



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:Catch 17-019

Agenda Date10/2/2017

Agenda Number:D3

Dan Hull, Chairman
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Halibut Retention in Sablefish Pots - Discussion paper

STAFF CONTACT: Sam Cunningham

ACTION REQUIRED:

Review discussion paper; action as necessary

BACKGROUND:

In June 2017, the Council received public testimony that killer whale depredation on longline gear continues to be a challenge in the BSAI sablefish and halibut IFQ fisheries. The Council requested this paper to outline the steps necessary to allow retention of Pacific halibut in pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) sablefish IFQ fishery, which could make the harvest of IFQ more efficient for fishermen and for the resource. The Council is also interested in a pot retention action for halibut because current Federal and IPHC regulations are out of alignment in regards to legal gear for halibut retention in the BSAI. IPHC regulations state that pots are legal gear for halibut throughout Alaska, but Federal regulations state that halibut may only be retained in pot gear when fishing for sablefish IFQ in the Gulf of Alaska.

This paper identifies scenarios where the Council, NMFS, and IPHC would need to coordinate action to allow halibut retention in BSAI pot gear. In that respect, the paper distinguishes between a Council action with the intent of retaining incidentally caught halibut when fishing for sablefish, and an action where halibut could be intentionally caught and retained with pot gear.

Section 2 includes a history of the Council's considered and completed actions relating to halibut retention in pot gear, dating back to 2012. That section also provides links to previous discussion papers, analyses, and correspondence between the Council and IPHC. Section 3 identifies the specific language in Federal and IPHC regulations that might need to be revised depending on the intent of the action that might be proposed for consideration. Section 4 provides a high-level data summary on participation and catch rates in BSAI fixed-gear fisheries (sablefish, halibut, and Pacific cod), and information on the amount and size of halibut taken as bycatch in sablefish pots. Section 5 summarizes and updates information on whale depredation that has been presented to the Council as part of previous actions.