



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:GF 14-004

Agenda Date 10/6/2014

Agenda Number: C4

John Henderschedt, Acting Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:
Proposed Groundfish Harvest Specifications/Plan Team Report

ESTIMATED TIME:
2 Hours

ACTION REQUIRED:
Adopt proposed Groundfish Harvest Specifications; receive Plan Team reports

BACKGROUND

Plan Team Reports

During their meetings on September 23-26, 2014, the BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Teams recommended proposed groundfish harvest specifications for 2015 and 2016. The Teams also considered numerous informational reports and made recommendations for inclusion in final assessments for November. Team recommendations for the next two fishing years are based on rollovers of the published 2015 final harvest specifications, which were adopted by the Council in December 2013. The reports from the meetings of the Joint BSAI/GOA Groundfish Plan Team, BSAI Groundfish Plan Team, and GOA Groundfish Plan Team are attached (item 1).

Proposed Harvest Specifications

The Council is scheduled at this meeting to recommend proposed BSAI and GOA groundfish harvest specifications for the next two-year period to notify the public of likely outcomes for Council action to set final harvest specifications in December 2014. Following this practice, 2015 annual harvest specifications were published in the *Federal Register* and will start the groundfish fisheries in January 2015. Proposed harvest specifications for 2016 will be adopted at this meeting and are set equal to the 2015 annual harvest specifications. Any proposed Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits for halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *opilio* crab, and herring and their gear type and target fishery apportionments, should be adopted by the Council at this meeting so that the final rule, based on final harvest specifications from December 2014, is a logical outgrowth of the proposed rule. Final harvest specifications will be based on stock assessments included in the respective Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Reports for the BSAI and GOA, which will be released in late November 2014.

Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands. The BSAI Plan Team recommendations for proposed 2015/2016 BSAI groundfish annual harvest specifications are attached (item 2). The Team adopted proposed 2015 BSAI OFLs and ABCs that were published in the *Federal Register* last year for the purpose of notifying the public of potential final specifications. Final BSAI harvest specifications include PSC limits for halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *opilio* crab, and herring and their gear type and target fishery apportionments, which are set in

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federal regulations. The 2015/2016 crab and herring PSC numbers will be revised when the most current biomass amounts are known. Proposed specifications for these PSC limits and apportionments based on 2015 are attached (item 3).

Flatfish flexibility ABC reserve. Amendment 105, which is effective as of October 23, 2014, affects the annual harvest specifications for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole, beginning in 2015. The Final Rule to implement this is attached (item 4). Under this amendment, an ABC reserve will be specified for the three flatfish species, which will be allocated to CDQ groups and Amendment 80 cooperatives using the same formulas that are used in the annual harvest specifications process. The ABC reserve for each species will be specified by the Council, by evaluating the ABC surplus for the species (i.e., the difference between the ABC and TAC), considering whether the amount needs to be reduced by a discretionary buffer amount based on social, economic, or ecological considerations. The Council will then designate some, all, or none of the ABC surplus as the ABC reserve. The Council should provide its rationale for setting the ABC reserve at a particular level for these three flatfish species each year. An example table provided by NMFS staff based upon TAC levels for 2015 specifications for these species and an assumption of the maximum ABC reserve is attached (item 3).

NMFS will provide a report on flatfish exchanges by the Amendment 80 cooperatives to the Council each year for the December meeting, to inform the Council's decision on future annual harvest specifications as to whether to establish a buffer reducing the amount of the ABC reserve available to be exchanged by eligible entities. The report will include information on the number of vessels used to harvest cooperative quota, the number of flatfish exchanges and the dates those exchanges were approved, the types of and amounts of cooperative quota and Amendment 80 ABC reserve utilized, and the dates, types, and amounts of inter-cooperative quota transfers.

Gulf of Alaska. The GOA Plan Team recommendations for proposed 2015/2016 GOA groundfish harvest specifications are listed below. Since 1997, the Council has reduced the GOA Pacific cod TAC to account for removals of not more than 25 percent of the Federal Pacific cod ABC from the State Guideline Harvest Level fisheries. Using the area apportionments of the proposed 2015 Pacific cod ABC that was recommended by the Plan Team, the 2015/2016 Federal TACs for Pacific cod would be adjusted as listed in the attached table (item 5).

The 2015 halibut PSC apportionments recommended are based on the 2015 apportionments for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries are attached (item 6). The 2016 tables attached (item 7) incorporate the reductions in halibut PSC limits, per Amendment 95 and the regulatory revisions that were published earlier this year. Amendment 95 to the GOA FMP will reduce the 2016 GOA halibut PSC limits for the groundfish trawl gear sector and groundfish catcher vessel (CV) hook-and-line gear sector by 15 percent. The 2016 hook-and-line catcher/processor sector's halibut PSC apportionment will be reduced by 7 percent. Salmon PSC limits are set in regulation.