to eligible western Alaska communities to invest and participate in BSAI fisheries. Among the species CDQ groups are allocated, Pacific halibut is of primary importance to many resident small-boat fishermen for providing employment and income in many of the member communities. Most small vessels fishing halibut CDQ generally do not fish halibut IFQ, and recent years of low abundance have created hardships for participating CDQ halibut fishermen. In times of low halibut catch limits, additional opportunity for CDQ groups to lease and use halibut IFQ for fishing in Areas 4B and 4CDE may benefit resident CDQ fishermen without undermining the goals of the halibut IFQ Program.

1.2 History of this Action

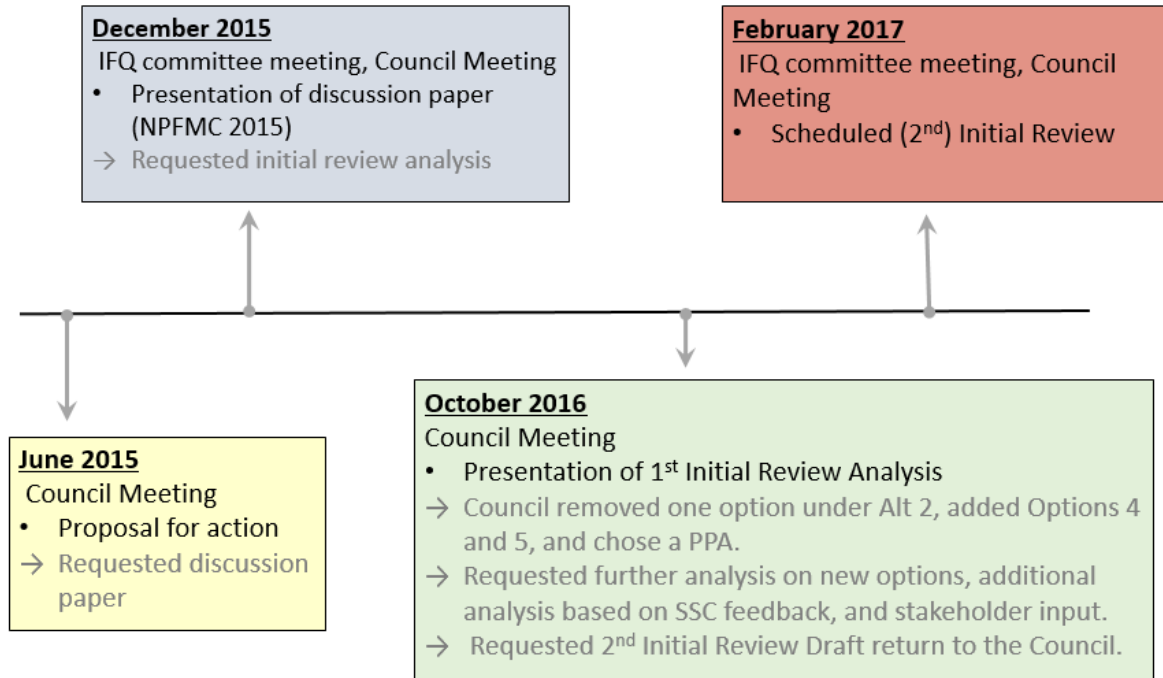
In June 2015, the Council initiated a discussion paper to examine the proposal to allow CDQ groups to lease halibut IFQ from private entities in Areas 4B, 4C, and 4D² for harvest by CDQ residents in years with low halibut catch limits in regulatory areas 4CDE. This discussion paper was presented to the IFQ Implementation Committee, Advisory Panel, and the Council in December 2015. At this December meeting, the Council adopted a purpose and need, and created a set of alternatives.

In October 2016, the Initial Review Draft analysis was presented to the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Advisory Panel (AP), and the Council. The Council removed one option under the suite of Alternatives (see Section 2.3), added Options 4 and 5 under Alternative 2, and identified a preliminary preferred alternative (PPA). Based on requests for more information from the SSC, public

² The motion for this proposal also suggested leasing Area 4E QS; however, IFQ is not issued in Area 4E. This clarification was made in the December 2015 alternatives.

testimony, as well as the addition of options, the Council requested another round of Initial Review for the package.

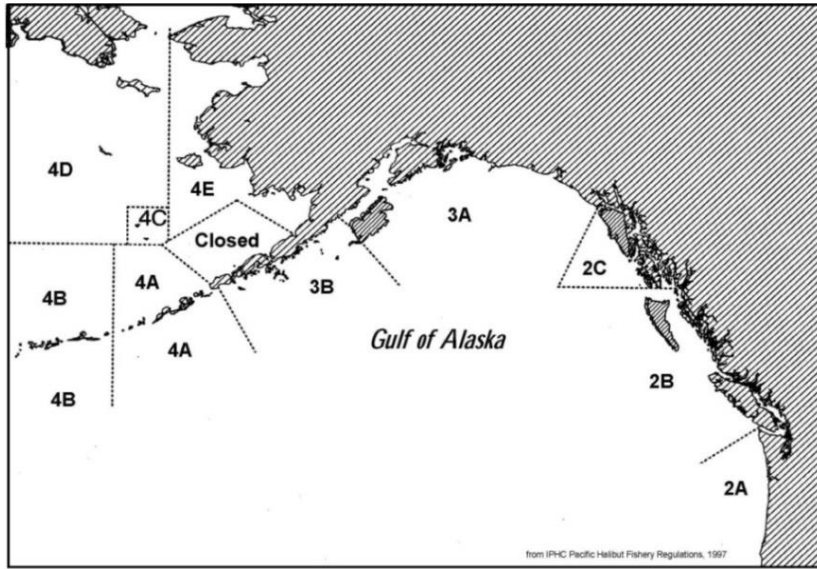
Figure 1 Timeline of Council action



1.3 Description of Management Area

The proposed action would apply to halibut regulatory areas in which CDQ groups hold halibut CDQ; this includes IPHC regulatory Area 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E (Figure 2). The halibut catch limit for Area 4B, 4C, and 4D are shared between CDQ groups and the IFQ program. Throughout the duration of the IFQ Program, Area 4E TAC has exclusively allocated to the CDQ program; therefore, no 4E IFQ could be leased to a CDQ group. Option 4, of Alternative 2 would allow Area 4D IFQ be leased to CDQ groups and harvested in Area 4E. The current harvest flexibilities across IPHC area boundaries that are available to IFQ and CDQ participants, are explained in Section 3.5.2

Figure 2 Regulatory areas for halibut in Alaska



Source: IPHC, 2013

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES

The action alternative in this analysis was designed to accomplish the stated purpose and need for the action; to enable CDQ groups the chance to provide their residents additional opportunity to harvest BSAI halibut, during times of low halibut abundance. The Council adopted the following alternatives for analysis in December 2015. The alternatives and options were revised in October 2016. The Council's preliminary preferred alternative (PPA) is represented in bold. Note one option previously considered was dropped (described in Section 2.3):

Alternative 1. No Action

Alternative 2. Allow CDQ groups to lease halibut IFQ in Areas 4B, 4C and 4D in years of low halibut catch limits in regulatory Areas 4B and 4CDE. Any IFQ transferred to a CDQ group under this provision would be added to their available halibut CDQ, intended for use by residents with a halibut CDQ permit and a CDQ hired master permit. No vessel over 51 feet LOA would be eligible to harvest the leased IFQ and vessels would have to comply with IFQ use restrictions. (Options below are not mutually exclusive.)

Option 1. Defining 'low catch limits' for the purpose of allowing leases. Designation of low catch limits is independently determined for Areas 4B and 4CDE. The threshold for designating a year of low halibut catch limit in each area is less than (separate sub-options may be selected for Area 4B and Area 4CDE):

Sub-option 1. 1 million pounds (Area 4B)

Sub-option 2. 1.3 million pounds

Sub-option 3. 1.5 million pounds (Area 4CDE)

Option 2. Leased Area 4D IFQ may be fished in Area 4E.

Option 3. Any Area 4B, 4C, or 4D catcher vessel QS transferred after December 14, 2015 may not be leased as IFQ to CDQ groups under this action for a period of:

Sub-option 1. 3 years

Sub-option 2. 4 years

Sub-option 3. 5 years

Option 4. No individual halibut QS holder may lease halibut IFQ to any CDQ group, on a consecutive basis, for more than:

Sub-option 1. 2 years

Sub-option 2. 3 years

Sub-option 3. 4 years

Option 5. Limit the ability to lease Area 4B halibut IFQ to CDQ groups under this action to QS holders that own less than:

- Sub-option 1. 2,000 pounds
- Sub-option 2. 5,000 pounds
- Sub-option 3. 7,500 pounds

2.1 Alternative 1, No Action

In this analysis, the no action alternative is the regulatory status quo. With no action, CDQ groups are not eligible to purchase halibut or sablefish QS/IFQ, with the exception of class A shares (catcher/ processor shares; see Section 2.3 for description of QS Classes).

Additionally, under current regulations, leasing of IFQ derived from catcher vessel shares has generally been prohibited (for individuals or CDQ groups) since 1998. Several provisions are included in the program that allowed for outright leasing under special conditions. This includes leasing of IFQ derived from Class A shares. It also includes leasing of catcher vessel IFQ under through:

- 1) temporary medical leases,
- 2) survivorship transfer privileges,
- 3) military leases,
- 4) leases through CQEs, and
- 5) IFQ to guided angler fish (GAF) transfers.

Therefore, individuals that are not QS holders, generally do not have access to catcher vessel IFQ leasing options to supplement halibut CDQ. A greater description of what is available under no action is described in Section 3.7.

2.2 Alternative 2, Allow Halibut IFQ Leasing by CDQ Groups

The action alternative would allow CDQ groups to lease halibut IFQ in Areas 4B, 4C, and 4D in years of low halibut catch limits in regulatory Areas 4B and 4CDE. Any halibut IFQ transferred to a CDQ group under this provision would be available for use in conjunction with halibut CDQ, intended for use by residents with a halibut CDQ permit and a CDQ hired master permit. This action would *not* convert IFQ to CDQ. CDQ allocations of halibut would not change. Under this Alternative, CDQ groups would be authorized to lease IFQ only in areas where the group holds a CDQ allocation (e.g., a CDQ group with a CDQ allocation only in Area 4C could only lease Area 4C IFQ), and all vessels using IFQ must comply with IFQ use restrictions.

Only catcher vessels less than or equal to 51 feet length overall (LOA) would be eligible to harvest the leased IFQ under the proposed Alternative 2. The Council established this threshold based on recent testimony indicating that this is the largest privately owned vessel that has landed halibut CDQ. While vessels greater than 51 feet LOA have landed halibut CDQ in the recent past, the objective of the action alternative is to allow for additional opportunity for participation among vessels already available in the CDQ group communities, so that resident skippers and crew members can benefit from the resulting harvest of halibut IFQs. Vessels greater than 51 feet LOA that are not privately owned by a resident of the community, are generally owned by the CDQ groups themselves or non-resident individuals that benefit

the groups and communities by paying a lease fee for the use of CDQ. Based on the Council's purpose and need statement, these non-resident vessels are not the target of the intended benefits of this action.

In a previous action in which the Council chose to release CDQ vessels from License Limitation Program (LLP) requirements (NMFS 2015b), it was determined that vessels that were privately owned by CDQ community residents were 46 feet LOA or under. This 51-foot length designation was confirmed by vessel ownership data for active vessels in 2014 and 2015.

Alternative 2 includes a series of sub-options for defining 'low catch limits' which would trigger the ability to lease. Separate sub-options may be selected for Area 4B and Area 4CDE.

Under current regulations, only 4D CDQ is able to be harvested in Area 4E. An option under Alternative 2 would allow Area 4D IFQ that is leased to a CDQ group be fished in Area 4E. Without this option, regulatory boundaries apply as under status quo (described in Section 3.5.2).

Alternative 2 contains three options (which are not mutually exclusive) that would include restrictions on who could lease and for how long. Option 3 would lock in a set of years after the acquisition of QS (i.e., a cooling-off period) in which that QS could not be leased, so as not to encourage entry into the halibut QS market with the sole intention of leasing halibut IFQ to CDQ groups. Option 4 would establish the maximum consecutive number of years a QS holder could lease their IFQ to CDQ groups. The final Option 5 would make the ability to lease halibut IFQ to CDQ groups exclusively limited to those individuals holding less than 2,000, 5,000, or 7,5000 pounds (sub-options).

2.3 Alternatives and Options Considered but Not Further Analyzed

An additional option under Alternative 2 was previously considered. This option would have allowed the leased IFQ pounds to be harvested on a vessel of any size (less than or equal to 51 feet LOA) regardless of the class designations of QS.

When the halibut/ sablefish IFQ Program was first implemented, halibut QS was designated as one of four QS classes (also called "vessel category" or "size category" of QS). These classes included categories for: catcher processor (freezer) vessels (Category A); catcher vessels greater than 60 feet LOA (Category B); catcher vessels greater than 35 feet up to 60 feet LOA (Category C); and catcher vessels less than or equal to 35 feet LOA (Category D).

Amendments to the IFQ Program now allow more flexibility within these categories. For instance, IFQ permit holders are permitted to "Fish down" IFQ, meaning catcher vessel IFQ derived from larger class QS can be fished on smaller class vessels. In addition, in response to safety concerns in the BSAI, a program amendment now allows "fishing up" of D class QS in Areas 3B, 4C, and 4B. This means IFQ designated as D class can be harvested on a vessel less than or equal to 60 feet LOA in these areas. Table 1 demonstrates the current use restrictions by share category and how "Fish up" and "Fish down" adds flexibility for QS/ IFQ holders.

Table 1 Current vessel QS class specifications for the halibut IFQ fisheries

IFQ Species	QS Class	Vessel Length Designation
Halibut	A	Any length
	B	Any length
	C	≤ 60 feet
	D*	≤ 35 feet

*Under the “fish up” provision, halibut IFQ Category D shares are able to be used on vessel ≤ 60 feet LOA in Areas 3B, 4C, and 4B.

Since the threshold for the proposed action would only allow vessels less than or equal to 51 feet LOA to participate (subject the CDQ group’s internal management), based on the current flexibility in class designations, no additional regulations would need to be changed for vessels less than or equal to 51 feet LOA to use any class of Area 4B and 4C QS in these areas.

Furthermore, based on the characteristics of the historical participation, (specifically the larger vessels that prosecuted the open waters of the Bering Sea in Area 4D), no D Class shares were initially issued for Area 4D. Therefore, no additional regulations would need to be changed for vessels less than or equal to 51 feet LOA to use any available class of Area 4D QS in Area 4D, or (based on the adoption of Alternative 2, Option 2) in Area 4E.

3 REGULATORY IMPACT REVIEW

This Regulatory Impact Review (RIR)³ examines the benefits and costs of a proposed regulatory amendment to allow CDQ groups to lease commercial halibut IFQ from quota share (QS) holders in times of low halibut abundance.

The preparation of an RIR is required under Presidential Executive Order (E.O.) 12866 (58 FR 51735, October 4, 1993). The requirements for all regulatory actions specified in E.O. 12866 are summarized in the following Statement from the E.O.:

In deciding whether and how to regulate, agencies should assess all costs and benefits of available regulatory alternatives, including the alternative of not regulating. Costs and Benefits shall be understood to include both quantifiable measures (to the fullest extent that these can be usefully estimated) and qualitative measures of costs and benefits that are difficult to quantify, but nonetheless essential to consider. Further, in choosing among alternative regulatory approaches agencies should select those approaches that maximize net benefits (including potential economic, environmental, public health and safety, and other advantages; distributive impacts; and equity), unless a statute requires another regulatory approach.

E.O. 12866 requires that the Office of Management and Budget review proposed regulatory programs that are considered to be “significant.” A “significant regulatory action” is one that is likely to:

- Have an annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more or adversely affect in a material way the economy, a sector of the economy, productivity, competition, jobs, local or tribal governments or communities;
- Create a serious inconsistency or otherwise interfere with an action taken or planned by another agency;
- Materially alter the budgetary impact of entitlements, grants, user fees, or loan programs or the rights and obligations of recipients thereof; or
- Raise novel legal or policy issues arising out of legal mandates, the President’s priorities, or the principles set forth in this Executive Order.

3.1 Management Authority

Management of the halibut fishery off Alaska is based on an international agreement between Canada and the United States and is given effect by the Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982. The Act provides that, for the halibut fishery off Alaska, the Council may develop regulations, including limited access regulations, to govern the fishery, provided that the Council’s actions are in addition to, and not in conflict with, regulations adopted by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC).

³ The proposed action has no potential to effect individually or cumulatively on the human environment. The only effects of the action are economic, as analyzed in this RIR/IRFA. As such, it is categorically excluded from the need to prepare an Environmental Assessment.

Regulations implementing the commercial IFQ fishery for Pacific halibut may be found at 50 CFR 679: Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska, Subpart D – Individual Fishing Quota Management Measures, Sections 679.40 through 679.45.

3.2 Purpose and Need for Action

The Council adopted the following purpose and need statement in December 2015:

The Community Development Quota (CDQ) Program was established to provide an opportunity to eligible western Alaska communities to invest and participate in BSAI fisheries. Among the species CDQ groups are allocated, Pacific halibut is of primary importance to many resident small-boat fishermen for providing employment and income in many of the member communities. Most small vessels fishing halibut CDQ generally do not fish halibut IFQ, and recent years of low abundance have created hardships for participating CDQ halibut fishermen. In times of low halibut catch limits, additional opportunity for CDQ groups to lease and use halibut IFQ for fishing in Areas 4B and 4CDE may benefit resident CDQ fishermen without undermining the goals of the halibut IFQ Program.

3.3 Alternatives

The action alternative in this analysis was designed to accomplish the stated purpose and need for the action; to enable CDQ groups the chance to provide their residents additional opportunity to harvest BSAI halibut, during times of low halibut abundance. The Council adopted the following alternatives for analysis in December 2015. The alternatives and options were revised in October 2016. The Council's preliminary preferred alternative (PPA) is represented in bold. Note one option previously considered was dropped (described in Section 2.3):

Alternative 1. No Action

Alternative 2. Allow CDQ groups to lease halibut IFQ in Areas 4B, 4C and 4D in years of low halibut catch limits in regulatory Areas 4B and 4CDE. Any IFQ transferred to a CDQ group under this provision would be added to their available halibut CDQ, intended for use by residents with a halibut CDQ permit and a CDQ hired master permit. No vessel over 51 feet LOA would be eligible to harvest the leased IFQ and vessels would have to comply with IFQ use restrictions. (Options below are not mutually exclusive.)

Option 1. Defining 'low catch limits' for the purpose of allowing leases. Designation of low catch limits is independently determined for Areas 4B and 4CDE. The threshold for designating a year of low halibut catch limit in each area is less than (separate sub-options may be selected for Area 4B and Area 4CDE):

Sub-option 1. 1 million pounds (Area 4B)

Sub-option 2. 1.3 million pounds

Sub-option 3. 1.5 million pounds (Area 4CDE)

Option 2. Leased Area 4D IFQ may be fished in Area 4E.

Option 3. Any Area 4B, 4C, or 4D catcher vessel QS transferred after December 14, 2015 may not be leased as IFQ to CDQ groups under this action for a period of:

Sub-option 1. 3 years

Sub-option 2. 4 years

Sub-option 3. 5 years

Option 4. No individual halibut QS holder may lease halibut IFQ to any CDQ group, on a consecutive basis, for more than:

Sub-option 1. 2 years

Sub-option 2. 3 years

Sub-option 3. 4 years

Option 5. Limit the ability to lease Area 4B halibut IFQ to CDQ groups under this action to QS holders that own less than:

Sub-option 1. 2,000 pounds

Sub-option 2. 5,000 pounds

Sub-option 3. 7,500 pounds

3.4 Methodology for Analysis of Impacts

The evaluation of impacts in this analysis is designed to meet the requirement of E.O. 12866, which dictates that an RIR evaluate the costs and benefits of the alternatives, to include both quantifiable and qualitative considerations. Additionally, the analysis should provide information for decision-makers “to maximize net benefits (including potential economic, environment, public health and safety, and other advantages; distributive impacts; and equity), unless a statute requires another regulatory approach.” The costs and benefits of this action with respect to these attributes are described in the sections that follow, comparing the No Action Alternative 1 with the action alternative. The analyst then provides a qualitative assessment of the net benefit to the Nation of the action alternative, compared to no action.

This analysis primarily uses Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) fish ticket data to describe the fishing behavior of the CDQ halibut small vessel fleet, which in this document is referring to vessels less than or equal to 51 feet length LOA that have previously relied on halibut CDQ to land halibut. In addition, NMFS Restricted Access Management (RAM) Division IFQ database is used to provide information on QS holdings. Publicly available information from NMFS RAM Division Transfer Reports (NMFS 2015a) provides information on QS prices and other transfer statistics. Anecdotal information was also gathered from representative of the CDQ groups, as well as other individuals involved in the halibut IFQ fisheries. A list of persons consulted is included in Section 6.

3.5 Background on the CDQ Halibut Fishery

The CDQ Program is an economic development program associated with federally managed fisheries in the Bering Sea/ Aleutian Islands (BSAI). NMFS, the State of Alaska, and the Western Alaska Community

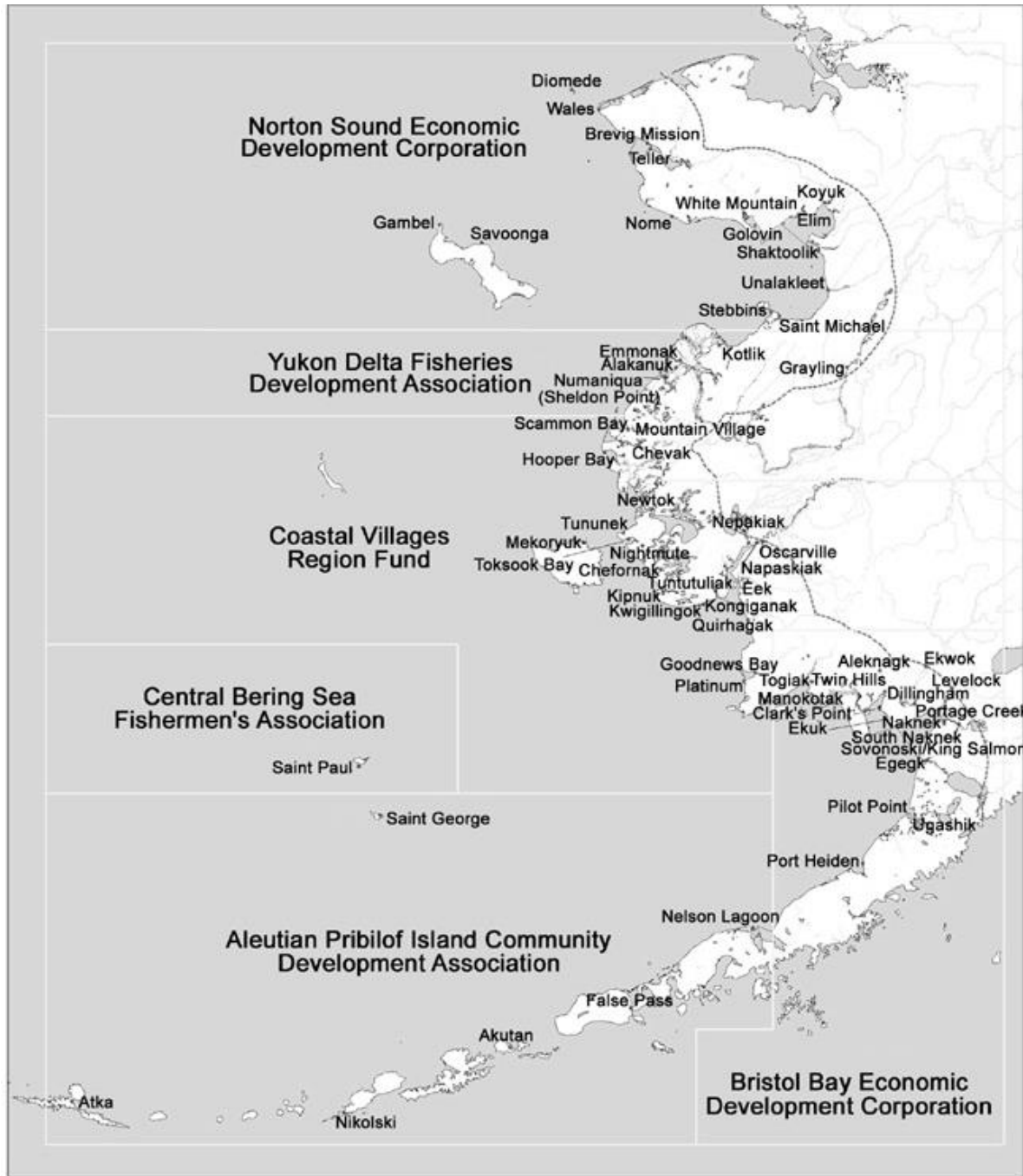
Development Association (WACDA) administer the CDQ Program. Its purpose, as specified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act (§305(i)(1)(A)), is to provide western Alaska communities the opportunity to participate and invest in BSAI fisheries, to support economic development in western Alaska, to alleviate poverty and provide economic and social benefits for residents of western Alaska, and to achieve sustainable and diversified local economies in western Alaska.

In fitting with these goals, NMFS allocates a portion of the annual catch limits for a variety of commercially valuable marine species in the BSAI to the CDQ Program. The percentage of each annual BSAI catch limit allocated to the CDQ Program varies by both species and management area. These apportionments are, in turn, allocated among six different non-profit managing organizations representing different affiliations of communities (CDQ groups), as dictated under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Eligibility requirements for a community to participate in the western Alaska Community Development Program are identified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act at §305(i)(1)(D). The six CDQ groups include:

- Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association (APICDA)
- Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation (BBEDC)
- Central Bering Sea Fisherman’s Association (CBSFA)
- Coastal Villages Region Fund (CVRF)
- Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (NSEDC)
- Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association (YDFDA)

Figure 3 identifies the names and relative locations of the CDQ groups and the communities they represent.

Figure 3 Western Alaska CDQ communities and groups



Source: NOAA, Alaska Fisheries Science Center

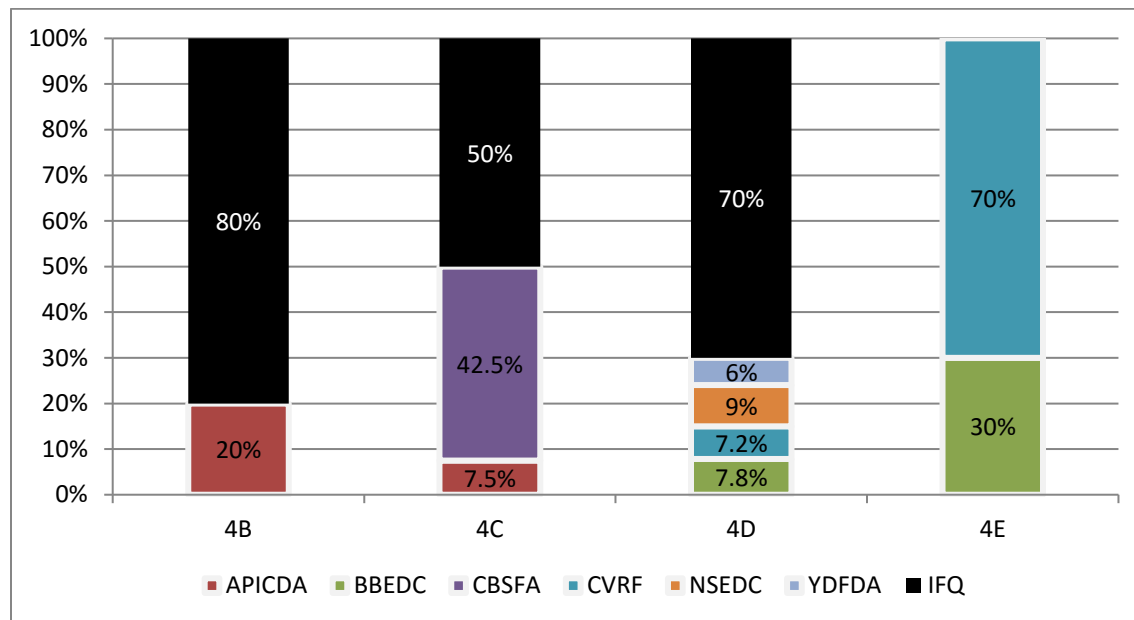
3.5.1 CDQ Allocations

Among the species CDQ groups are allocated for commercial fishing, Pacific halibut is an important species for resident employment and income in many of the groups. Halibut fisheries are regulated by the IPHC and NMFS, in consultation with the Council, as specified by the Northern Pacific Halibut Act. In

practice, the IPHC establishes catch limits for directed halibut fisheries and other halibut conservation measures, and the Council recommends regulations to govern the fisheries, including limited access and allocation decisions. Halibut is allocated to CDQ groups for commercial fisheries in four IPHC regulatory areas: 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E (see Figure 4 and Table 2).

Allocations of halibut quota are expected to provide CDQ groups real opportunities for small vessel fishing for their fleets, and, as such, area allocations of halibut CDQ are generally correlated with the location of the groups (refer to Figure 2, 3 and 4). For instance, Area 4B is located in the Aleutian Islands where the full CDQ allocation (30% of total allowable catch (TAC)) is held by APICDA. Area 4C surrounds the Pribilof Islands and the CDQ portion of the TAC is split 85% to St. Paul Island’s CBSFA and 15% to APICDA, which includes St. George Island as a member. The large BS halibut area of 4D halibut CDQ is split 20% to YDFDA, 30% to NSEDC, 24% to CVRF, and 26% to BBEDC. Of the final Area 4E halibut CDQ, 70% is allocated to CVRF and 30% to BBEDC.

Figure 4 Halibut CDQ/ IFQ allocation in the regulatory Areas 4B, 4C, 4D and 4E



Source: 2016 CDQ program quota categories, target and non-target CDQ reserves, allocation percentages, and group quotas: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/reports/annualmatrix2016.pdf>

Table 2 demonstrates the pounds that these percentages have represented over time (2008 through 2015). Current regulations authorize a CDQ group to transfer CDQ halibut to another CDQ group that has a CDQ halibut allocation in the same regulatory area.

Table 2 Annual halibut CDQ allocation by regulatory area (all units in net headed and gutted pounds), 2008 through 2016

Area	Year	TAC	Program Allocations	APICDA	BBEDC	CBSFA	CVRF	NSEDC	YDFDA
4B	2008	1,860,000	20%	372,000	0	0	0	0	0
	2009	1,870,000		374,000	0	0	0	0	0
	2010	2,164,000		432,000	0	0	0	0	0
	2011	2,180,000		436,000	0	0	0	0	0
	2012	1,869,000		373,800	0	0	0	0	0
	2013	1,450,000		290,000	0	0	0	0	0
	2014	1,140,000		228,000	0	0	0	0	0
	2015	1,140,000		228,000	0	0	0	0	0
2016	1,140,000	228,000	0	0	0	0	0	0	
4C	2008	1,769,000	50%	132,675	0	751,825	0	0	0
	2009	1,569,000		117,675	0	666,825	0	0	0
	2010	1,625,000		121,875	0	690,625	0	0	0
	2011	1,690,000		126,750	0	718,250	0	0	0
	2012	1,107,356		83,052	0	470,626	0	0	0
	2013	859,000		64,425	0	365,075	0	0	0
	2014	596,600		44,745	0	253,555	0	0	0
	2015	596,600		44,745	0	253,555	0	0	0
2016	733,600	55,020	0	311,780	0	0	0	0	
4D	2008	1,769,000	30%	0	137,982	0	127,368	159,210	106,140
	2009	1,569,000		0	122,382	0	112,968	141,210	94,140
	2010	1,625,000		0	126,750	0	117,000	146,250	97,500
	2011	1,690,000		0	131,820	0	121,680	152,100	101,400
	2012	1,107,356		0	86,374	0	79,730	99,662	66,441
	2013	859,000		0	67,002	0	61,848	77,310	51,540
	2014	596,600		0	46,535	0	42,955	53,694	35,796
	2015	596,600		0	46,535	0	42,955	53,694	35,796
2016	733,600	0	57,221	0	52,819	66,024	44,016		
4E	2008	352,000	100%	0	105,600	0	246,400	0	0
	2009	322,000		0	96,600	0	225,400	0	0
	2010	330,000		0	99,000	0	231,000	0	0
	2011	340,000		0	102,000	0	238,000	0	0
	2012	250,290		0	75,087	0	175,203	0	0
	2013	212,000		0	63,600	0	148,400	0	0
	2014	91,800		0	27,540	0	64,260	0	0
	2015	91,800		0	27,540	0	64,260	0	0
2016	192,800	0	57,840	0	134,960	0	0		
4CDE	2008	3,890,000		132,675	243,582	751,825	373,768	159,210	106,140
	2009	3,460,000		117,675	218,982	666,825	338,368	141,210	94,140
	2010	3,580,000		121,875	225,750	690,625	348,000	146,250	97,500
	2011	3,720,000		126,750	233,820	718,250	359,680	152,100	101,400
	2012	2,465,002		83,052	161,461	470,626	254,933	99,662	66,441
	2013	1,930,000		64,425	130,602	365,075	210,248	77,310	51,540
	2014	1,285,000		44,745	74,075	253,555	107,215	53,694	35,796
	2015	1,285,000		44,745	74,075	253,555	107,215	53,694	35,796
2016	1,660,000	55,020	115,061	311,780	187,779	66,024	44,016		

Source: CDQ program quota categories, target and non-target CDQ reserves, allocation percentages, and group quotas (2008 through 2016): <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/reports/annualmatrix2016.pdf>

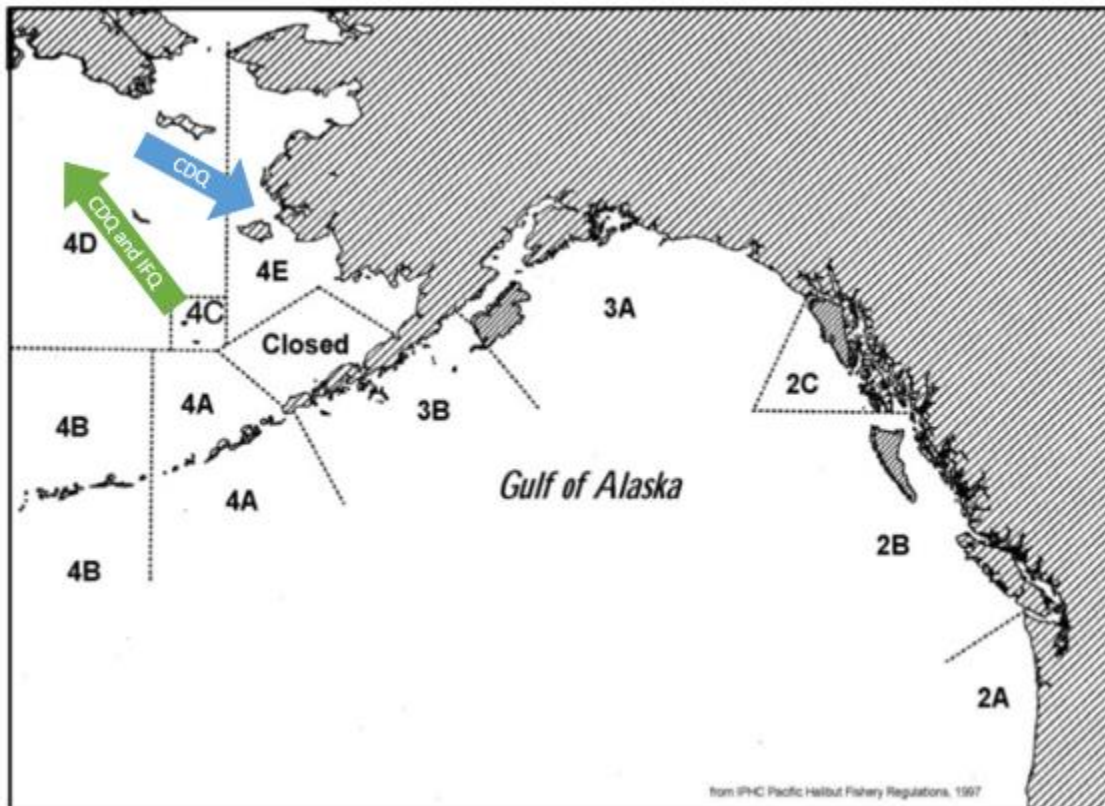
3.5.2 Harvest Flexibility (CDQ/ IFQ)

There is some fishing flexibility within the halibut regulatory areas as well (Figure 5). The IPHC considers the halibut in Areas 4C, 4D, and 4E to be a single stock unit for stock assessment and management purposes. Separation of these areas was a socio-economic decision established in the Council's Catch Sharing Plan for Area 4 (61 FR 11337). Therefore, there has been latitude for the Council to consider exemptions to harvesting halibut allocations across these management areas.

Effective April 2, 2003, NMFS amended the IFQ Program to allow CDQ Program participants to harvest allocations of Area 4D halibut CDQ in Area 4E (68 FR 9902, March 3, 2003). This action was intended to allow residents in CDQ communities along the Western Alaska coast to have more near-shore opportunities to harvest their group's CDQ halibut. Therefore, the IPHC regulations dictate, the total amount of permissible halibut harvest for Area 4E is the sum of the 4E and 4D CDQ TAC.

Effective July 22, 2005, in response to reports of localized depletion, decreasing catch per unit effort, and resultant limitations on the optimal utilization of Area 4C IFQ and CDQ, the Council passed an Omnibus (IV) amendment package providing for the harvest of Area 4C IFQ and CDQ in Area 4D (70 FR 43328, July 27, 2005). Therefore, the total amount of permissible halibut harvest for Area 4D is the sum of Area 4D TAC and Area 4C TAC.

Figure 5 Halibut CDQ and IFQ harvest flexibility in Areas 4CDE



3.5.3 The Halibut CDQ Fleet

The characteristic of the resident halibut CDQ fleets varies by group and is impacted by factors such as: the number of interested and qualified residents, the location of the halibut resource relative to nearshore fishing grounds, other fishing opportunities (such as salmon and crab fishing), other employment opportunities, and the availability of processing operations. Also, as some parts of the CDQ small vessel fishing operations have been subsidized by groups in the past, the resident fleet is also impacted by internal economic decisions made by the CDQ groups and in the ways they chose to promote economic development in their communities.

Criteria for participation in CDQ fisheries also varies by group. Some groups have a formalized process in which interested participants must submit an application demonstrating length of residency in one of the communities represented by the CDQ group. Some groups require that the vessel harvesting CDQ is 100% owned by a resident of a CDQ community. Other groups have a traditional set of local participants and therefore a more informal process to harvesting their groups' privileges. Many of the groups will make CDQ freely available to their eligible residents, but charge a lease rate in a situation where the CDQ is prosecuted by non-resident vessels. The intention is, that in the latter case, the revenues collected from leasing CDQ can be used for other types of economic development opportunities in the communities they represent.

On average about 70% of the weight of landed halibut CDQ was harvested on vessels less than or equal to 51 feet LOA, between 2009 and 2015 (see Table 3). Additionally, a great proportion of the fleet has typically been small vessels. During this same time period, the fleet landing halibut CDQ was made of 96% vessels less than or equal to 51 feet LOA, and 90% of the vessels were less than or equal to 32 feet LOA. This indicates a large involvement of small vessels, with several larger vessels that contribute large landings.

The sharp decrease in the number of vessels participating in halibut CDQ fishing observed between 2013 and 2014 in Table 3 is in part due to the decline in available halibut CDQ (dropping in Areas 4CDE from 1.93 million pound to 1.285 million pounds), but in large part due to the CDQ group's internal management response to this decline.

Table 3 Count and harvest of vessels landing halibut CDQ by vessel length overall, 2009 through 2015

Year	Length overall	Count of vessels landing halibut CDQ	Average harvest (pounds)	Total harvest (pounds)	Percent of total annual harvest
2009	≤ 22 ft	97	1,288	124,901	6%
	>22 ft and ≤ 32 ft	109	8,381	913,529	44%
	> 32 ft and ≤ 51 ft	10	33,854	338,537	16%
	>51 ft	7	102,960	720,719	34%
	2009 total	223	2,097,686	9,407	100%
2010	≤ 22 ft	89	1,515	134,879	6%
	>22 ft and ≤ 32 ft	103	9,796	1,008,974	42%
	> 32 ft and ≤ 51 ft	10	39,202	392,016	16%
	>51 ft	9	95,548	859,929	36%
	2010 total	211	2,395,798	11,354	100%
2011	≤ 22 ft	105	1,194	125,389	5%
	>22 ft and ≤ 32 ft	114	9,298	1,060,024	40%
	> 32 ft and ≤ 51 ft	10	47,383	473,827	18%
	>51 ft	10	96,539	965,390	37%
	2011 total	239	2,624,630	10,982	100%
2012	≤ 22 ft	98	1,559	152,804	8%
	>22 ft and ≤ 32 ft	118	6,677	787,880	41%
	> 32 ft and ≤ 51 ft	13	28,254	367,307	19%
	>51 ft	10	59,986	599,864	31%
	2012 total	239	1,907,855	7,983	100%
2013	≤ 22 ft	116	1,160	134,614	10%
	>22 ft and ≤ 32 ft	112	6,302	705,875	51%
	> 32 ft and ≤ 51 ft	9	25,568	230,110	17%
	>51 ft	7	44,244	309,705	22%
	2013 total	244	1,380,304	5,657	100%
2014	≤ 22 ft	25	3,786	94,656	10%
	>22 ft and ≤ 32 ft	57	7,640	435,472	44%
	> 32 ft and ≤ 51 ft	9	23,424	210,817	21%
	>51 ft	5	50,051	250,255	25%
	2014 total	96	991,200	10,325	100%
2015	≤ 22 ft	17	2,957	50,263	6%
	>22 ft and ≤ 32 ft	30	10,591	317,730	36%
	> 32 ft and ≤ 51 ft	10	29,168	291,679	33%
	>51 ft	8	27,445	219,557	25%
	2015 total	65	879,229	13,527	100%

Source: AKFIN comprehensive_ft database

A revenue diversification table can highlight vessel dependency on a particular fishery by comparing the value a vessel generates in one fishery versus all their other sources of fishing revenue in a given season. For instance, Table 4 demonstrates that in 2009, of the 97 vessels \leq 22 feet LOA that participated in landing halibut CDQ, none of those vessels also landed halibut IFQ in the same year. These vessels derived 96% of their total fisheries ex vessel revenue from halibut CDQ fishing. Overall, Table 4 illustrates that only a small number of vessels fishing halibut CDQ are generally also fishing halibut IFQ in the same year. Of the 444 unique vessels that fished halibut CDQ between 2009 and 2015, only 58 of these vessels also reported landing halibut IFQ (about 13%).

Table 4 illustrates a clear ex vessel dependency distinction related to vessel size. For vessels 32 feet LOA and under, nearly all of their halibut revenues in a given year (2009 to 2015) are generated from CDQ halibut (rather than IFQ halibut). Considering ex vessel revenue from all sources of fishing (including state fisheries like salmon and herring), halibut CDQ is shown to be the primary source of revenue for vessels that do not exceed 32 feet LOA. Larger vessels are more likely to participate in the halibut IFQ fishery and in other (non-halibut CDQ) fisheries, with an average of 33% of their total halibut-related ex vessel revenue being derived from halibut CDQ and an average of 14% of their total fisheries-related ex vessel revenue being derived from halibut CDQ. There also appears to be some movement among all vessel length categories towards greater seasonal diversification, particularly in 2014 and 2015.

One caveat of this method of identifying diversification, is that it relies on the overlap in fishing by a vessel. If, for example, an individual fished halibut CDQ on their own skiff in nearshore waters, then prosecuted their 4D halibut IFQ on a partner's vessel, this would not be captured in Table 4. Table 9 in Section 3.8.3 also displays QS holders in Area 4A, 4C, and 4D by registered address, providing a further metric identifying potential overlap between these stakeholder groups.

Table 4 Diversification of ex vessel revenue for vessels that participate in the halibut CDQ fishery by LOA, 2009 to 2015

Length overall (feet)	Count of vessels landing halibut CDQ	Average ex vessel rev from halibut CDQ	Count of vessels that also landed halibut IFQ in the same year	Of the vessels that landed IFQ and CDQ, average ex vessel rev from halibut IFQ	Rev dependence on CDQ halibut versus IFQ halibut for (all vessels landing halibut CDQ)	Average ex vessel rev from all fisheries for vessel landing halibut CDQ	Rev dependence on CDQ halibut versus total fisheries ex vessel rev
≤ 22	97	\$ 2,361.58	0	\$ -	100%	\$ 2,710.96	96%
>22 and ≤ 32	109	\$ 14,752.23	4	\$ 12,660.83	97%	\$ 26,380.91	62%
>32 and ≤ 51	10	\$ 67,170.56	2	\$ 52,295.22	88%	\$ 126,857.86	58%
>51	7	\$ 199,666.22	7	\$ 376,232.16	37%	\$ 1,288,032.10	17%
2009 total	223	\$ 17,517.65	13	\$ 214,527.61	61%	\$ 60,194.10	32%
≤ 22	89	\$ 3,737.91	2	\$ 9,202.43	95%	\$ 4,496.17	90%
>22 and ≤ 32	103	\$ 28,382.50	4	\$ 54,590.86	94%	\$ 43,419.83	71%
>32 and ≤ 51	10	\$ 118,567.55	5	\$ 18,576.84	93%	\$ 198,070.62	65%
>51	9	\$ 280,150.88	8	\$ 665,514.07	34%	\$ 1,368,447.80	22%
2010 total	211	\$ 33,000.50	19	\$ 297,566.58	57%	\$ 90,848.99	39%
≤ 22	105	\$ 4,167.42	0	\$ -	100%	\$ 4,463.19	98%
>22 and ≤ 32	114	\$ 38,015.70	4	\$ 4,468.64	100%	\$ 49,927.53	80%
>32 and ≤ 51	10	\$ 201,873.02	2	\$ 147,965.48	88%	\$ 317,443.83	67%
>51	10	\$ 403,090.25	10	\$ 697,050.04	37%	\$ 2,458,148.89	17%
2011 total	239	\$ 45,276.16	16	\$ 468,956.67	60%	\$ 141,909.21	34%
≤ 22	98	\$ 5,735.98	2	\$ 10,058.35	97%	\$ 6,173.14	96%
>22 and ≤ 32	118	\$ 25,542.16	3	\$ 79,572.73	93%	\$ 41,089.86	64%
>32 and ≤ 51	13	\$ 112,627.15	5	\$ 205,649.99	60%	\$ 282,922.02	41%
>51	10	\$ 215,073.21	10	\$ 456,000.92	33%	\$ 1,659,377.14	13%
2012 total	239	\$ 30,087.80	20	\$ 292,354.70	56%	\$ 107,637.36	29%
≤ 22	116	\$ 4,007.99	3	\$ 14,656.18	91%	\$ 4,506.45	90%
>22 and ≤ 32	112	\$ 22,415.06	10	\$ 35,225.87	88%	\$ 35,390.16	64%
>32 and ≤ 51	9	\$ 81,714.03	4	\$ 112,036.87	63%	\$ 190,963.25	44%
>51	7	\$ 136,160.43	7	\$ 321,048.48	30%	\$ 1,256,954.87	11%
2013 total	244	\$ 19,114.60	24	\$ 128,821.42	61%	\$ 61,490.98	32%
≤ 22	25	\$ 13,727.72	3	\$ 18,399.63	86%	\$ 15,951.97	86%
>22 and ≤ 32	57	\$ 25,759.15	10	\$ 30,667.85	83%	\$ 45,852.36	56%
>32 and ≤ 51	9	\$ 90,913.64	6	\$ 110,531.30	55%	\$ 259,238.33	35%
>51	5	\$ 189,397.84	5	\$ 289,050.77	40%	\$ 1,721,123.56	11%
2014 total	96	\$ 37,257.05	24	\$ 102,929.96	59%	\$ 1,723,166.49	26%
≤ 22	17	\$ 11,530.65	2	\$ 26,422.41	79%	\$ 14,639.17	79%
>22 and ≤ 32	30	\$ 44,433.01	7	\$ 41,718.40	82%	\$ 66,088.16	67%
>32 and ≤ 51	10	\$ 116,613.08	5	\$ 145,383.68	62%	\$ 289,713.80	40%
>51	8	\$ 114,144.77	8	\$ 373,024.62	23%	\$ 1,235,113.06	9%
2015 total	65	\$ 55,512.31	22	\$ 184,363.13	47%	\$ 230,916.20	24%

Source: AKFIN comprehensive_ft database

Note: Ex vessel values are in real 2015 USD based on the BLS CPI

Table 4 demonstrates diversification of fishing efforts by a vessel within the same year, but it is not clear what, if any, alternative fisheries a vessel would participate in if the operator chose to (or is not able to) participate halibut CDQ fishing for a season. The availability of alternative fisheries to participate in is also an important distinction in understanding vessel dependency on a fishery.

Inter-seasonal fishery diversification is demonstrated in Table 5 by vessel LOA. Of the 444 vessels that landed halibut CDQ at least once between 2009 and 2015, this table shows other non-halibut fisheries that these vessels have participated in. Note this list is not all encompassing of possible fisheries these vessels could have participated in, but include some of the most popular alternatives. This table demonstrates that the smaller vessels (less than or equal to 32 ft LOA) also have some participation in salmon and herring fisheries, while the larger vessels are more diversified in groundfish and sablefish. Mid-sized vessels (greater than 22 ft to less than or equal to 51 ft LOA) have had some participation in landing crab rationalization and CDQ crab.

Table 5 Of the 444 vessels that landed halibut CDQ between 2009 through 2015, other fisheries these vessels participated in, by LOA

Year	Herring	Salmon	BS Sablefish	Crab CDQ and QS	Other Shellfish	BSAI groundfish	GOA groundfish
Vessels ≤ 22 ft LOA							
2009		1					
2010		3					
2011		1					
2012		2					
2013	6	1				2	
2014							
2015							
Vessels >22 ft and ≤ 32 ft LOA							
2009	2	14		5			
2010		10		4			
2011	2	13		3			
2012	2	19		5			
2013	14	15		1		13	
2014		12		2			
2015		14		1			
Vessels >32 ft and ≤ 51 ft LOA							
2009			1	5		3	1
2010	1			4		1	
2011	1		1	4			2
2012	1	1		4		3	3
2013	1	1		3	1		1
2014			1	3		2	1
2015				4		2	1
Vessels >51 ft LOA							
2009			3	2		2	2
2010			3		1	3	4
2011		1	7		1	2	5
2012			5	1	1	6	4
2013		1	2			3	3
2014			2			3	1
2015		1	3			2	2

Source: AKFIN comprehensive_ft database

Although Table 3 demonstrated a significant drop off in the number of small vessels participating in halibut CDQ fisheries between 2013 and 2014 (continued into 2015), Table 5 does not reveal a prominent trend of small vessels identifying other fisheries to participate in. In part, this may be the result of the reduced catch limits, and the desire to minimize costs by consolidating harvest of multiple participants on fewer vessels. However, the Council also heard public testimony about “boats left on the beach” due to low catch limits (Simeon Swetzof, Jr, 10/9/16, public testimony).

In addition to vessel dependency as demonstrated through revenue diversification in Table 4, other recent Council documents have worked to explain BSAI community dependence on halibut through other

metrics. Particularly relative for the scope of this proposal, is Appendix C to the recent Public Review Draft of Amendment 111 to the BSAI groundfish Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) describes BSAI community engagement in the BSAI halibut fishery (NPFMC 2015a). This document presents a broad range of information, such as the role of the fishing sector in each CDQ group regional economy, and in particular the role of the commercial halibut fishing sector. In addition to demographic statistics, it presents the number of community resident-owned BSAI halibut catcher vessels versus resident-owned catcher vessels used for other fisheries, as well as the number of participants with permits in the halibut fishery compared to other types of fishing permits. Some of this information is not only inclusive of residents that participate in halibut CDQ fishing in the BSAI, but also QS holders, vessel owners, and crew members that participate in the halibut IFQ fishery and are located in these communities.

3.6 Background on the Halibut IFQ Fishery

In 1991, the Council recommended an IFQ program for the management of the fixed gear (hook and line) halibut and sablefish fisheries off of Alaska (NMFS & NPFMC 1992). The Secretary of Commerce approved the Council's IFQ program as a regulatory amendment in 1993, and the program was implemented by NMFS for the fishing season in 1995. The fundamental component of the IFQ program is quota shares, issued to participants as a percentage of the quota share pool for a species-specific IFQ regulatory area, which is translated into annual IFQ allocations in the form of fishable pounds.

This section of the analysis provides background information on the halibut IFQ fishery which is necessary for the subsequent discussion of impacts resulting from the proposed action alternative. This section includes Areas 4B, 4C and 4D-specific data on IFQ allocations, harvest, and a description of participating vessels. Further information on the IFQ Program are incorporated into the analysis of impacts in relation to the proposed action.

There are also many sources that can provide more comprehensive and extensive background data on the IFQ Program. For example, the IFQ Program Review presented at the October 2016 Council meeting provides a comprehensive assessment of the procession of the program, framed around the 10 objectives identified by the Council when it developed the program (NPFMC/NMFS 2016). Additionally, QS transfer data, disaggregated in many ways, can also be found in the NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region Restricted Access Management (RAM) Transfer Report (NMFS 2015a), and choice statistics about the fishery were provided in the RAM Report to the Fleet (NMFS 2014), which was produced annually up until 2012.

3.6.1 Area 4 IFQ Allocation and Harvest

Table 6 and Table 7 provide a reference for Area 4B as well as Area 4C and 4D halibut IFQ allocation and harvest over time (see also Figure 10 and Figure 11). Area 4B has seen high prosecution rates of halibut IFQ, with only a few years that dipped below 90% prosecution of the catch limit (2005, 2009, 2010, and 2013). Prior to the passage of the amendment that allowed Area 4C IFQ be harvested in Area 4D, Area 4C was experiencing a steady drop in catch rates. During the 2003 fishing season, Area 4C participants landed just 42% of the total Area 4C halibut IFQ allocation compared to a statewide average of 97% for all areas. Declining catch rates in Area 4C were assumed to be indicative of a decrease in

halibut abundance over time in the area, which was associated with concentrated fishing effort in a relatively small fishing area and reduced recruitment and immigration into Area 4C.

After the implementation of the 2005 amendment, Area 4C and 4D catch limits are combined Table 7, as are Area 4C and 4D harvests. During the first three years following the implementation of the amendment, 4C and 4D harvests were under 90% of the combined TACs, perhaps indicative of 4C IFQ holders adjusting to the new harvesting flexibility. Since 2008, over 90% of the combined TACs of Areas 4C and 4D have been harvested, except for 2013 when only 89% was harvested.

It is also informative to observe the trends in catch limits over time in Area 4B, 4C, and 4D. Area 4B halibut IFQ catch limit has dropped substantially from 2001 to 2007, with a slight rise between 2007 and 2011, then a continuation of the downward trend to 2015. In 2015, the Area 4B halibut IFQ catch limit is less than a quarter of what it was in 2000. Area 4C and 4D has seen more fluctuation in the halibut IFQ catch limits during this time period, but still with a strong downward trend.

Table 6 Area 4B IFQ allocation and harvest, 2000 through 2015

Year	4B TAC	4B harvest	% 4B TAC harvested
2000	3,928,000	3,626,754	92%
2001	3,928,000	3,517,658	90%
2002	3,344,000	3,213,189	96%
2003	3,344,000	3,005,534	90%
2004	2,284,000	2,169,480	95%
2005	1,808,000	1,595,682	88%
2006	1,336,000	1,220,833	91%
2007	1,152,000	1,088,443	94%
2008	1,488,000	1,357,128	91%
2009	1,496,000	1,232,219	82%
2010	1,728,000	1,394,752	81%
2011	1,744,000	1,595,524	91%
2012	1,495,200	1,370,408	92%
2013	1,160,000	986,945	85%
2014	912,000	864,227	95%
2015	912,000	852,286	93%

Source: NMFS IFQ landings database sourced by AKFIN

Table 7 Area 4C and Area 4D IFQ allocation and harvest, 2000 through 2015

Year	4C TAC	4C harvest	% 4C TAC harvested	4D TAC	4D harvest	% 4D TAC harvested
2000	1,015,000	731,358	72%	1,421,000	1,378,038	97%
2001	1,015,000	724,815	71%	1,421,000	1,368,875	96%
2002	1,015,000	484,815	48%	1,421,000	1,360,253	96%
2003	1,015,000	424,935	42%	1,421,000	1,421,028	100%
2004	860,000	478,274	56%	1,204,000	1,202,152	99%
	4C/4D TAC		4C/4D harvest		% TAC harvested	
2005		2,178,000		1,756,825		81%
2006		1,932,000		1,655,348		86%
2007		2,239,800		1,986,725		89%
2008		2,122,800		2,113,434		99%
2009		1,882,800		1,737,668		92%
2010		1,950,000		1,809,616		93%
2011		2,028,000		1,847,773		91%
2012		1,328,827		1,207,051		91%
2013		1,030,800		917,155		89%
2014		715,920		688,225		96%
2015		715,920		690,581		96%

Source: NMFS IFQ landings database sourced by AKFIN

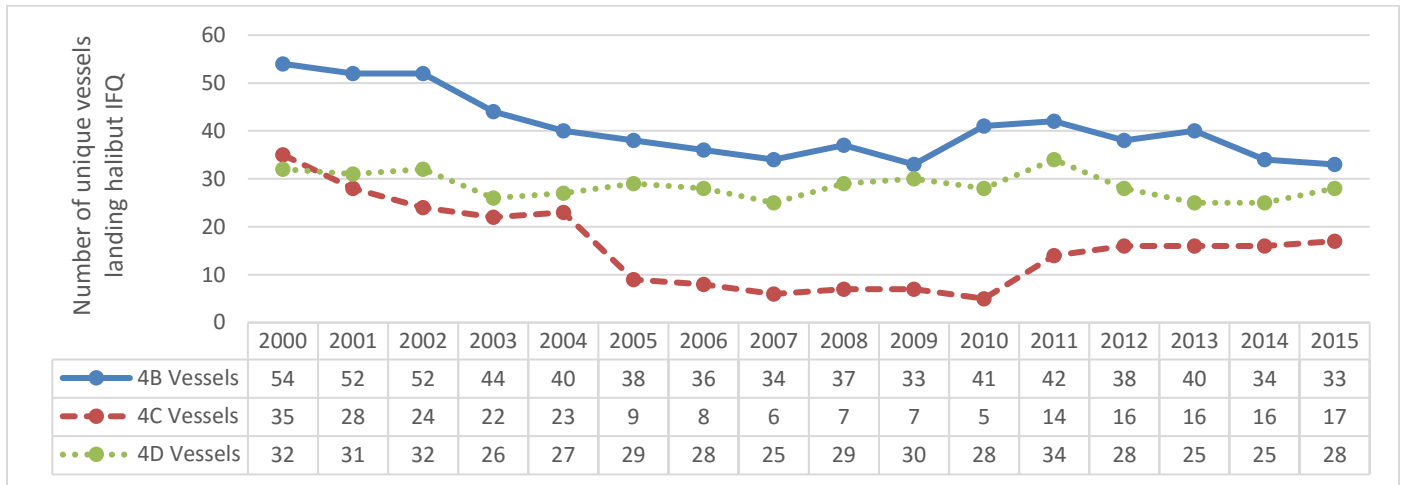
Note: In 2005, a regulatory amendment allowed Area 4C IFQ to be harvested in Area 4D. Therefore, catch limits and harvest have been reported as combined from 2005 on.

3.6.2 The Area 4 Halibut IFQ Fleet

This section describes the current fleet harvesting halibut IFQ in Areas 4B, 4C and 4D in terms of number of active vessels, LOA of active vessels, use of one's own vessel to harvest their IFQ, the number of vessels at or near the vessel IFQ cap, and use of hired masters.

Figure 6 and Figure 7 illustrates the size composition of the fleet in Area 4B, 4C, and 4D both in terms of the number of active vessels (2000 to 2015) and vessel LOA (2009 to 2015). These figures highlight that beginning in 2004, Area 4C there was a sharp decrease in the number of participating vessels. Again, this is likely do to the harvest flexibility permitted of Area 4C QS into Area 4D beginning in 2005.

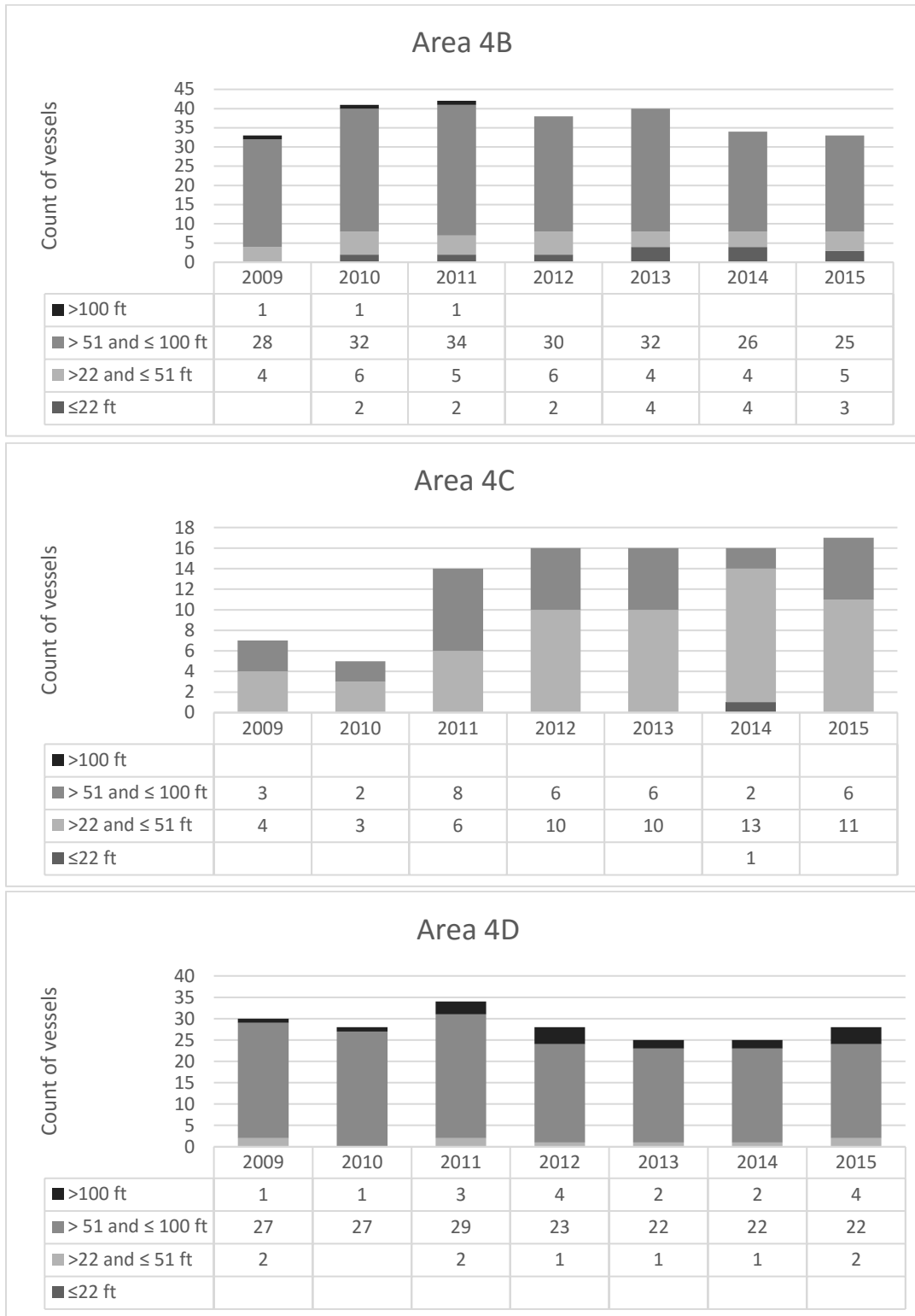
Figure 6 Count of unique vessels landing Area 4B, 4C, and 4D halibut IFQ, 2000 through 2015



Source: NMFS IFQ landings database sourced by AKFIN

Figure 7 also illustrates the much smaller fleet in Area 4C compared to Areas 4B and 4D in terms of vessel LOA. A few vessels less than or equal to 22 feet LOA have harvested halibut IFQ in Area 4B during this time period, while only 5 vessels less than or equal to 51 feet LOA have harvested halibut IFQ in Area 4D, all of which are greater than 22 feet LOA. While there is some overlap between CDQ and IFQ fishing (see Table 4), Figure 4 illustrates a contrast in IFQ fleet characteristics compared to the halibut CDQ fleet described in Table 3. Vessels that have traditionally harvested IFQ in these areas tend to be larger; better suited for open ocean and variable weather and seas.

Figure 7 Count of unique vessels landing Area 4B, 4C, and 4D halibut IFQ by vessel length overall, 2009-2015



Source: NMFS IFQ landings database sourced by AKFIN

Particularly in years where QS generates lower pounds of IFQ, QS holders will often seek to minimize the variable costs associated harvesting that IFQ. In some cases, this means consolidating harvesting privileges by walking on board a vessel with other IFQ holders to share in the purchase of fuel, crew wages, food, etc. At the onset of the IFQ Program there was significant and immediate consolidation of harvest on vessels due to the increased ability for fishery participants to coordinate rather than compete. This opportunity led to a continued slow increasing trend in “persons per vessel” (i.e. QS holders, hired masters or persons leasing IFQ) over the decade that followed based on all IFQ areas, with substantial inter-annual variability (NPFMC/NMFS 2016).

However, Figure 8 demonstrates that between 2000 and 2015 there was relative stability in Area 4B and 4D in terms of the percent of halibut IFQ that is landed on a vessel, for which the vessel owner is also the registered QS holder.

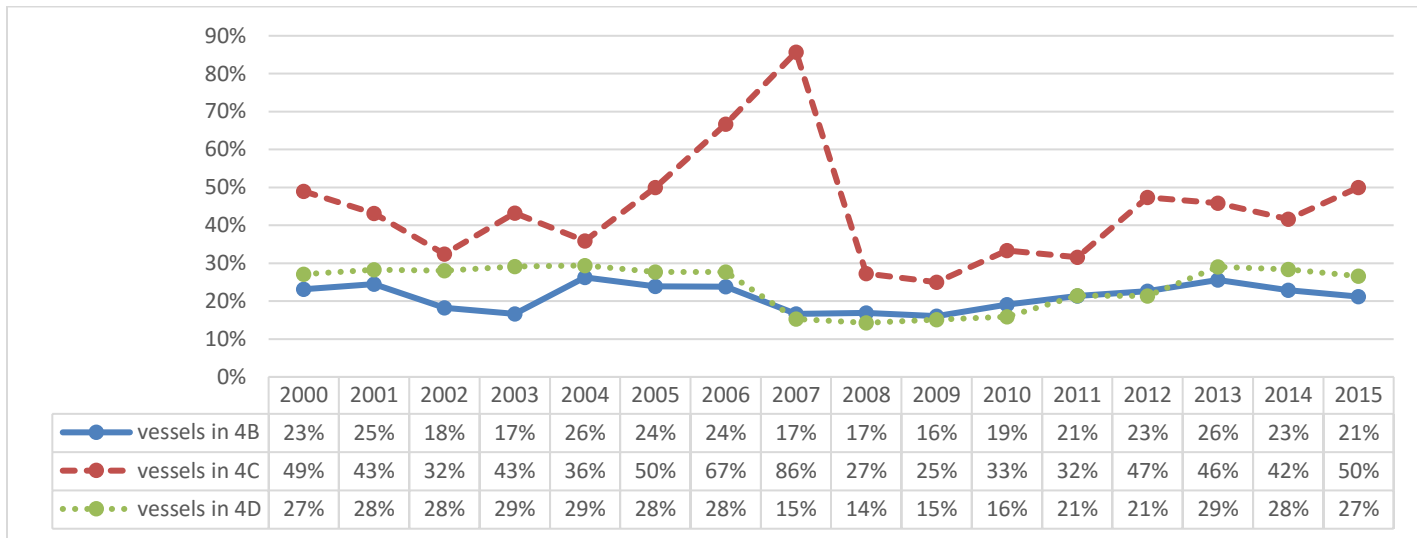
To create this figure, halibut IFQ landings are linked to the NMFS IDs which are given to each vessel owner. An ID is assigned to each person regardless of whether an individual holds 100% interest in a vessel or 1% interest in a vessel. This NMFS ID is then matched to the NMFS ID assigned to each QS holder name. This represent the percent of total IFQ weight that is landed by a vessel owner (or one of the vessel owners) with an ID that matches the QS holder ID.

Between 2000 and 2015, on average 79% of the Area 4B halibut IFQ weight was landed on a vessel, for which none of the vessel owners were also the registered holder of the QS. In Area 4D, on average between this same time period, 76% of the halibut IFQ weight was landed on a vessel, in which none of the vessels owners were also the registered holder of the IFQ.

Area 4C shows significant inter-annual variation, with IFQ landings on board vessels in which the vessel owner is also the QS holder accounting for up to 86% of the total landings (in 2007). However, it is important to remember that the number of active vessels in Area 4C dropped from 23 in 2004, to 9 in 2005, and that by 2007 there were only 6 active vessels landing halibut IFQ harvested in Area 4C (Figure 6). Small sample sizes like this are more prone to variation. It could be that 1 or 2 of those 6 vessels accounted for the majority weight of the landings and therefore their characteristics dominate the sample.

Note this does necessary say anything about the extent of hired master use, which will be later discussed in this section. A vessel owner, a QS holder, and the skipper could all be the same individual, in which case the vessel owner would be represented as landing their own IFQ in Figure 8. Additionally, a QS holder may be the one to land the IFQ, but does not own the vessel. This is a common scenario given the owner-on-board regulation of the IFQ Program, and would be represented as IFQ not landed by the vessel owner in Figure 8. Under a hired master arrangement, the QS holder and the vessel owner could be the same person, but the hired master could be a different person. In this case the vessel owner would still be represented as landing their own IFQ in the Figure 8.

Figure 8 Percent of halibut IFQ that is landed on a vessel, of which the vessel owner is also the registered QS holder, 2000 through 2015



Source: NMFS IFQ landings database sourced by AKFIN

It has been suggested in Council public testimony that vessel IFQ caps have prevented some QS holders from further consolidation of halibut IFQ onto vessel in order to save on variable costs, particularly in times of low abundance. The vessel IFQ caps are a regulatory element of the IFQ Program that dictates an annual cap on the amount of IFQ one vessel can land in a given season. For halibut, there is a vessel IFQ cap of 0.5% of all of the halibut IFQ TAC combined.⁴ While the vessel IFQ cap may in fact, be a constraint to some halibut IFQ participants, overall the data shows very few vessels that participate in Area 4B, 4C, or 4D halibut IFQ fisheries to be at, or within 10% of the caps (Table 8).

⁴ Area 2C has an additional halibut vessel IFQ cap of 1% of the Area 2C halibut IFQ TAC.

Table 8 Number of vessels that have participated in Areas 4B, 4C, and/ or 4D halibut IFQ fishing that are within 10% of the vessel IFQ cap, 2000 through 2015

Year	Number of vessels within 10% of cap
2000	1
2001	2
2002	-
2003	-
2004	-
2005	-
2006	-
2007	1
2008	1
2009	1
2010	2
2011	4
2012	3
2013	1
2014	2
2015	-

Source: NMFS IFQ landings database sourced by AKFIN

At the outset of the IFQ Program, the Council intended for catcher vessel QS to be held by owner-operators. However, the Council allowed initial QS recipients to use a hired master – a person designated by the shareholder to land that shareholder’s IFQ – in order to provide these initial recipients with the flexibility to continue in the business practices that they had had prior to the implementation of the IFQ Program. Eligibility to use a hired master is tied to the shareholder and not the QS, so initial recipients could use a hired master on QS that they acquired over time. Additionally, non-individual entities are permitted to use hired masters, as this is necessary to land their IFQ.⁵

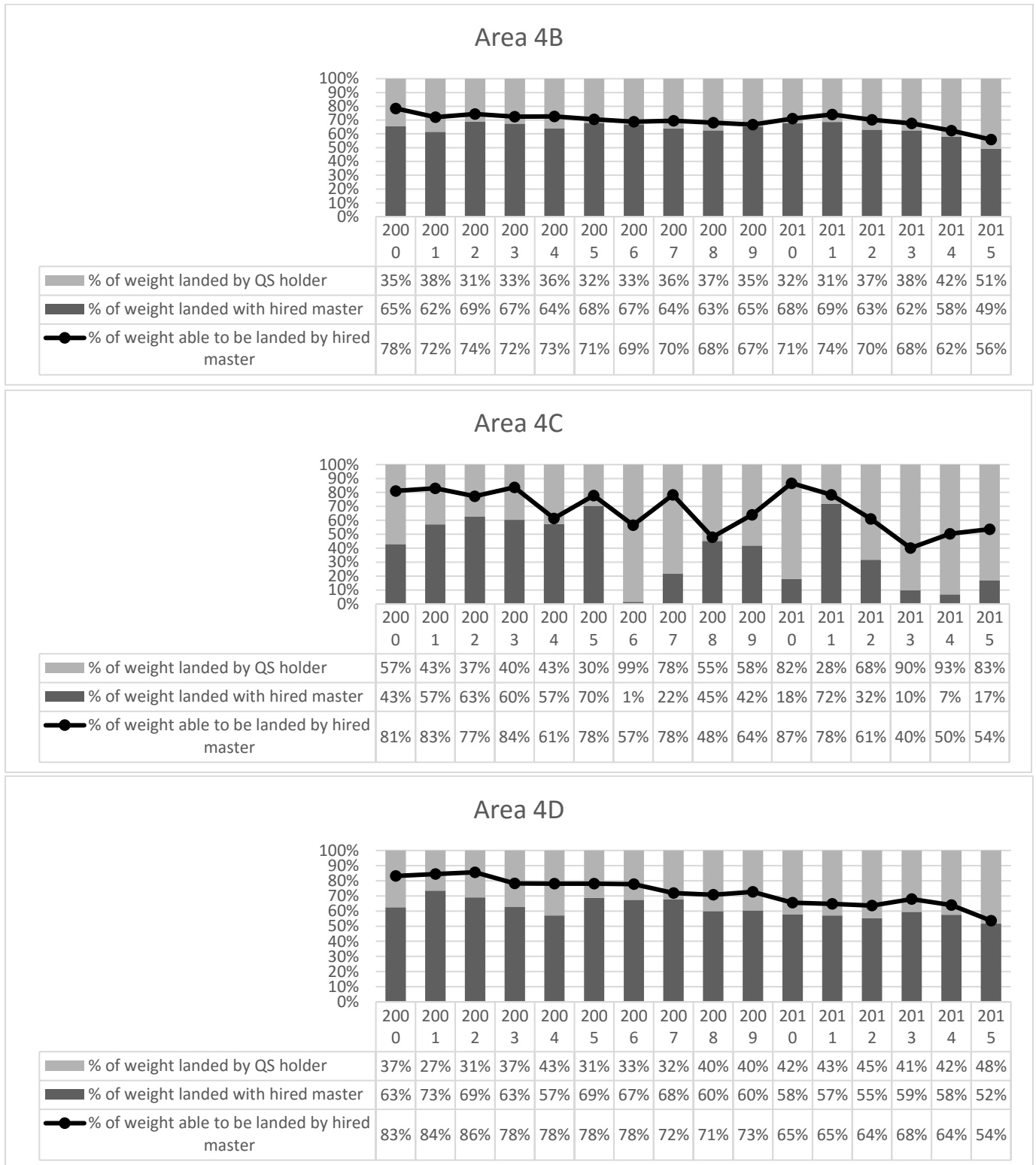
Over the 20 years of the IFQ Program, the hired master use provision has been amended several times to address regulatory loopholes. The Council’s intent was that the shareholder using a hired master remains a vested participant in the IFQ fisheries, so the IFQ Program initially included a vessel ownership requirement for shareholders intending to use hired masters to land their IFQ. In 1999, the Council specified that shareholders must have at least a 20% ownership interest in the vessel upon which their IFQ is being fished. In 2002, an amendment to the program allowed shareholders to substitute indirect ownership of a vessel through corporate or other non-individual entity interest for all or part of direct vessel ownership by the shareholder for purposes of using a hired master to land that shareholder’s IFQ. In 2007, an amendment to the program specified the formal, government-issued documents that shareholders must use to demonstrate the 20% vessel ownership interest requisite for using a hired master. In 2014, an amendment to the program added a 12-month requirement for the minimum 20% vessel

⁵ In Southeast Alaska (halibut Area 2C and the Southeast Outside District of the sablefish fishery), the Council limited hired master use to non-individual entities that received an initial QS allocation in order to maintain what had historically been an owner-operated fleet in this area.

ownership interest. Also in 2014, an amendment to the program was implemented prohibiting initial QS recipients from using a hired master to harvest IFQ derived from catcher vessel QS received by transfer after February 12, 2010. The 2014 amendments were in response to increasing evidence of overall reliance on hired masters by shareholders, many of whom had ownership interest in vessels only for the duration of the fishing trip during which their IFQ was being harvested.

Figure 9 illustrates halibut catcher vessel IFQ landed by hired masters in Area 4B, 4C, and 4D, as well as the IFQ able to be landed by a hired master. Note that all Class A IFQ is able to be both leased as well as harvested by a hired master and is not included in this figure. As this figure is based on analysis of *landed* halibut IFQ, QS that is flagged as able to be harvested by a hired master is only represented if the IFQ is harvested. This may account for some of the stark variation in Area 4C, in 2004, 2006 and 2008. It could be that IFQ that was able to be harvested by a hired master, was not harvested at all. It may also be that this weight was harvested in Area 4D. In Figure 9, Area 4C also demonstrates substantial variation in the percent of total IFQ that is landed by a hired master. Again, this is likely due to the very low number of vessels landing IFQ in Area 4C. Area 4B and 4C see a slightly decreasing trend of hired master use between 2000 and 2015; ranging from 31 to 51% of QS holders fishing their IFQ in Area 4B and from 27 to 48% of the QS holders fishing their IFQ in Area 4D. The percent of IFQ able to be harvested by a hired master has also seen a slight decreasing trend between 2000 and 2015 in these two areas. This would be expected as hired master use privileges are exclusive to initial issuees and non-individual entities, and this privilege does not continue once the QS has been transferred.

Figure 9 Percent of Area 4B, 4C, and 4D halibut catcher vessel IFQ landed with a hired master, 2000-2015



Source: NMFS IFQ landings database sourced by AKFIN

3.7 Analysis of Impacts: Alternative 1, No Action

In this analysis, the no action alternative is the regulatory status quo. Under status quo, there are two regulatory elements that prohibit the proposed action alternative from occurring.

In particular, with no action, CDQ groups are not eligible to purchase or lease halibut or sablefish QS/IFQ, with the expectation of Class A shares. CDQ groups can and have acquired Class A share halibut QS. Class A QS are the most flexible harvesting privileges. They can be used for both harvesting and processing activities, or just harvesting activities,⁶ on a vessel of any size. Three of the CDQ groups currently hold Area 4 halibut A class QS. APICDA and YDFDA both hold A class halibut QS in Area 4A, 4B, and 4D, and BBEDC holds A class halibut QS in Area 4B and 4D. Technically, these CDQ groups may already be able to have residents that participate in the small vessel CDQ halibut fishery act as hired masters to fish some of this IFQ, augmenting their CDQ allocation. However, because of the flexibility of Class A QS, it tends to be more valuable. Leasing A share IFQ to resident would forego revenue from a lease rate that they might be able to get from a private party. Therefore, leasing A share QS to their residents may come at a higher opportunity cost for CDQ groups than the ability to lease B, C or D Class QS (catcher vessel shares).

The other regulatory elements under status quo that constrain the proposed action from occurring relate to the owner on board requirements of catcher vessel shares under the IFQ program. The program contains limitations on both on leasing and the use of hired masters.

Under current regulations, leasing of IFQ derived from catcher vessel shares has generally been prohibited (for individuals or CDQ groups) since 1998. Several provisions are included in the program that allow for outright leasing under special conditions. One of these provisions includes the leasing of IFQ derived from Class A shares. Special exceptions for leasing catcher vessel IFQ also includes the following situations:

- 1) temporary medical leases,
- 2) survivorship transfer privileges,
- 3) military leases,
- 4) leases through CQEs, and
- 5) IFQ to guided angler fish (GAF) transfers.

Therefore, individuals that are holders of catcher vessel QS, generally do not have access to catcher vessel IFQ leasing options.

It is possible that CDQ community residents could increase participation in the IFQ fisheries by acting as a hired master for a catcher vessel QS holder. While not technically considered a lease based on federal regulations and requirements, the use of a hired master by a QS holder can often acts as a de facto lease depending on the arrangement with the individual or entity holding the QS.⁷

⁶ In recent years, Class A share halibut IFQ has been exclusively fished on catcher vessels and landed on shore.

⁷ The primary difference between the two practices is that leasing IFQ requires a formal leasing transfer application, and the IFQ permit is issued in the lessee's name; while in contrast, a hired master must obtain a hired master's

However, as illustrated in Figure 9, the opportunity to use a hired master is only available to certain QS holders in the program. In many cases, under status quo, the CDQ resident could not operate as a hired master. If hired master use is not permitted, the QS holder would need to be on board the CDQ resident's vessel if they were to fish another entities IFQ.

There are a few other options for CDQ residents to expand their halibut operations in times of low halibut abundance. When available, CDQ groups can lease quota from each other. Additionally, with available funds CDQ residents could seek to acquire halibut QS to hold and use on their own. As seen in Table 4, however, there are low rates of harvest overlap of vessels that participate in landing halibut CDQ as well as halibut IFQ under status quo. This indicates that residents harvesting halibut CDQ generally have not had an opportunity or have made a choice not to participate in the halibut IFQ fishery.

The implications of Alternative 1 are heavily dependent on the health of the halibut resource. Since the proposed action under Alternative 2 only applies in times of low catch limits, if halibut catch limits remain above any of the proposed thresholds, the only difference between adopting an Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 is increased administrative effort to revise regulations and develop administrative processes for years in which CDQ groups may lease IFQ. If the catch limits for these areas do become low, the results of adopting status quo could include more negative impacts on residents of CDQ communities that have historically relied on CDQ halibut than might be achieved with action. However, no action would reduce the risk of exacerbating any possible negative impacts of low halibut catch limits on Area 4 IFQ crew and vessel owners, as well as potentially certain processors and communities. A greater discussion of the qualitative cost and benefits are included in the analysis for Alternative 2 under Section 3.8 and Section 3.9.

3.8 Analysis of Impacts: Alternative 2, Allow CDQ Groups to Lease Halibut IFQ

The action alternative would allow CDQ groups to lease halibut catcher vessel IFQ in Areas 4B, 4C, and 4D in years of low halibut catch limits in regulatory Areas 4B and 4CDE. Any IFQ transferred to a CDQ group under this provision would be available for use in conjunction with halibut CDQ, intended for use by residents that have traditionally harvested halibut CDQ. This action would *not* convert IFQ to CDQ. CDQ allocations would not change. No vessel over 51 feet LOA would be eligible to harvest the leased IFQ, and all vessels harvesting IFQ must comply with IFQ use restrictions. This proposal does not limit that amount of IFQ that could be leased by a CDQ group in a year.

3.8.1 Potential Benefits

Halibut is a culturally and economically significant species for many user groups in the North Pacific. Thus, dramatic declines in IPHC Area 4 biomass levels (as well as coast-wide) have greatly impacted a

permit, but their harvest is debited from an IFQ permit authorized under the name of the QS holder. The QS holder remains liable for any fishing violations reported associated with that permit. Additionally, for the use of hired masters, regulations require the QS holder to have a 20% ownership interest in the vessel used to harvest the IFQ, demonstrated for at least a 12-month period.

substantial number of individuals and businesses. Particularly given the recent low catch limits for the commercial (IFQ and CDQ) fishery in Area 4, some of the CDQ groups are seeking opportunities to keep their residents actively fishing through these periods. In addition to the clear incentive of encouraging continued employment and income for residents traditionally involved in the halibut CDQ fishery, this proposed action is also seeking to keep processing plants and secondary service providers that the CDQ groups rely on in operation even during years of low halibut abundance. In many of these coastal communities there are few other viable options for employment.

The benefits that could be derived from such action are different among CDQ groups and would likely even be distributional within a CDQ group. Overall, this action is not necessarily expected to result in a financial gain for a CDQ groups that choose to lease halibut IFQ. It is likely that some or all of the leasing fee would need to be subsidized by the group. However, in particular, representatives from the CDQ groups CBSFA, NSEDC, and APICDA have all suggested that if available and feasible, their group would likely take advantage of the opportunity. Representatives have emphasized that the opportunity to keep community members employed has distributional benefits to the individuals involved in the fishery that would likely be worth the subsidized expense to the CDQ group (Jeff Kaufman, 10/9/2015, personal communication).

If the halibut catch limit for Area 4B and Area 4CDE falls to a low threshold (determined in Option 1 of this alternative), the actual use of this flexibility within a CDQ group will depend on a number of factors. The small vessel fleet that could potentially benefit from increased access to harvest opportunities tends to stay in nearshore areas and be more sensitive to ocean and weather conditions. Therefore, a CDQ group may be more motivated to use this option in a year where the halibut are found close enough to shore and when weather allowed them to fully prosecute their CDQ allocation in addition to any leased IFQ.

The current nature of the halibut fishery for the other CDQ groups makes it less likely that they would take advantage of this flexibility. In years where halibut catch limits have been very low, CVFRF has made the internal management decision to not open their small vessel halibut fishery; therefore, it is unknown whether CVFRF would ever take advantage of this additional flexibility. BBEDC and YDFDA halibut fisheries are such that either residents do not have direct access to the halibut resource due to location of the communities relative to the available stock or quota (such as YDFDA's allocation of Area 4D halibut CDQ), or residents target halibut around other priority fisheries (such as salmon fishing in Bristol Bay). However, representatives from BBEDC have still voiced support for this proposal (Ann Vanderhoven, 10/20/2015, personal communication).

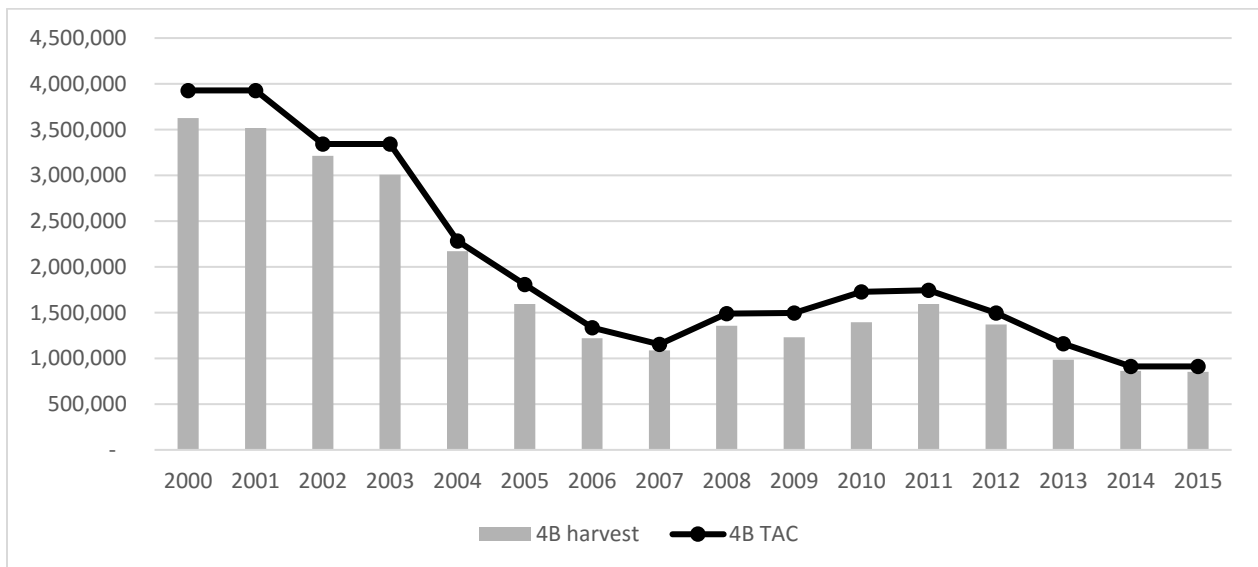
Although not described as the need for action, under the purpose and need (Section 1.1), halibut QS holders of Areas 4B, 4C, and 4D may also benefit from this opportunity. These QS holders may feel constrained as their QS is associated with smaller and smaller pounds of IFQ. In years of low halibut abundance, it may not be economically viable for some QS holders to harvest their small amounts of IFQ, particularly in these remote areas in which operating costs are higher relative to other regulatory areas. Depending on operating costs and catch limits, QS holders leasing their IFQ to CDQ groups may be able to earn more revenue from leasing IFQ than from harvesting it themselves or hiring a master to harvest the IFQ (if the QS holder is eligible). To be clear, this action would not propose any amendments to QS use caps or vessel IFQ caps. This action would provide an opportunity for halibut QS holders with QS in

Area 4B, 4C, or 4D a chance to lease this IFQ to CDQ groups in years when the harvest limits drop below a certain threshold, without a specified limit to the leasing potential.

Currently IFQ leasing is prohibited, except for the specific exemptions explained in Section 3.7. IFQ hired master restrictions seeking to retain the owner-on-board characteristics of the fleet, do not permit the use of a hired master for all halibut QS holders (see Figure 9). Specifically, non-initial issues may not use a hired master to harvest their IFQ. Also in 2014, an amendment to the program was implemented prohibiting initial QS recipients from using a hired master to harvest IFQ derived from catcher vessel QS received by transfer after February 12, 2010. Therefore, this proposed action would present some halibut QS holders their *only* opportunity to lease Areas 4B, 4C, and 4D halibut QS. They could benefit from this opportunity by earning a lease rate for the IFQ they may or may not have fished.

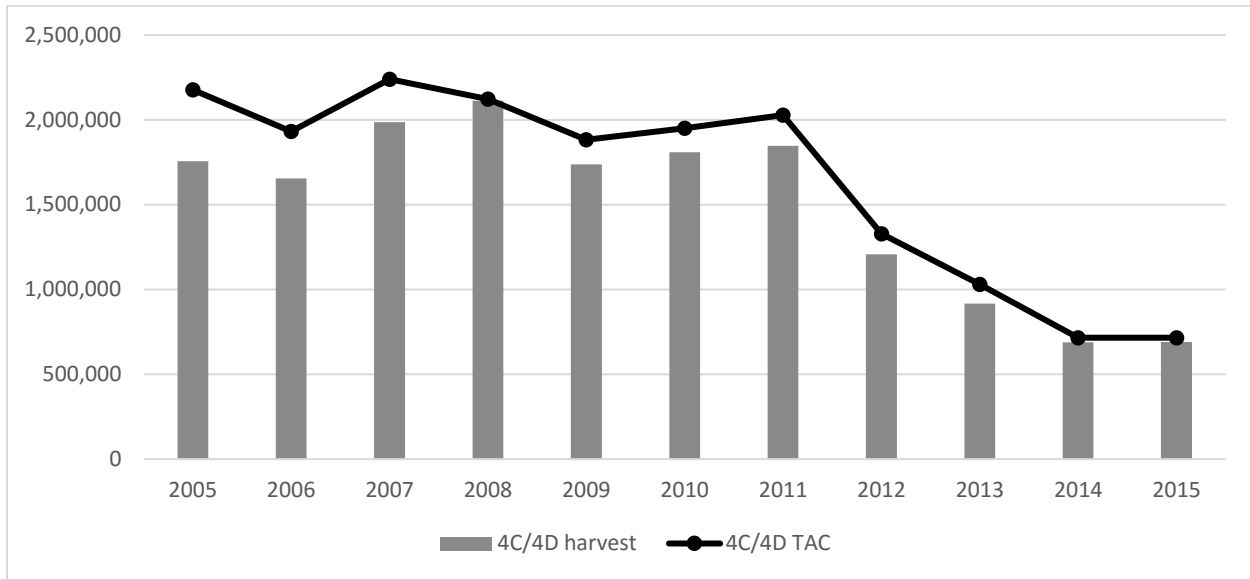
It should be noted, that the halibut IFQ catch limit has been nearly fully prosecuted in Area 4B, Area 4C/4D. Figure 10 and Figure 11 demonstrate the percent utilization of the IFQ catch limit relative to the declining catch limit (also included in Table 6 and Table 7). However, this does not necessarily mean that there has not been increased economic struggles relative to prosecuting small amounts of halibut IFQ in years of low catch limits. Recent public testimony has highlighted challenges associated with generating the economies of scale necessary to prosecute the small amount of IFQ.

Figure 10 Halibut IFQ catch limits and harvest for Area 4B



Source: NMFS IFQ landings database sourced by AKFIN

Figure 11 Halibut IFQ catch limits and harvest for Area 4C/D



Source: NMFS IFQ landings database sourced by AKFIN

Note: See associated numbers in Table 6 and Table 7.

3.8.2 Potential Costs

Direct impacts would be expected to be positive or neutral for both participants of the CDQ groups and QS holders (as discussed in Section 3.8.1), because the opportunity for this additional flexibility in years of low halibut abundance would be voluntary for both user groups. However, Alternative 2 could plausibly have negative indirect effects on some stakeholders of the halibut IFQ fishery. It is possible this action could result in a displacement of some crew jobs, for the duration of time that the halibut catch limits are low enough to allow IFQ leasing, potentially disadvantage vessel owner (to the extent that they are not also the QS holder), and potentially disadvantage some processors and communities (to the extent that they are not the primary location for both IFQ and CDQ halibut from the area).

The uncertainty about how much IFQ may be leased, from whom, and how this would impact current operations, is the challenge associated with predicting the extent to which this action may have a negative impact on these stakeholders. Likely this action would result in some amount of temporary consolidation; impacting the number of trips taken, or resulting in some vessels not being used in the halibut fishery at all in a season. The impact to (non-QS holding) crew and the vessel owner are distributional. It would be expected that some crew and vessel owner could be disadvantaged, while vessel owners and crew of CDQ vessels may benefit. The negative impacts to whomever is disadvantaged in this flexibility could be compounded in a time when more state and federal fisheries involve barriers to entry (e.g. limited entry permits or quota share) making it potentially more difficult to identify temporary diversification opportunities in years when the halibut catch limits are low. If vessel owners are also QS holders, they would make the decision about whether to lease their IFQ in these years, thus would not be expected to be negatively impacted by this action.

Distributional impacts on processors and communities could occur, if leased halibut IFQ were landed at different locations or plants than historical users would have relied on. Assuming resident halibut CDQ

participants would chose to land any leased halibut IFQ at the same port as their halibut CDQ catch, landings data can demonstrate the overlap between ports receiving halibut CDQ versus ports receiving halibut IFQ. However, given the small number of processors in most communities, much of the data demonstrating overlap in IFQ and CDQ landings is confidential and cannot be presented in this analysis.

In some regions, there is only one active processing plant. In this situation, it is unlikely distributional impacts would be felt under the proposed action. Substantial overlap occurs between where halibut IFQ and CDQ is processed in Areas 4C and Area 4D.

In Area 4B and 4E, the proposed action may indirectly motivate distributional impacts on processors based on a change in landing patterns. Halibut IFQ could move from processors that have dominated the halibut IFQ market to other processors that have been more specialized in halibut CDQ. All of the ports that have received Area 4B halibut CDQ between 2009 and 2015, have also accepted some halibut IFQ. However, the primary processor for CDQ halibut contributes a small fraction of the IFQ processing. If Alternative 2, Option 3 is adopted (the opportunity to harvest leased Area 4D IFQ in Area 4E) Area 4D IFQ landings would may be landed in one of the 11 different Western Alaskan communities ⁸ that have processed halibut CDQ between 2009 and 2015.

If the locations of port of origin and landings changes with leased IFQ, there is a potential some communities may lose out in terms of raw fish tax, levied by the municipality as a percent of ex vessel revenue, and business landing tax, which is also a fish tax levied by the state (and shared with the communities), as a percent of ex vessel revenue. These communities may also lose out in terms of the economic activity associated with the fishing trip; purchase of food and fuel and the potential for a local vessel to be leased for the harvest of a visiting QS holder's halibut IFQ. These are distributional impacts; therefore, they could represent loses to some communities, while other communities (those with traditional halibut CDQ participation), may benefit.

3.8.3 Policy Considerations

3.8.3.1 Consistency with IFQ Program Goals

The IFQ program was developed to address issues associated with the race-for-fish that had resulted from the open-access and effort control management of the halibut and sablefish fisheries. Specifically, the Council identified several problems that emerged in these fisheries due to the previous management regime, including increased fishing, processing, and marketing costs without increasing catch, decreased product quality, sablefish and halibut prices, and the availability of fresh halibut, increased conflicts among halibut fishermen, sablefish fishermen, or other interest groups, adverse effects on halibut and sablefish stocks, and unintended distributions of benefits and costs.

In the original Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the IFQ program (NPFMC & NMFS 1992), the Council identified 10 policy objectives that it intended to address through specific elements of the IFQ program. Specifically, in selecting the elements of the IFQ program the Council attempted to do the following:

⁸ 11 communities and "other Alaska".

- 1) Address the problems that occurred with the open-access management regime.
 - The Council identified 10 specific problems: Allocation conflicts, gear conflicts, deadloss from lost gear, bycatch loss, discard mortality, excess harvesting capacity, product wholesomeness, safety, economic stability in the fisheries and communities, and rural coastal community development of a small boat fleet.
- 2) Link the initial quota share allocations to recent dependence on the halibut and sablefish fixed gear fisheries.
- 3) Broadly distribute quota share to prevent excessively large quota share from being given to some persons.
- 4) Maintain the diversity in the fleet with respect to vessel categories.
- 5) Maintain the existing business relationships among vessel owners, crews, and processors.
- 6) Assure that those directly involved in the fishery benefit from the IFQ program by assuring that these two fisheries are dominated by owner/operator operations.
- 7) Limit the concentration of quota share ownership and IFQ usage that will occur over time.
- 8) Limit the adjustment cost to current participants including Alaskan coastal communities.
- 9) Increase the ability of rural coastal communities adjacent to the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands to share in the wealth generated by the IFQ program.
- 10) Achieve previously stated Council goals and objectives and meet Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements.

In developing the Alaska halibut and sablefish IFQ Program the Council was concerned with the potential for the emergence of a class of absentee catcher vessel shareholders. The Council believed that absentee QS holder would be in opposition to its intent that benefits from the fishery flow to those directly involved in it. Objective #6 highlights this concern, by stating the intent to, “assure that those directly involved in the fishery benefit from the IFQ program by assuring that these two fisheries are dominated by owner/operator operations.”

Therefore, the Council included an owner-on-board requirement for catcher vessel QS holders in the IFQ Program. The intent of the owner-on-board requirement was to provide for a transition of the catcher vessel fleet to becoming fully owner-operated. Class A shares were exempt from the owner-on-board requirement, because these shares were already largely corporate owned at the time the IFQ Program was being implemented and comprise a very small percentage of the total QS in the two fisheries.

Leasing of IFQ is generally prohibited (with the exceptions stated in Section 3.7) and hired master use is limited to initial recipients (except for Area 2C, in which initial recipients are not permitted to use hired masters) and non-individual entities. Because some catcher vessel QS recipients had used hired masters prior to implementation of the IFQ Program, the Council intended the exemption from the owner-on-board requirement to provide initial recipients with the latitude to continue in the business practices that they had had prior to the implementation of the IFQ Program.

The Council has made a number of regulatory amendments to the IFQ Program to further limit the amount of leasing and hired skipper use that occurs in the fishery (see NPFMC/NMFS, 2016 for a list of examples). These examples reinforce the Council’s continued interest in discouraging absentee ownership

and moving towards an owner-operated Program. The proposed action may be considered counter to this purpose, as it allows for an avenue to lease halibut QS without any owner-on-board provisions.

Proponents of the proposed action may argue that this type of leasing would be only permitted in dire circumstances (when halibut abundance has dropped below a certain threshold), and only involving a limited scope of participants (halibut CDQ participants and Area 4B, 4C, or 4D QS holders). With the inclusion of some of the options under Alternative 2, provisions would attempt to further contain the effects by: limiting the incentive to buy QS with the sole intention of leasing (Alternative 2, Option 3), limiting the number of consecutive years a QS holder could lease (Alternative 2, Option 4), and further restricting the QS holders able to lease (Alternative 3, Option 5). Additionally, goal #9 of the IFQ Program states it is an objective of the Program to “increase the ability of the rural coastal communities adjacent to the BS/AI to share in the wealth generated by the IFQ program” (NMFPC 1992).

It is a policy judgement whether this flexibility is warranted under the goals of the IFQ program. The purpose and need of this action specifically addresses the need to consider the objectives of both the IFQ and the CDQ programs.

3.8.3.2 From Whom Will the CDQ Groups Lease?

Another potential policy concern was identified during Council discussions in October 2016. Alternative 2 (without consideration of its options), would provide CDQ groups total flexibility, in years of low halibut abundance, in how much QS they lease and from whom. It is possible a CDQ group could choose to lease halibut IFQ from a resident, employee, director, or manager of a CDQ group that would also have access to harvesting halibut CDQ. This situation may benefit one individual, but it may not bring new harvesting opportunity to the community, as described in the purpose and need statement. Instead, one individual in a community may benefit both from earning a lease rate as well as the benefits of harvesting CDQ.

Currently, most CDQ groups provide economic development opportunities to encourage their residents fishing ventures. This includes tools such as loan programs for vessels and QS, subsidized processing opportunities, and market contacts. It is the responsibility of the CDQ groups to determine how to best maximize the net benefits of their fishery allocations in order to affect the broadest swath of their population. In fitting with this pattern, there is nothing in the proposed action that would *prohibit* self-leasing-type behavior or *require* that the benefits have the greatest impact on the communities.

It would be beneficial for the Council to consider the intent of action through the purpose and need statement, and make clear what leasing situations, if any, it considers undesirable.

If the Council considers this a policy concern, there are a number of ways the Council may monitor and/or restrict the lessors of IFQ. This could be as strict as requiring that any IFQ leased by CDQ groups is not associated with a member of the community or management of the CDQ group. Or the Council could simply state its intent for the proposed action and monitor the types of transactions that occur. The Council could include a provision that CDQ Groups submit annual reports describing the persons leasing IFQ to the groups and the criteria that the groups used to select those persons. In addition, as non-profit organizations, CDQ groups are required to submit an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) 990 form which

provides the public with financial records for the entities. A new annual reporting requirement, which the Council would need to specify in its alternatives, or current non-profit reporting practices may be considered enough of a monitoring tool for the Council to understand if the intent of action has been satisfied.

In addition, some of the options under Alternative 2 may restrict the eligibility of QS holders to target leasing situations that more fitting with the Council's purpose and need statement. For example, Option 5, would limit QS holders that are eligible to lease to those with small holdings, and the duration limits on Option 4 would mean the CDQ groups could not use the same QS holders for an extended period of time.

3.8.4 Potential Market Effects

Allowing for the opportunity for CDQ groups to lease halibut QS in Area 4B, 4C, and 4D could have an impact on the halibut QS market.

Without the adoption of Option 4 (establishing a cooling off period for CDQ leasing opportunities), the proposed action could result in individuals seeking to privately acquire more halibut QS with the intention of leasing it to the CDQ groups. This potential result of the proposed action would especially work counter to the IFQ program's goal of promoting an owner-operated fleet, in addition to increasing the QS demand, which could impact the QS market. These impacts may be mitigated by establishing a cooling-off period, during which newly acquired QS could not be leased, as provided in Option 4. This is option is discussed under Section 3.8.7.

Particularly with a cooling off period for leasing, by only allowing CDQ groups to lease, rather than permanently acquire QS, this proposed action would not likely induce QS movement or consolidation. Conversely, this action may motivate some QS holders that may otherwise consider selling, to hold onto their Area 4B, 4C or 4D halibut QS. This result could be considered either positive or negative, depending on an individual's interest in the fishery. Some stakeholders have suggested that it could help retain the local holdings of QS. This could especially be true for Area 4C holdings, where residents of St. Paul hold 27% of the QS pool. Table 9 demonstrates a link between communities and QS, by linking registered QS address.

Table 9 Halibut QS holders in Area 4B, 4C, and 4D by QS area and registered address, 2015

4B			
Address	QS holders	QS holdings	% of Area QS pool
Alaska	39	4,374,156	47.1%
ADAK	2	702,575	7.6%
ANCHORAGE	4	532,419	5.7%
ATKA	6	352,180	3.8%
CORDOVA	2	213,869	2.3%
DILLINGHAM	1	370,314	4.0%
DUTCH HARBOR	1	135,240	1.5%
FAIRBANKS	1	22,392	0.2%
HAINES	1	7,293	0.1%
HOMER	2	174,732	1.9%
JUNEAU	1	2,368	0.0%
KODIAK	15	1,588,001	17.1%
PETERSBURG	1	2	0.0%
SITKA	2	272,771	2.9%
Outside Alaska	39	4,910,618	52.9%

4C			
Address	QS holders	QS holdings	% of Area QS pool
Alaska	21	1,944,790	48.4%
ANCHORAGE	4	297,437	7.4%
DELTA JUNCTION	1	366,151	9.1%
HOMER	2	19,948	0.5%
ST GEORGE ISLAND	3	80,621	2.0%
ST PAUL ISLAND	12	1,070,655	26.7%
SEWARD	1	12,077	0.3%
UNALASKA	1	96,994	2.4%
WASILLA	1	907	0.0%
Outside Alaska	21	2,071,562	51.6%

4D			
Address	QS holders	QS holdings	% of Area QS pool
Alaska	12	1,472,738	30%
ANCHORAGE	4	198,868	4.0%
DELTA JUNCTION	1	292,706	5.9%
DILLINGHAM	1	122,473	2.5%
JUNEAU	1	213,044	4.3%
KODIAK	2	342,286	6.9%
ST PAUL ISLAND	1	38,984	0.8%
SEWARD	1	44,173	0.9%
UNALASKA	1	220,204	4.4%
Outside Alaska	30	3,485,512	70.3%

Source: NOAA RAM Division, accessed 11/18/2015, available online: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/permits-licenses>

Note: APICDA holds Area 4 class A QS registered to Juneau. YDFDA holds Area 4 class A QS registered to Anchorage. BBEDC Area 4 class A QS is registered to Dillingham.

For those individuals seeking entry into the halibut QS market, the lack of QS movement may not be a positive result. One might expect that decreasing catch limits would be associated with lower QS prices, more exit, and less demand for QS. However, these trends are not being observed in the IFQ fisheries. Area 4B, 4C, and 4D already tend to have the lowest level of QS transactions of any regulatory area (although, this may also be because a portion of the catch limit is designated as CDQ) and the QS prices, similar to other regulatory areas, appear to be increasing (Table 10). However, compared to other IPHC areas off of Alaska, acquiring halibut QS in these areas is generally less expensive per pound. Between 2012 and 2014, reported price per pound averaged \$40.66, \$34.33, \$21.75, \$16.55 in Areas 2C, 3A, 3B, and 4A, respectively (NMFS 2015a) compared to the prices identified in Table 10 for Areas 4B, 4C, and 4D.

Table 10 Prices for halibut QS transfers by regulatory area, 2005 through 2014

Area	Year	Number of transactions used for pricing	Price per pound			Price per QS unit		
			Mean Price	Stan Dev of price	Total pounds transferred used for pricing	Mean Price	Stan Dev of price	Total QS units transferred used for pricing
4B	2005	8	\$ 7.49	\$ 1.18	63,139	\$ 1.46	\$ 0.23	324,243
	2006	2	C	C	7,850	C	C	54,558
	2007	9	\$ 8.45	\$ 2.51	37,045	\$ 1.05	\$ 0.31	298,569
	2008	18	\$ 9.99	\$ 2.35	131,987	\$ 1.60	\$ 0.38	823,570
	2009	12	\$ 10.39	\$ 1.36	129,379	\$ 1.67	\$ 0.22	802,982
	2010	5	\$ 8.93	\$ 1.53	21,700	\$ 1.66	\$ 0.28	116,598
	2011	15	\$ 11.05	\$ 1.86	122,182	\$ 2.08	\$ 0.35	650,471
	2012	4	\$ 19.60	\$ 1.26	58,425	\$ 3.16	\$ 0.20	362,811
	2013	1	C	C	508	C	C	4,066
2014	3	C	C	10,332	C	C	105,186	
4C	2005	7	\$ 5.46	\$ 2.02	86,607	\$ 1.23	\$ 0.46	383,147
	2006	0	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	0
	2007	6	\$ 8.04	\$ 1.82	67,184	\$ 1.87	\$ 0.42	289,134
	2008	7	\$ 8.65	\$ 1.47	61,260	\$ 1.90	\$ 0.32	278,173
	2009	6	\$ 11.41	\$ 1.56	67,133	\$ 2.23	\$ 0.31	343,693
	2010	4	\$ 9.90	\$ 0.22	55,116	\$ 2.00	\$ 0.04	272,450
	2011	18	\$ 12.20	\$ 2.31	116,704	\$ 2.57	\$ 0.49	554,708
	2013	3	C	C	6,873	C	C	64,271
	2014	4	\$ 13.33	\$ 1.46	10,983	\$ 0.99	\$ 0.11	147,877
4D	2005	4	\$ 9.09	\$ 1.31	19,557	\$ 2.33	\$ 0.34	76,317
	2006	0	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	0
	2007	9	\$ 8.77	\$ 2.18	114,370	\$ 2.31	\$ 0.57	434,031
	2008	1	C	C	3,526	C	C	14,118
	2009	3	C	C	11,584	C	C	52,298
	2010	4	\$ 9.50	\$ 2.85	39,239	\$ 2.18	\$ 0.65	171,040
	2011	10	\$ 13.58	\$ 1.14	163,162	\$ 3.24	\$ 0.27	683,856
	2012	0	\$ -	\$ -	0	\$ -	\$ -	0
	2013	2	C	C	3,683	C	C	30,370
	2014	3	C	C	5,148	C	C	61,127

Source: NOAA RAM division, IFQ Transfer Report 2015, available online:

<https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/reports/halibut-transferfrpt2015.pdf>

Note: C denotes confidential information. Quota share prices in dollars per QS unit are not comparable across areas because the ratio of IFQs to QS differs from area to area and may differ from year to year as TACs change. QS prices in dollars per pound of associated IFQ are more comparable across areas.

3.8.5 Option 1: Defining ‘Low Catch Limit’

The action alternative identifies that the IFQ leasing option would only be available to CDQ groups, in years of low halibut catch limits in regulatory Areas 4B and 4CDE. Thus, one key Council decision point is in setting that threshold of low catch limits.

One thing to note is that, while Area 4E is not open to halibut IFQ fishing, and therefore 4E halibut IFQ would not be available to lease under the proposed action, the IPHC generates an estimate of exploitable biomass for Areas 4CDE (including biomass from closed areas) as one combined number and treats

4CDE as a single unit when recommending the catch limit for a given year. The 4C, 4D, and 4E subareas were created to serve the needs of the Council's Area 4CDE Catch Sharing Plan (CSP). Once the catch limit is set for Area 4CDE by the IPHC, that limit is further apportioned to each of the three subareas using the CSP developed by the Council.⁹

In light of this apportionment process, the IPHC staff recommends Option 1 consider a 'low abundance' threshold at the combined Area 4CDE-level, due to the quota sharing among some of the 4CDE regulatory areas and ultimately the combined halibut abundance estimated for Area 4CDE.¹⁰

The IPHC does specify separate catch limits for Area 4B and 4CDE. Thus, the Option 1 of Alternative 2 allows the threshold for Area 4B to be chosen independently of Area 4CDE:

Option 1. Defining 'low catch limits' for the purpose of allowing leases. Designation of low catch limits is independently determined for Areas 4B and 4CDE. The threshold for designating a year of low halibut catch limit in each area is less than (separate sub-options may be selected for Area 4B and Area 4CDE):

Sub-option 1. 1 million pounds (PA for Area 4B)

Sub-option 2. 1.3 million pounds

Sub-option 3. 1.5 million pounds (PA for Area 4CDE)

To provide some context, these proposed thresholds are compared to the adopted catch limits in Area 4B and Area 4CDE, as well as attainment between 2008 and 2016 in Table 11. Throughout this time period, none of the catch limits have fallen below the 1 Mlb threshold. Area 4CDE was below the 1.3 Mlb threshold in 2014 and 2015 (1.285 Mlb). Area 4B was below the 1.3 Mlb threshold in 2014, 2015, and 2016 (1.14 Mlb) and was below the 1.5 Mlb threshold in 2013 (1.45 Mlb). For most CDQ groups, a drop in the number of small vessels participating in the CDQ halibut fishery occurred in either 2013, 2014 or both years (refer to Table 3).

⁹ The Council's Catch Share Plan sets the combined Area CDE limits as: 46.43% to Area 4C, 46.43% to Area 4D, and 7.14% to Area 4E, when the total catch limit *does not exceed* 1,657,600 pounds. If the Area CDQ catch limit exceeds 1,657,600 pounds, then an addition fixed 80,000 pounds is set aside for Area 4E (CDQ), and the percentages are applied to the remainder.

¹⁰ All of the proposed 'low catch limits' are below the threshold which changes the Area 4CDE allocations, therefore, it should not make a mathematical difference whether the Council used the combined Area 4CDE catch limits or the individual Area 4C and 4D catch limits to create a threshold to trigger the allowance of IFQ leasing; these apportionments will move together at all of the proposed thresholds.

Table 11 Adopted catch limits and commercial catch (including IPHC research catch; in pounds, net weight) for Area 4B and Area 4CDE, 2008 through 2016

Year	4B		4CDE	
	Catch Limit	Commercial Catch	Catch Limit	Commercial Catch
2008	1,860,000	1,760,000	3,890,000	3,880,000
2009	1,870,000	1,590,000	3,460,000	3,310,000
2010	2,160,000	1,830,000	3,580,000	3,320,000
2011	2,180,000	2,050,000	3,720,000	3,430,000
2012	1,869,000	1,740,000	2,465,000	2,340,000
2013	1,450,000	1,250,000	1,930,000	1,770,000
2014	1,140,000	1,120,000	1,285,000	1,260,000
2015	1,140,000	1,110,000	1,285,000	1,210,000
2016	1,140,000	NA	1,660,000	NA

Source: 2016 CDQ program quota categories, target and non-target CDQ reserves, allocation percentages, and group quotas: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/reports/annualmatrix2016.pdf>

Table notes: NA = not available data. Additional carryover from the underage/ overage not included. Catch from 2015 are preliminary estimates.

3.8.6 Option 2: Leased Area 4D IFQ May Be Fished in Area 4E

Option 3 of the action alternative would allow for more explicit movement of Area 4D IFQ into Area 4E. Under this option:

Option 2. Leased Area 4D IFQ may be fished in Area 4E. (PA)

Even without the adoption of Option 2, Alternative 2, this action has the potential to change some of the historic patterns of harvest; both within a regulatory area and among areas, through the ability to harvest some halibut QS associated with one regulatory area, across area lines. As previously mentioned, some of the QS is able to be harvested in multiple IPHC regulatory areas. The Area 4C CDQ/ IFQ allocation may be fished in 4C or 4D. The Area 4D CDQ allocation may be fished in 4D or 4E. Although there is no IFQ fishery in Area 4E, and Area 4D IFQ cannot be fished in Area 4E, harvest in Area 4E could be indirectly impacted by this proposal as well.

For example, if NSEDC wanted to expand their halibut fishing opportunities in Area 4E (the Nome halibut fishery), they may attempt to lease Area 4D halibut IFQ QS. This non-CDQ IFQ would not be transferable to harvest opportunities in Nome, however NSEDC could use this IFQ to provide opportunities to their Savoonga fishery, freeing up Area 4D CDQ to be transferred to their Nome fishery.

Historically, due to the harvest flexibility described in Section 3.5.2, Area 4E has had up to 67% harvest above its allocated level due to this ability to move fishing effort from Area 4D. Area 4D harvest is often lower than its harvest limit, even with the inclusion of 4C allocation caught in Area 4D. Thus, while the IPHC may not perceive this potential for change in locational fishing intensity from the proposed action to be a threat to overall stock conservation as long as the Area 4CDE total catch limit is not exceeded,

there is a possibility of localized impacts on fishing opportunities if fishing effort patterns were to change substantially.

If the Council chooses to adopt Alternative 2, Option 2, it would make recommendations for regulatory changes to the IPHC as well as to the Secretary of Commerce. In order for ‘CDQ-leased’ Area 4D IFQ to be harvested in Area 4E, IPHC and NMFS regulations would need to be amended. For IPHC regulation changes, the Commissioners would need to take action on these changes at its annual meeting in January. IPHC-recommended regulation changes are then forwarded to the governments of the U.S. and Canada for implementation before the start of the fishing season in that same year. If the Council and NMFS recommend regulation changes to the IPHC, they would do so during IPHC’s call for regulatory proposals in the fall of the year prior to anticipated implementation. Regulatory change proposals are due to IPHC at the end of October each year to be considered for action by the Commissioners for the next year’s fishery.

A preliminary evaluation has determined that the following IPHC regulations may need to be revised with the inclusion of Option 3:¹¹

- Section 7 (Fishing in Regulatory Area 4E and 4D) to add IFQ leased by CDQ,
- Section 11 (Catch Limits) to add IFQ amounts leased by CDQ, and
- Section 18 (Fishing Multiple Regulatory Areas), which currently has specific prohibitions about how much halibut from multiple areas may be possessed on board a vessel in any specific area at any time.

3.8.7 Option 3: Cooling Off Period for Lease of QS

As described in Section 3.8.3, there is a potential for QS market effects given a new opportunity to lease IFQ. Individuals could seek to acquire halibut QS in Areas 4B, 4C, or 4D without the intention of fishing it themselves, rather under the intention of leasing the IFQ to the CDQ groups, and earning a lease fee from the transaction. As described in Section 3.8.3, while the original IFQ Program goals sought to maintain existing business relationships (goal #5), the program was also focused on discouraging new business models that may perpetuate an absentee owner fishery (goal #6). Recent Program amendments have reinforced the Council’s commitment towards this original objective of maintaining an owner-operated fleet (NPFMC/NMFS 2016). Therefore, if the Council wishes to discourage the type of market behavior in which an individual may purchase QS without the intention of ever fishing it themselves, the Council could include a provision that establishes a “cooling-off period”. A cooling-off period would be a period of time after QS is acquired in which that QS could not be leased. More specifically:

Option 3. Any Area 4B, 4C, or 4D catcher vessel QS transferred after December 14, 2015¹² may not be leased as IFQ to CDQ groups under this action for a period of:

Sub-option 1. 3 years

¹¹ Note that some of these regulations may need to be amendment for Alternative 2 even without the adoption of Option 3.

¹² The Council selected the control date, based on the date they first considered the proposal as a discussion paper and first considered setting a control date.

Sub-option 2. 4 years

Sub-option 3. 5 years (PA)

A cooling-off period would discourage a person from buying QS with the intention of leasing the IFQ, as it is difficult to make a large investment, such as a QS purchase, by relying on potential sources of revenue (lease rates) several years away. Moreover, it is difficult to predict what the halibut stock conditions (and ultimately catch limits) will be 3, 4, or 5 years out; therefore, a buyer would be uncertain of whether this option would even be available to them. The inclusion of this option would make it more difficult to consider leasing as a viable opportunity when determining whether or not to buy QS.

The tradeoff to this option, is the potential to constrict the available pool of leasable QS to a point where CDQ groups leasing, is not a viable option. An analysis of Area 4B, 4C, and 4D QS transfers can also provide a sense for how constraining Option 3 and its sub-options may be on a CDQ group in search of leasable QS. Table 12 through Table 14 demonstrate trends in QS transfers in these areas. These tables reveal limited market activity overall, particularly in the more recent years. The average total annual transfers in Area 4B, 4C, and 4D represent about 8%, 7%, and 6% of the corresponding QS pools, respectively. In the last 5 years, there has only been 26 transfers of QS in Area 4C and 4D combined.

Furthermore, the percentages in Table 12 through Table 14 likely represent an overestimate as they are calculated as the number of QS units transferred compared to the total QS pool. In other words, if 1,000 units of QS change hands in a year 3 times, this will be depicted as 3,000 QS units transferred divided by the total QS pool. This also means there could be more than 100% represented if the same QS units are transferred more than once.

Table 12 Area 4B QS transfers, 2000 through 2016

Year	Number of transfers	Max transfer (% of pool)	Median transfer (% of pool)	Total transfers (% of QS pool)
2000	34	1.8%	0.3%	16.2%
2001	26	1.5%	0.4%	13.0%
2002	12	1.8%	0.4%	6.1%
2003	25	2.2%	0.3%	13.9%
2004	12	2.8%	0.5%	10.6%
2005	10	3.5%	0.4%	7.1%
2006	5	2.4%	0.4%	3.8%
2007	12	1.6%	0.3%	4.9%
2008	24	2.4%	0.3%	11.3%
2009	19	2.0%	0.4%	12.4%
2010	9	2.0%	0.3%	4.9%
2011	22	1.6%	0.4%	10.8%
2012	6	2.0%	0.6%	4.9%
2013	7	0.9%	0.2%	2.0%
2014	5	1.2%	0.4%	2.6%
2015	4	0.4%	0.4%	1.7%
2016	12	0.6%	0.2%	2.9%

Source: NMFS RAM QS/ IFQ transfer data sourced through AKFIN

Table 13 Area 4C QS transfers, 2000 through 2016

Year	Number of transfers	Max transfer (% of pool)	Median transfer (% of pool)	Total transfers (% of QS pool)
2000	8	1.5%	0.4%	4.7%
2001	14	5.1%	0.7%	18.2%
2002	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2003	5	3.4%	3.2%	11.5%
2004	8	3.4%	0.8%	9.4%
2005	7	3.4%	1.0%	9.5%
2006	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2007	9	2.4%	1.1%	9.6%
2008	8	3.4%	1.0%	10.4%
2009	7	3.4%	0.8%	9.3%
2010	6	4.2%	0.7%	8.0%
2011	18	4.2%	0.6%	13.8%
2012	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2013	4	0.7%	0.4%	1.6%
2014	4	1.7%	0.7%	3.7%
2015	5	3.4%	0.7%	7.0%
2016	1	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%

Source: NMFS RAM QS/ IFQ transfer data sourced through AKFIN

Table 14 Area 4D QS transfers, 2000 through 2016

Year	Number of transfers	Max transfer (% of pool)	Median transfer (% of pool)	Total transfers (% of QS pool)
2000	16	2.4%	0.8%	15.2%
2001	14	2.4%	0.7%	14.9%
2002	11	4.0%	0.9%	13.3%
2003	10	2.3%	1.0%	10.3%
2004	3	3.9%	1.6%	6.6%
2005	5	0.6%	0.5%	2.1%
2006	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2007	10	2.3%	0.8%	9.6%
2008	2	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%
2009	3	0.5%	0.4%	1.1%
2010	7	2.3%	0.6%	6.7%
2011	10	4.9%	0.9%	13.8%
2012	1	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%
2013	2	0.6%	0.3%	0.6%
2014	3	0.6%	0.4%	1.2%
2015	6	3.9%	0.7%	8.1%
2016	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: NMFS RAM QS/ IFQ transfer data sourced through AKFIN

Given that QS transfers patterns are tied to many external factors, such as, importantly, halibut catch limits, it is very difficult to predict future transfer rates. In lieu of predicting how much Areas 4B, 4C, and 4D QS will be transferred in future years, (thereby making it temporarily unavailable for leasing to CDQ groups under Option 3), looking back on transfer rates in 5-year increments can provide a basis with which to consider effects of the Council’s PA. Table 15 illustrates that, had the PA provisions been in place in 2000, and a CDQ group wished to lease Area 4B QS in 2004, up to 60% of the 4B QS would be unavailable due to recent transfers. Again, it is necessary to remember these percentages represent an overestimate as some QS may have been transferred multiple times. Given the declining trend of QS transfers illustrated in Table 12 through Table 14 in Areas 4B, 4C, and 4D, Table 15 also demonstrates that a 5-year cooling-off period would have less of a constraining effect on the leasable QS after 2004.

Table 15 Percent of QS pool transferred in 5-year increments, Area 4B, 4C, and 4D

5-year range	4B	4C	4D
2000-2004	59.8%	43.6%	59.5%
2005-2009	39.4%	38.9%	13.4%
2010-2014	25.2%	27.1%	24.0%

Source: NMFS RAM QS/ IFQ transfer data sourced through AKFIN

While Table 15 presents some example periods based on the Council’s PA, the effect of Sub-option 1 (a 3-year cooling-off period) and Sub-option 2 (a 4-year cooling-off period) may also be considered by

summing the percentage points under total transfers for 3 or 4 year increments in Table 12 through Table 14.¹³

Option 3 would require NMFS RAM Division to investigate the transaction history of QS holdings before approving a lease of IFQ. This would most likely be done on a case-by-case basis at the time of transaction. Although NMFS has indicated it will automate this process as much as possible, the need to review transfer history, may increase the time to process the leasing transaction and increase administrative costs.

3.8.8 Option 4: Limit to the Duration of Leasing

Option 4 was included to address the policy concerns associated with allowing for a non-owner operated fishing option (described in Section 3.8.3.1). Alternative 2 would already restrict duration of use by only being available in years in which the catch limits fall below the specified levels (established under Alternative 2, Option 1). The intent behind Option 4 is to further limit the amount of time a halibut QS holder could depend on leasing as a viable business decision. Option 4 states:

Option 4. No individual halibut QS holder may lease halibut IFQ to any CDQ group, on a consecutive basis, for more than:

- Sub-option 1. 2 years
- Sub-option 2. 3 years
- Sub-option 3. 4 years

It is difficult to understand the impacts from Option 4 because there is no basis with which to predict how many consecutive years the halibut catch limit in Area 4B and in Areas 4C and 4D, would fall below the thresholds identified under Alternative 2, Option 1. Additionally, it is unclear which QS holders would be motivated to lease their IFQ and how much IFQ a CDQ groups would seek to lease. The answers to these latter questions are situational dependent. For instance, as mentioned, a CDQ groups' interest in leasing IFQ may depend on how accessible the halibut resource is to local fishing grounds. Clearly, if the Council chooses a lower number of consecutive years, a QS may be more likely to be constrained in their leasing efforts than if the Council chose a greater number.

There is likely to be administrative costs associated with both flagging years in which, under Alternative 2, these leasing opportunities were available, but also in identifying that halibut QS holders that are eligible to lease their IFQ during these years. While this process will be automated to the extent possible, NMFS RAM Division has indicated this would likely be done on a case-by-case basis at the time of transfer, which particularly under a limited number of transfers, may minimize some of the administrative burden. Option 4 would require RAM Division to identify the number of consecutive years a QS holder has leased IFQ to a CDQ group before approving a transfer.

¹³ Note that this provides an approximate percent of the QS pool transferred as the QS pool changed slightly in Area 4C and 4D during this time period.

3.8.9 Option 5: Limit to the Size of Leasable QS

In an effort to minimize the negative impacts on Aleutian Island communities near Area 4B fishing grounds, the Council included Option 5 for analysis in October 2016. Stakeholders described that communities in the Aleutian Islands benefit from QS holders that fly out to the Aleutian Islands, pay a fee to walk onboard a resident's vessel, pay business and raw fish tax to the state and community based on the weight of their landings, and may also purchase food, fuel and other goods and services in town. Community representative expressed concern about losing this beneficial economic activity should these QS holders chose to lease their IFQ to a CDQ group and ultimately used by residents in a different community.

The Council included Option 5 as a potential way to allow for some leasing to QS holders with small holdings of IFQ, while maintaining owner-on-board requirements for those QS holders with larger amounts of IFQ. Particularly if a QS holder lives out of state and needs to be on board to harvest their IFQ, those with small amounts of IFQ are more likely to leave their holdings unharvested. Option 5 states:

Option 5. Limit the ability to lease Area 4B halibut IFQ to CDQ groups under this action to QS holders that own less than:

- Sub-option 1. 2,000 pounds
- Sub-option 2. 5,000 pounds
- Sub-option 3. 7,500 pounds

The way the Option 5 is written, no distinction of QS Class is made. In other words, if the Council chose Sub-option 1 (2,000 pounds), and an individual held 1,500 pounds of B Class IFQ and 3,000 pounds of C Class IFQ in that year, they would not be permitted to lease.

It is also not clear if the amount IFQ held would be Area-specific or encompassing of all QS holdings. For instance, if the Council chose Sub-option 1 (2,000 pounds), and an individual held 1,500 pounds of Area 4B IFQ and 3,000 pounds of Area 4C IFQ, that individual would not be permitted to lease given the current language. The Council should make it clear this is the intent.

Table 16 provides some context for number of QS holders and characteristics of IFQ holdings in Area 4B that would be eligible to lease their IFQ based on the Council's 3 sub-options. Because Option 5 establishes thresholds in pounds, with no reference year, eligibility to for a QS holder to lease will change depending on the halibut catch limits (i.e. the QS:IFQ ratio for the season). If the catch limits are higher, less individuals would have QS holdings that amount to 2,000 pounds in a given season. However, the eligibility is also dependent on Area 4B catch limit dropping below a certain threshold; one million pounds is suggested by the Council's PPA under Option 1. Therefore Table 16, is based off what IFQ holdings would be if the catch limit for Area 4B were one million pounds. An Area 4B allocation of one million pounds results in 200,000 pounds to CDQ groups (20%) and 800,000 pounds allocated as IFQ.

Table 16 Number of QS holders and IFQ characteristics for Area 4B, based on IFQ that would be issues if Area 4B catch limit dropped to 1 million pounds

Size categories (in pounds)	Number of QS holders	Mean amount of IFQ held (in pounds)	Total amount of IFQ (in pounds)	Percent of total amount of IFQ
< 2,000	16	889	14,225	1.8%
< 5,000	17	3,305	56,185	7.0%
< 7,500	12	5,829	69,951	8.7%
≥ 7,500	36	18,323	659,639	82.5%
Total	81	9,877	800,000	100.0%

Source: NOAA RAM division, QS holder database sourced through AKFIN

Again, it is difficult to say how constraining each threshold would be to CDQ groups, without knowing how much interest there would be in leasing. Clearly, establishing a lower number of pounds would both more constraining in terms of the pounds available, but also in the number of QS holders eligible to engage in leasing.

Identifying whether a QS holder’s annual IFQ is small enough to qualify for leasing to CDQ groups would be another element that could increase the administrative burden with the associated transaction. NMFS RAM Division has indicated that like Option 3 and 4, this element would mostly likely require a manual check at the time of transfer (i.e. leasing of IFQ). With the expectation that this type of leasing would not occur frequently, the administrative burden would then not be expected to be large.

3.8.10 Other Management and Enforcement Considerations

3.8.10.1 Vessel IFQ Caps

The vessel IFQ cap (also referred to as “vessel cap” or “vessel use cap”) restricts the amount of IFQ that can be consolidated and accounts for the IFQ species harvest on one vessel during a season. Vessel IFQ caps do not apply to CDQ. However, in the proposed action, vessel IFQ caps would still apply for the IFQ leased to CDQ groups and fished by CDQ hired masters, just as it does under the status quo for the vessel being used by any other hired skipper. Under status quo, if a vessel is harvesting both CDQ and IFQ halibut during a single trip, they are required to ensure these separate harvests are identifiable, and this requirement would be maintained under the proposed action.

While regulations would not change in this situation, the scope of this action may expand this provision to vessels operators that are not familiar with this practice. While it may be unlikely that a small CDQ resident-owned vessel would be in danger of exceeding the vessel IFQ caps for halibut, these vessel operators would still be required to ensure IFQ halibut and CDQ halibut are separate harvests and are identifiable.

3.8.10.2 Overage/ Underage Provision

The overage/ underage provision for the IFQ fishery provides flexibility for IFQ holders who are near their IFQ landing limits. This provision allows for an administrative adjustment of IFQ permits as a result of under- and overfishing the prior year up to 10%. Overages of greater than 10% of the IFQ allocation

remaining at time of landing are treated as violations and subject the IFQ holder to enforcement action. Administrative adjustments “follow the QS” so that the adjustment is computed for the permit of the person who, at the beginning of a year, holds the QS associated with the IFQ that was under- or overfished the prior year. Under Alternative 2, this provision would be in place, consistent with the status quo.

3.8.10.3 Certification

For monitoring and enforcement purposes, the more provisions for CDQ hired masters match what is currently required of halibut IFQ hired masters, the easier this action could be to implement. For example, this would mean a vessel operator harvesting halibut CDQ and halibut IFQ leased to a CDQ group would need to carry:

- CDQ halibut permit
- CDQ hired masters permit
- IFQ permit of CDQ group
- IFQ hired master permit

Halibut that is landed would be coming off two separate catch limits. Therefore, for purposes of catch accounting, participants would need to understand which halibut they harvest is associated with the group’s CDQ and what is associated with IFQ.

3.8.10.4 Cost Recovery

The proposed action alternative would be expected to generate some initial administrative costs. For example, in establishing the regulations to provide for IFQ leasing to CDQ groups during low catch limit years, NMFS would create an IFQ permit held only by CDQ groups. NMFS would also make changes to the database that monitors transfers of IFQ from one permit holder to another. There also may be some small variable costs associated with the annual use of this IFQ leasing flexibility, including verification of the eligibility (as described under Option 3, 4, and 5 in Sections 3.8.7, 3.8.8, and 3.8.9), the issuing of the IFQ hired master permit to hired masters designated by a CDQ group, and any increased enforcement costs.

Section 304(d)(2)(A) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, obligates NMFS to recover the actual costs of management, data collection, and enforcement (direct program cost) of the IFQ fisheries. Therefore, NMFS implemented a cost recovery fee program for the IFQ fisheries in 2000 (65 FR 14919, March 20, 2000). While cost specific to the CDQ Program are recoverable through a separate cost recovery program (81 FR 150, January 5, 2016), the proposed regulatory changes would be made to the IFQ leasing and hired master use provisions and therefore constitute changes in management of the IFQ Program. CDQ group participants using this flexibility would be expected to contribute to IFQ cost recovery as a portion of the ex vessel value of their landed halibut; just as any other user of halibut IFQ.

3.9 Summation of the Alternatives with Respect to Net Benefit to the Nation

This section uses qualitative methods to assess the potential net benefit of action on the Nation (relative to the no action baseline). Compared to ‘no action’, the proposed action (Alternative 2) in this analysis would allow CDQ groups to lease Area 4B, 4C, or 4D commercial halibut IFQ from QS holders in times when the catch limit in Area 4B and/or Area 4CDE reaches below a certain limit. Under Alternative 2, any leased halibut IFQ would be available for use by the halibut CDQ fleet onboard vessels less than or equal to 51 feet LOA (with a halibut CDQ permit and a CDQ hired master permit), subject to the group’s internal halibut management.

The analysis indicates that if the halibut catch limits for these areas never fall low enough for this flexibility to be available (i.e., the catch limit does not fall below the threshold determined under Alternative 2, Option 1), the proposed action will have no effect on any stakeholder groups compared to the baseline, with the exception that some minor administrative costs will be incurred by NMFS (see Section 3.8.10.4). These costs would be expected to be recovered in the cost recovery fee program for the IFQ fisheries.

If the halibut catch limit does fall below the established threshold, there is no guarantee that any CDQ group will choose to pursue IFQ leasing opportunities. Groups may take advantage of other economic fishing opportunities such as, having residents harvest A class IFQ, increasing their harvest of CDQ Pacific cod to augment revenue from halibut, leasing halibut CDQ from other CDQ groups, aiding their residents operator as hired masters, and/ or purchasing their own QS. It could also be the case, that although the catch limit is low, the halibut resource and/ or ocean and weather conditions are not conducive to promoting additional halibut harvesting opportunities in nearshore areas that are accessible to the CDQ fleet. Furthermore, CDQ group may choose to use their funds to promote other types of economic opportunities for their residents. In any of these cases, the proposed action will also have no effect on any stakeholder groups, with the exception that some minor administrative costs will be incurred by NMFS.

If a CDQ group does choose to lease IFQ in order to promote additional halibut harvesting opportunities for their residents at times of low halibut catch limits, there is expected to be distributional impacts. Assuming that the groups are acting in the best economic and socio-economic interests of the residents in their communities, this additional opportunity could keep halibut fisheries open to the CDQ fleet, and could keep community members employed in harvesting and secondary service operations and in a culturally important profession. In addition, this action may provide an opportunity for halibut QS holders with QS in Area 4B, 4C, or 4D a chance to lease this IFQ to CDQ groups and receive a lease rate in years when the harvest limits drop below a certain threshold. This may be their only opportunity to lease and it may create the benefit of helping to retain local QS holdings.

These benefits are in contrast to possible distributional cost on non-QS holding crew and vessel owners, depending on how leased IFQ impacts current operations. There would be possible distributional impacts to processors and communities, to the extent that these processors are not the primary plant for both IFQ and CDQ halibut in the region. The lack of movement in the QS market could create additional barriers to

entry for new QS holder; however, QS from these areas has typically been the least expensive compared to other areas off of Alaska. Options 3, 4, and 5 considered under Alternative 2 may mitigate some of the negative distributional impacts felt.

Overall, there would be no expected changes to the amount of halibut harvested, conservation of the species, product produced, price of the product, or other impacts to the consumers, and therefore the proposed action would either have no effect on net benefits to the Nation, or if negative distributional costs proved to be minor, and community and socio-economic benefits occurred, action could potentially produce small net benefit to the Nation.

4 INITIAL REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) addresses the statutory requirements of the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA) of 1980, as amended by the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996 (5 U.S.C. 601-612). This IRFA evaluates the potential adverse economic impacts on small entities directly regulated by the proposed action.

The RFA, first enacted in 1980, was designed to place the burden on the government to review all regulations to ensure that, while accomplishing their intended purposes, they do not unduly inhibit the ability of small entities to compete. The RFA recognizes that the size of a business, unit of government, or nonprofit organization frequently has a bearing on its ability to comply with a Federal regulation. Major goals of the RFA are 1) to increase agency awareness and understanding of the impact of their regulations on small business, 2) to require that agencies communicate and explain their findings to the public, and 3) to encourage agencies to use flexibility and to provide regulatory relief to small entities.

The RFA emphasizes predicting significant adverse economic impacts on small entities as a group distinct from other entities, and on the consideration of alternatives that may minimize adverse economic impacts, while still achieving the stated objective of the action. When an agency publishes a proposed rule, it must either ‘certify’ that the action will not have a significant adverse economic impact on a substantial number of small entities, and support that certification with the ‘factual basis’ upon which the decision is based; or it must prepare and make available for public review an IRFA. When an agency publishes a final rule, it must prepare a Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, unless, based on public comment, it chooses to certify the action.

In determining the scope, or ‘universe’, of the entities to be considered in an IRFA, NMFS generally includes only those entities that are directly regulated by the proposed action. If the effects of the rule fall primarily on a distinct segment, or portion thereof, of the industry (e.g., user group, gear type, geographic area), that segment would be considered the universe for the purpose of this analysis.

4.2 IRFA Requirements

Until the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) makes a final decision on a preferred alternative, a definitive assessment of the proposed management alternatives cannot be conducted. In order to allow the agency to make a certification decision, or to satisfy the requirements of an IRFA of the preferred alternative, this section addresses the requirements for an IRFA. Under 5 U.S.C., section 603(b) of the RFA, each IRFA is required to contain:

- A description of the reasons why action by the agency is being considered;
- A succinct statement of the objectives of, and the legal basis for, the proposed rule;
- A description of and, where feasible, an estimate of the number of small entities to which the proposed rule will apply (including a profile of the industry divided into industry segments, if appropriate);

- A description of the projected reporting, record keeping, and other compliance requirements of the proposed rule, including an estimate of the classes of small entities that will be subject to the requirement and the type of professional skills necessary for preparation of the report or record;
- An identification, to the extent practicable, of all relevant Federal rules that may duplicate, overlap, or conflict with the proposed rule;
- A description of any significant alternatives to the proposed rule that accomplish the stated objectives of the proposed action, consistent with applicable statutes, and that would minimize any significant economic impact of the proposed rule on small entities. Consistent with the stated objectives of applicable statutes, the analysis shall discuss significant alternatives, such as:
 1. The establishment of differing compliance or reporting requirements or timetables that take into account the resources available to small entities;
 2. The clarification, consolidation, or simplification of compliance and reporting requirements under the rule for such small entities;
 3. The use of performance rather than design standards;
 4. An exemption from coverage of the rule, or any part thereof, for such small entities.

In preparing an IRFA, an agency may provide either a quantifiable or numerical description of the effects of a proposed action (and alternatives to the proposed action), or more general descriptive statements, if quantification is not practicable or reliable.

4.3 Definition of a Small Entity

The RFA recognizes and defines three kinds of small entities: 1) small businesses, 2) small non-profit organizations, and 3) small government jurisdictions.

Small businesses. Section 601(3) of the RFA defines a ‘small business’ as having the same meaning as ‘small business concern’, which is defined under section 3 of the Small Business Act (SBA). ‘Small business’ or ‘small business concern’ includes any firm that is independently owned and operated and not dominant in its field of operation. The SBA has further defined a “small business concern” as one “organized for profit, with a place of business located in the United States, and which operates primarily within the United States or which makes a significant contribution to the U.S. economy through payment of taxes or use of American products, materials or labor...A small business concern may be in the legal form of an individual proprietorship, partnership, limited liability company, corporation, joint venture, association, trust or cooperative, except that where the firm is a joint venture there can be no more than 49% participation by foreign business entities in the joint venture.”

Section 601(3) of the RFA provides that an agency, after consultation with SBA’s Office of Advocacy and after an opportunity for public comment, may establish one or more definitions of “small business” which are appropriate to the activities of the agency. In accordance with this provision, NMFS has established a small business size standard for all businesses in the commercial fishing industry, for the purpose of compliance with the Regulatory Flexibility Act only. **A business is considered to be a small business if it is independently owned and operated and not dominant in its field of operation (including its affiliates) and if it has combined annual gross receipts not in excess of \$11.0 million**

for all its affiliated operations worldwide. The \$11.0 million standard applies to all businesses classified under the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 11411 for commercial fishing, including all businesses classified as commercial finfish fishing (NAICS 114111), commercial shellfish fishing (NAICS 114112), and other commercial marine fishing (NAICS 114119) businesses.

For fish processing businesses, the agency relies on the SBA size criteria. A seafood processor (NAICS 311710) is a small business if it is independently owned and operated, not dominant in its field of operation, and employs 750 or fewer persons on a full-time, part-time, temporary, or other basis, at all its affiliated operations worldwide. A business that both harvests and processes fish (i.e., a catcher/processor) is a small business if it meets the criteria for the applicable fish harvesting operation (i.e., the \$11.0 million standard described above). A wholesale business servicing the fishing industry is a small business if it employs 100 or fewer persons on a full-time, part-time, temporary, or other basis, at all its affiliated operations worldwide.

The SBA has established “principles of affiliation” to determine whether a business concern is “independently owned and operated.” In general, business concerns are affiliates of each other when one concern controls or has the power to control the other, or a third party controls or has the power to control both. The SBA considers factors such as ownership, management, previous relationships with or ties to another concern, and contractual relationships, in determining whether affiliation exists. Individuals or firms that have identical or substantially identical business or economic interests, such as family members, persons with common investments, or firms that are economically dependent through contractual or other relationships, are treated as one party with such interests aggregated when measuring the size of the concern in question. The SBA counts the receipts or employees of the concern whose size is at issue and those of all its domestic and foreign affiliates, regardless of whether the affiliates are organized for profit, in determining the concern’s size. However, business concerns owned and controlled by Indian Tribes, Alaska Regional or Village Corporations organized pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C. 1601), Native Hawaiian Organizations, or Community Development Corporations authorized by 42 U.S.C. 9805 are not considered affiliates of such entities, or with other concerns owned by these entities solely because of their common ownership.

Affiliation may be based on stock ownership when 1) a person is an affiliate of a concern if the person owns or controls, or has the power to control 50% or more of its voting stock, or a block of stock which affords control because it is large compared to other outstanding blocks of stock; or 2) if two or more persons each owns, controls or has the power to control less than 50% of the voting stock of a concern, with minority holdings that are equal or approximately equal in size, but the aggregate of these minority holdings is large as compared with any other stock holding, each such person is presumed to be an affiliate of the concern.

Affiliation may be based on common management or joint venture arrangements. Affiliation arises where one or more officers, directors, or general partners, controls the board of directors and/or the management of another concern. Parties to a joint venture also may be affiliates. A contractor and subcontractor are treated as joint venturers if the ostensible subcontractor will perform primary and vital requirements of a contract or if the prime contractor is unusually reliant upon the ostensible subcontractor. All requirements

of the contract are considered in reviewing such relationship, including contract management, technical responsibilities, and the percentage of subcontracted work.

Small organizations. The RFA defines “small organizations” as any not-for-profit enterprise that is independently owned and operated, and is not dominant in its field.

Small governmental jurisdictions. The RFA defines “small governmental jurisdictions” as governments of cities, counties, towns, townships, villages, school districts, or special districts with populations of fewer than 50,000.

4.4 Reason for Considering the Proposed Action

The purpose of this action alternative would be to alleviate the adverse impacts of decreasing available halibut resource on Western Alaskan communities, while taking into account the objectives of the halibut IFQ program. The Council adopted the following purpose and need statement in December 2015:

The Community Development Quota (CDQ) Program was established to provide an opportunity to eligible western Alaska communities to invest and participate in BSAI fisheries. Among the species CDQ groups are allocated, Pacific halibut is of primary importance to many resident small-boat fishermen for providing employment and income in many of the member communities. Most small vessels fishing halibut CDQ generally do not fish halibut IFQ, and recent years of low abundance have created hardships for participating CDQ halibut fishermen. In times of low halibut catch limits, additional opportunity for CDQ groups to lease and use halibut IFQ for fishing in Areas 4B and 4CDE may benefit resident CDQ fishermen without undermining the goals of the halibut IFQ Program.

4.5 Objectives of Proposed Action and its Legal Basis

The CDQ program, as specified by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), is intended to provide to provide western Alaska communities the opportunity to participate and invest in BSAI fisheries, to support economic development in western Alaska, to alleviate poverty and provide economic and social benefits for residents of western Alaska, and to achieve sustainable and diversified local economies in western Alaska (§305(i)). Recent years of low abundance have created hardships for participating CDQ halibut fishermen. The objective of the proposed action is to provide additional fishing opportunity for resident CDQ halibut fishermen in years of low halibut catch limits, without undermining the goals of the halibut IFQ Program.

The Halibut Act grants the Council the authority to oversee allocations of the halibut fishery in Alaskan and Federal waters. Thus the proposed action would not require changes to any Fisheries Management Plan; however, it would represent an amendment to a number of Federal regulations related to the IFQ program leasing provisions and the CDQ program. The proposed action would also constitute a proposal for corresponding changes in International Pacific Halibut Commission regulations.

4.6 Number and Description of Directly Regulated Small Entities

The thresholds that define a small entity are described in Section 4.3. The operative phrase in the action alternative under consideration is: [To] allow CDQ groups to lease halibut IFQ in Areas 4B, 4C, and 4D in years of low halibut catch limits in regulatory Areas 4B and 4CDE. In light of that, the universe of entities that might be directly regulated by this action is limited to the CDQ groups and the harvesters that have traditionally harvested halibut CDQ and may have an opportunity to harvest leased halibut IFQ as well.¹⁴

Regardless of their revenues, as they are deemed “small non-profits” that are independently owned and not dominant in their field, for purposes of the Regulatory Flexibly Act, CDQ groups are considered to be small entities (Querirolo 2013).

In addition to these six CDQ entities, the harvesters that have recently participated in the commercial halibut CDQ fishery are also considered to be directly regulated under the proposed action alternative. Under the action alternative, these entities may also have the opportunity to participate in the halibut IFQ fishery. To the extent that they do not already participate in this fishery, these individuals will be subject to new rules and regulations associated with halibut IFQ fishing. Given data limitation, vessels are considered a proxy for harvesters. AKFIN has provided the analysts with the most recent complete set of gross revenue data by vessel. This includes 244 vessels harvesting halibut CDQ in 2013, 94 vessels in 2014, and 65 vessels in 2015.

As defined in Section 4.3, an \$11.0 million standard now applies to all businesses classified under the NAICS code 11411 (i.e., commercial fishing), regardless of the type of fishing operation. Section 4.3 also explains that if a vessel has a known affiliation with other vessels – through a business ownership or through a cooperative – are measured against the small entity threshold based on the total gross revenues of all affiliated vessels. Based on average annual gross revenue data, including affiliations, all vessels that landed halibut between 2013 and 2015 are considered small entities, except for one vessel which participated in 2013. Including the six CDQ groups the total number of small entities directly regulated in the proposed action alternative results in: 249 small entities in 2013, 100 small entities in 2014, and 71 small entities in 2015.

4.7 Recordkeeping, Reporting, and Other Compliance Requirements

This section cannot be fully completed until the Council selects a preferred alternative. However thus far, no unique professional skills have been identified to be required for the CDQ groups or vessel operators to comply with any of the reporting and recordkeeping requirements associated with the proposed action.

¹⁴ The NMFS Regional Economist for Alaska provides guidance on the preparation of the IRFA. That guidance states that for a small entity to be “directly regulated” by the action, the action must require some affirmative action on the part of the specific entity. This is a higher threshold than simply stating that an entity is potentially impacted by the action. The action alternative under consideration merely “allows” CDQ groups and their resident fleets to participant in leasing of B, C and D class IFQ; it does not require it. Secondary impacts of IFQ leasing cannot strictly be described as the result of direct regulation. It is questionable whether any entities or harvesters are directly regulated by the considered action, since no affirmative action on their part is *required*.

The requirements that apply to the CDQ groups require knowledge of the CDQ group's fishing activities, including contractual arrangements with vessel operators and processing plants, and quota balances, and the authority to submit information to NMFS on behalf of the CDQ group. These responsibilities generally are fulfilled by a member of the CDQ group's professional staff who already is fulfilling similar reporting and recordkeeping functions for other aspects of the CDQ Program. The vessel operator must have the ability to receive information from the CDQ group and the organizational skills necessary to maintain the document(s) in good, readable condition in a place on the vessel where it can be retrieved, if requested by U.S. Coast Guard or NMFS enforcement officers.

4.8 Federal Rules that may Duplicate, Overlap, or Conflict with Proposed Action

This section cannot be fully completed until the Council selects a preferred alternative. At this stage, no existing federal rules have been identified that would duplicate, overlap, or conflict with the proposed action alternative.

4.9 Description of Significant Alternatives to the Proposed Action that Minimize Adverse Economic Impacts on Small Entities

The purpose of an IRFA analysis is to identify if the proposed action will result in a disproportionate and/or significant adverse economic impact on the directly regulated small entities, and to consider alternatives that would lessen this adverse economic impact to those small entities. Section 4.6 highlighted that the number of small, directly regulated entities according to SBA definitions includes CDQ groups and halibut CDQ harvesters. However, importantly, these entities would all be voluntarily participating in the IFQ program regulatory system in addition to their current operations, and therefore they would be expected to experience positive economic (and socio-economic) impacts from Alternative 2.

Alternative 1 (the no action alternative) would not be expected lessen the adverse economic impact on directly regulated small entities, as the impacts from Alternative 2 are expected to be positive towards these entities. In addition, Alternative 1 would not meet the Council's objective of providing for additional harvesting flexibility for CDQ group community residents at times of low halibut catch limits, nor would it address Magnuson-Stevens Act National Standard 8¹⁵ and the objectives of the CDQ program cited in §305(i)(1)(A).

A discussion of the economic impacts to small entities from the options that are presented under Alternative 2 will be expanded on once the Council had identified a preferred alternative. Until then, this section cannot be fully completed.

¹⁵ Conservation and management measures shall, consistent with the conservation requirements of this Act (including the prevention of overfishing and rebuilding of overfished stocks), take into account the importance of fishery resources to fishing communities by utilizing economic and social data that meet the requirements of paragraph (2), in order to (A) provide for the sustained participation of such communities, and (B) to the extent practicable, minimize adverse economic impacts on such communities. (Magnuson-Stevens Act §301(a)(8))

5 PACIFIC HALIBUT ACT CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Northern Pacific Halibut Act

The fisheries for Pacific halibut are governed under the authority of the Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982 (Halibut Act, 16 U.S.C. 773-773k). For the United States, the Halibut Act gives effect to the Convention between the United States and Canada for the Preservation of the Halibut Fishery of the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea. The Halibut Act also provides authority to the Regional Fishery Management Councils, as described in § 773c:

(c) Regional Fishery Management Council involvement

The Regional Fishery Management Council having authority for the geographic area concerned may develop regulations governing the United States portion of Convention waters, including limited access regulations, applicable to nationals or vessels of the United States, or both, which are in addition to, and not in conflict with regulations adopted by the International Pacific Halibut Commission. Such regulations shall only be implemented with the approval of the Secretary, shall not discriminate between residents of different States, and shall be consistent with the limited entry criteria set forth in section 1853(b)(6) of this title. If it becomes necessary to allocate or assign halibut fishing privileges among various United States fishermen, such allocation shall be fair and equitable to all such fishermen, based upon the rights and obligations in existing Federal law, reasonably calculated to promote conservation, and carried out in such manner that no particular individual, corporation, or other entity acquires an excessive share of the halibut fishing privileges.

It is necessary for the Council to consider the directions in the Halibut Act about the regulations that may result from this action. Much of the direction listed in § 773c(c) is duplicative with the Magnuson-Stevens Act's National Standard 4, requiring that regulations not discriminate between residents of different States, and directing that if halibut fishing privileges are allocated or assigned among fishermen, such allocation shall be fair and equitable.

The Halibut Act also directs regulations to be consistent with the limited entry criteria set forth in the Magnuson-Stevens Act. These are criteria that the Council and the Secretary must take into account when establishing a limited access system for a Magnuson-Stevens Act fishery. The criteria are listed below.

- (A) present participation in the fishery;
- (B) historical fishing practices in, and dependence on, the fishery;
- (C) the economics of the fishery;
- (D) the capability of fishing vessels used in the fishery to engage in other fisheries;
- (E) the cultural and social framework relevant to the fishery and any affected fishing communities;
- (F) the fair and equitable distribution of access privileges in the fishery; and
- (G) any other relevant consider actions.

Once the Council has identified a preferred alternative, this section will include an assessment of that alternative in relation to these criteria.

6 PREPARERS AND PERSONS CONSULTED

Preparers and Contributing Staff

Sarah Marrinan, NPFMC
Tracy Buck, NMFS Alaska Region RAM Division
Albert Duncan, NOAA OLE
Michael Fey, PSFMC AKFIN
Rachel Baker, NMFS Alaska Region SF
Jamie Goen, IPHC
Claude Dykstra, IPHC
Lauren Smoker, NOAA GC

Persons Consulted

Heather McCarty, CBSFA
Jeff Kauffman, CBSFA
Mateo Paz-Soldán, CBSFA
Simeon Swetzof, Jr., City of St. Paul
Simon Kinneen; NSEDC
Ann Vanderhoeven, BBEDC
Troy Wilkinson, CVRF
Luci Roberts, APICDA
Jeff Farvour, ALFA
Buck Laukitis, Magic Fish Co.

7 REFERENCES

- National Marine Fisheries Service [NMFS]. 2014. Fishing year 2012: Pacific halibut-sablefish IFQ report. March 2014. Juneau, AK. Available at:
<https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/reports/rtf12.pdf>
- NMFS. 2015a. Transfer Report – Changes under Alaska’s Sablefish IFQ Program, 1995 through 2014. Available online: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/reports/sablefish-transferrpt2015.pdf>
- NMFS. 2015b. RIR/IRFA/EA for a proposed Amendment 109 to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area: Pacific cod community development quota fishery development. Draft for Secretarial Review. July 2015. Juneau, AK.
- North Pacific Fishery Management Council [NPFMC] and National Marine Fisheries Service [NMFS]. 1992. Final supplemental environmental impact statement/ environmental impact statement for the individual fishing quota management alternative for fixed gear sablefish and halibut fisheries: Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea Aleutian Islands. Anchorage, AK. September 15, 1992. Available at: https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/analyses/amd_15_20_seis_0992.pdf
- North Pacific Fisheries Management Council/ National Marine Fisheries Service [NPFMC/NMFS]. 2016. Twenty-Year Review of the Pacific Halibut and Sablefish Individual Fishing Quota Management Program. December, 2016. Available at: http://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/halibut/IFQProgramReview_1216.pdf
- NPFMC. 2015a. Appendix C: Proposed Bering Sea/ Aleutian Islands Halibut Prohibited Species Catch Limit Revisions: Community Analysis. (May 2015). Prepared for NPFMC by AECOM, Inc. San Diego, CA. Available at:
<http://npfmc.legistar.com/gateway.aspx?M=F&ID=4f5ad4ed-33b1-4dfe-88d2-e7e366e60c5d.pdf>
- NPFMC. 2015b. Discussion paper: Halibut IFQ leasing by CDQ groups. December 2015. Anchorage, AK. Available at: <http://npfmc.legistar.com/gateway.aspx?M=F&ID=900d267f-b62f-49bb-b507-7d08e944ba50.pdf>
- Queirolo, L. E. 2013. Conducting Economic Impact Analyses for NOAA Fisheries Service. (Revised in response to Presidential Executive Order 13563). National Marine Fisheries Service, P. O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802. October 24, 2013.