



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

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Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Halibut Abundance-based PSC Limits - Discussion Paper

STAFF CONTACT: Diana Stram

ACTION REQUIRED:

Review discussion paper; action as necessary.

BACKGROUND:

The Council is examining abundance-based approaches to establishing halibut prohibited species catch (PSC) limits in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) because current halibut PSC limits are a fixed amount of halibut mortality in metric tons. When halibut abundance declines, halibut PSC becomes a larger proportion of total halibut removals and can result in lower catch limits for directed halibut fisheries; conversely, when halibut are abundant, a fixed amount of PSC can be very constraining to groundfish fisheries. Both the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) and the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) have expressed concern about impacts on directed halibut fisheries under the status quo and identified abundance-based halibut PSC limits as a potential management approach to address these concerns.

The Council tasked an inter-agency workgroup of NMFS AKR, NMFS AFSC, IPHC, and Council staff to develop abundance-based approaches for BSAI halibut PSC limits, building upon previous work by IPHC staff. The workgroup has met numerous times and has produced two different discussion papers (in April 2016 and again in October 2016) to provide information necessary to establish abundance-based PSC limits as well as to provide draft index and control rule formulations for Council consideration. Per Council direction, two different stakeholder workshops have also been held, the most recent in conjunction with the February 2017 Council meeting. The current discussion paper (attached) builds upon these previous papers with direction as provided by the Council and the SSC in October. This discussion paper is intended to address the Council's October requests for further development of indices and control rules as well as to incorporate feedback from the workshop held in February 2017. A supplement to the paper is also attached which provides an example of the application of the candidate control rule-indices combinations (noted in the paper as Abundance Based Management ABM examples) retrospectively to illustrate the calculation of PSC limits using the ABM examples in the discussion paper.

Members of the inter-agency workgroup from the Council, AFSC, AKRO, and IPHC will be available to present the discussion paper. Council action and next steps for continued development of alternatives are contained in the discussion paper.