



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

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Agenda Date 2/1/2016

Agenda Number: C4

Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:
Halibut Management Framework - SSC/Council Review

STAFF CONTACT: Chris Oliver

ACTION REQUIRED:
Review framework; action as necessary

BACKGROUND:

At the June 2015 meeting, after taking action to reduce halibut PSC (bycatch) limits in the BSAI groundfish fisheries, the Council committed to additional efforts to address halibut bycatch, including development of a strategic planning document (Halibut Management Framework) intended to integrate the various management and research activities currently underway, and to improve coordination and communication between the Council and the IPHC. This initiative is intended, in part, to ensure progress on a number of items discussed at the February 2015 joint Council/IPHC meeting in Seattle, WA. In October 2015 the Council reviewed a first draft of the Framework document, and provided direction to staff for revisions. In December 2015, the Council received additional public input on the draft, as well as initial input from the IPHC, and passed a motion (**attached**) which provided further direction in three key areas. Specifically, the Council took action to (1) identify specific, overarching objectives for the Framework; (2) identify (preliminary) priority research issues; and (3) identify specific actions to improve coordination and communication with the IPHC.

Further Council direction on the Framework is expected in February 2016, following on further input from the IPHC who will be reviewing the revised draft Framework at its January 2016 meeting in Juneau, Alaska. The Council is also requesting input from its SSC in February 2016, specifically in the areas of research, in order to help the Council and IPHC prioritize research issues and inform further development of the key research issues which will inform future decision-making by both the Council and the IPHC. The Framework document is viewed by the Council as a strategic planning document intended to inform and guide the Council in achieving halibut management objectives, and is expected to be updated and revised as necessary.

One of the issues discussed at the February 2015 joint Council/IPHC meeting, and identified as a priority within our Council's Framework document, is interest in pursuing some type of abundance-based PSC management approach. IPHC staff took the lead on this issue with Dr. Steve Martell preparing an initial discussion paper which has been reviewed by both the IPHC and the Council (but not the Council's SSC). Following Dr. Martell's presentation in December, the Council passed a motion to form an interagency staff working group to pick up on this initiative by evaluating alternative methods to index halibut PSC limits based on halibut abundance (yield). The Council requests that this workgroup describe potential data and management advantages and challenges provided by alternative methods to index halibut PSC limits based on abundance and to evaluate the effects of various assumptions on an abundance-based approach, such as those related to natural mortality (by size and age), growth rates, size composition of PSC by sector, and the long-term spawning capital of juvenile halibut, with the goal of returning abundance-based recommendations

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to the Council as soon as possible.

This workgroup is in the formative stages, but the initial plan is for them to incorporate Dr. Martell's conceptual paper into the workgroup's consideration, and to also explore other, potentially simpler approaches. A report from the workgroup would be vetted through the Council's SSC prior to coming before the Council, with a tentative target of April 2016 for an initial workgroup report. Membership of the staff workgroup includes: Diana Stram (NPFMC), Bruce Leaman (IPHC), Rachel Baker (NMFS Region), Jim Ianelli (NMFS AFSC), Dana Hanselman (NMFS AFSC), and Carey McGilliard (NMFS AFSC).

At its December meeting, the Council also formed its own Halibut Management Committee consisting of three Council members (Dan Hull, Simon Kinneen, and Craig Cross) and the three U.S. IPHC Commissioners, in order to better coordinate halibut management issues from a domestic perspective. That Committee will likely hold its initial meeting sometime later this spring, possibly in conjunction with its April 2016 meeting in Anchorage. The Council is also pursuing the potential establishment of a 'Joint Protocol Committee' with the IPHC (similar to our Joint Protocol Committee with the Alaska Board of fisheries), which would likely be broader in scope, and would include IPHC Commissioners of the IPHC's choosing, but would be generally aimed at pursuing issues of mutual interest, as were raised in the February 2015 joint Council/IPHC meeting or through the Framework discussions.

The Council's December motion also included a request to the IPHC to provide the Council with a presentation on its Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process and progress to date, as that initiative could intersect in some ways with the Council's strategic planning document (Framework). April 2016 may be an opportune time to receive that update.