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News & Notes

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

June 2014

Thank You, Nome!

The Council held the June Council meeting in Nome, Alaska. Many local stakeholders participated in the week-long meetings, and local and regional businesses went out of their way to ensure a successful meeting. Thank you to the Chamber of Commerce who helped coordinate the logistics, as well as the many groups who provided lodging, catering, and internet capabilities. Also thanks to NSEDC who hosted a BBQ at the Safety Roadhouse. A good time was had by all.



Olson Terms Out

Eric Olson served on the Council process for 13 years – 4 years on the Advisory Panel, 9 on the Council, and 7 of those as Chairman. The Council and NSEDC hosted a “Toast and Roast” to the outgoing chairman, and a fun evening was had in the land of the midnight sun! Thank you Chairman Olson for your work in managing Alaska’s fisheries, and we look forward to working with you in a different capacity in the future.



David Witherell, photo

BSAI Halibut Bycatch Reduction

During its June 2014 meeting, the Council identified its plans for addressing Pacific halibut bycatch in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Island groundfish fisheries. First, the Council requested voluntary actions from five groundfish fishing sectors (American Fisheries Act Catcher Processor, American Fisheries Act Catcher Vessel, Amendment 80, Freezer Longline Cooperative, and Community Development Quota) to reduce halibut mortalities in the BSAI resulting from halibut PSC use, as well as discards in the directed halibut fishery, by a cumulative 10% from the current 5-year average levels, through the 2014-15 fishing seasons. The Council requested that industry report back to the Council on those voluntary halibut reduction measures and the effectiveness of those measures in terms of absolute reductions in halibut mortalities. These reports are scheduled for February 2015.

The Council requested several actions to be undertaken by NMFS: 1) continue to work with the Amendment 80 sector to develop deck sorting procedures and technologies that could reduce halibut mortalities, in order to initiate regulatory changes for a full-scale program; 2) continue to work with the International Pacific Halibut Commission to provide halibut bycatch and discard size data from the Observer Program in a form that can be better incorporated into IPHC stock assessments; and 3) evaluate the potential to reduce halibut PSC use under: a) the Amendment 80 flatfish flexibility program, b) a potential change to the Amendment 80 trawl season opening date from January 20 to January 1, and c) potential changes to the current Amendment 80 area closures.

The Council also adopted a purpose and need statement and initiated an analysis of alternatives to reduce the halibut PSC limits in the BSAI groundfish fisheries. In addition to the “No Action” alternative, Alternative 2 includes options to: 1) establish seasonal apportionment of halibut PSC in the BSAI trawl limited access sector and 2) analyze a range of 10, 20, 30, and 35 percent reductions of current halibut PSC limits to the five sectors identified above. Alternative 3 would implement measures in the Amendment 80 sector to allow deck sorting of halibut. Initial review of the Analysis is scheduled for February 2015

The Council requested that the analysis include reviews of specific information, which are listed in the motion that is posted on the Council website. The Council noted its interest in reviewing a revised version of an IPHC paper on the biological and management issues related to accounting and management of all sizes of halibut, which is planned to be provided to the IPHC later this year and potentially acted on during its January 2015 meeting. The Council may revise the above alternatives after reviewing the IPHC paper. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo/Diana Evans.



Nome, AK - Photo: Joy Berger

Upcoming meetings:

AFSC Independent Peer Review, BSAI Stock Assessment: July 29-31, 9am-5pm, AFSC, Seattle

Crab Plan Team: September 15-18, AFSC

BS FEP public meeting : September 15, Seattle, 3-6pm (tentative, location TBD)

Ecosystem Committee: September 16, AFSC, Seattle 8:30am-5pm (timing tentative)

Electronic Monitoring Workgroup: September 17-18, Seattle, AFSC; 17th: 8:30-5p; 18th: 8:30-noon (timing tentative)

Observer Advisory Committee: September 18-19, AFSC, Seattle, 18th: 1-5p; 19th: 8:30-5p (timing tentative)

Groundfish Plan Team: September 23-25 and November 17-21, AFSC, Seattle

Crab Modeling workshop: (T) Anchorage, January 12-14

Bering Sea FEP

The Council provided an opportunity for stakeholders to comment on the potential development of a Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP). The Council initiated a series of scoping meetings to get public input on a BS FEP after reviewing a discussion paper in February 2014. A meeting will be held in Seattle in September, and there will also be an opportunity to provide input at the October Council meeting in Anchorage. Staff contact is Diana Evans.

Research Priorities

The Council identified a five-year research plan for 2014-2018, as required by Magnuson-Stevens Act, which is posted online. The Council chose to carry over the research priorities identified in June 2013, which were developed based on recommendations from its four Plan Teams, the Scientific and Statistical Committee, and the Advisory Panel, as they considered that the priorities expressed in 2013 are still current. Staff and the SSC have been working on transitioning the research priority list to a relational database system accessed through a web portal, <https://research.psmfc.org/>, developed by Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission staff. The use of the database will allow the Council to track more information relative to each research priority, including Plan Team prioritization, keywords, and the status of research activity. The SSC and the Council identified a number of improvements to the process and to decision-making materials, which will be addressed in the coming year.

Salmon EFP

The Council approved an application for a salmon excluder exempted fishing permit to continue research on salmon bycatch reduction devices in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. The purpose of the EFP is to improve performance of the salmon excluder device developed in trials in 2011 and 2012. The testing will occur over several weeks during both A and B seasons of 2015 and 2016. In order to test the excluder device the applicants require exemptions to existing regulations for salmon bycatch management, observer requirements, several closures and additional TAC for pollock and other

incidentally caught groundfish species. EFP fishing would be permitted if the ABC for Bering Sea pollock exceeds the TAC by at least 5,000 mt in 2015 and 2,500 mt in 2016. The EFP also requires a total (2015-2016) of additional Chinook salmon PSC (1,450) and chum salmon PSC (3,000). It is also estimated to need approximately 12 mt of halibut PSC per season. Results will be presented to the Council at the conclusion of the project. Reports on the previous analyses of iterative designs for salmon excluder devices by the applicant are posted on the Council's website. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

BSAI Halibut PSC Rollover

The 167-mt halibut PSC limit for the yellowfin sole fishery category has been reached and NMFS closed its directed fishery by the BSAI trawl limited access sector on May 18, 2014. As of May 24, 2014, 12,623 mt of yellowfin sole allocation to the sector remained. Currently, 347 mt of unused halibut PSC remains of the total 875 mt PSC limit for the BSAI trawl limited access sector. Of the 453 mt PSC limit for the Pacific cod fishery category, 169 mt remained unused as of May 24, 2014. After receiving a request from NMFS to reapportion the BSAI trawl limit access halibut PSC limit between fisheries, the Council recommended that NMFS reapportion 60 mt of halibut PSC in the Bering Sea Pacific cod fishery to the Bering Sea yellowfin sole fishery, as NMFS projects that the halibut PSC limit for the Pacific cod fishery category will not be reached during 2014.

Norton Sound Red King Crab

The Council followed up on a public testimony from October 2013 in which a participant of the Norton Sound Red King Crab (NSRKC) fishery asked the Council to take action to reduce over-capitalization in the fishery. Specifically the stakeholder ask the Council to lift the exemption for vessels less than or equal to 32 ft to operate in the NSRKC fishery without a License Limitation Program (LLP) license. Additionally, there was a suggestion of an LLP recency program which would remove licenses that were latent. The testimony suggested that at least one reported NSRKC landing in the past five years would be required in order to maintain a license. Council received a discussion paper produced by staff that demonstrated characteristics of participation in the recent years. The paper demonstrated an increase in the number of small vessels (vessels \leq 32 ft) participating in the fishery in recent years and that out of 62 LLP licenses, 24 of those licenses had made at least one landing in the five year period from 2008 to 2012.

This item was discussed in Nome in order to gather more public input on these management strategies. After receiving additional public testimony from stakeholders of the fishery, the Council urged the fleet and local stakeholder to work together to bring potential solutions or alternatives back to the Council at a future meeting. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

Bering Sea Salmon Bycatch Management

The Council has been iteratively reviewing the performance of management measures for Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery since the implementation of Amendment 91 in 2011. Overall bycatch levels have been much lower than historical levels and very low in comparison to the cap level and performance standard established in regulation. However, given continuing concerns regarding poor returns to western Alaskan Chinook salmon stocks, the Council continues to focus on potential improvements to Chinook bycatch management in the Bering Sea. Additionally, the Council is interested in moving forward with more comprehensive concurrent management of Chinook and chum salmon bycatch management in the Bering Sea pollock fishery.

At the Council's request, a discussion paper was prepared which included an analysis of regulatory issues associated with proposed modifications to address chum and Chinook salmon bycatch management. For chum salmon this entailed discussion of the regulatory changes needed to incorporate Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch avoidance into the Chinook salmon Incentive Plan Agreements (IPAs). For Chinook information, the paper centered on both the vessel-level bycatch performance estimates and an evaluation of potential refinements to current measures to further reduce bycatch encounters, especially at low levels of abundance. Specific information was presented on measures to impose restrictions or penalties on vessels with consistently high Chinook bycatch rates in the IPAs, to require the use of salmon excluders when Chinook encounter rates are high, modifying provisions of how

the rolling hot spot program closures are enacted, shortening the pollock fishery when pollock catch rates decline and Chinook bycatch rates increase (late B season September/October) and modifying the accounting period for application of the Chinook PSC limit.

After considerable discussion of the likely impacts of modifying measures under the IPAs and considerations of appropriate incentive-based measures to reduce bycatch, the Council initiated an analysis for combined chum and Chinook salmon bycatch management measures. The Council noted in its purpose and need statement for this analysis, that while Chinook salmon bycatch impact rates have been low under the Amendment 91 program, there is evidence that improvements could be made to ensure the program is effectively reducing Chinook salmon bycatch at low abundance. Measures to be considered in this analysis include provisions to avoid salmon late in the year and to strengthen incentives across both seasons.

Alternatives to be considered include incorporating chum salmon avoidance into the IPAs, revising IPAs for Chinook provisions to address the identification of vessels with higher rates relative to other vessels, mandating the use of salmon excluders, and modifying provisions of the hot spot program and savings credits issuance under specific IPAs. Alternatives also consider revising the pollock fishery seasons to alter the start and end date of the B season and reducing the current performance standard by 25-60% in times of low western Alaska Chinook abundance. The problem statement, as well as more specific options and additional considerations to be analyzed, are available in the motion on the Council's website. The analysis will be available online by early November and will be addressed at the December 2014 Council meeting in Anchorage. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

Crab Specifications

The Council reviewed final stock assessments and set specifications for three crab stocks in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands: Norton Sound red king crab (NSRKC), Western Aleutian Islands red king crab (WAIRKC), and Aleutian Islands golden king crab (AIGKC). The current biomass estimate for NSRKC is below its BMSY estimate, while biomass estimates are not available at this time to determine stock status for WAIRKC or AIGKC stocks. The SSC recommended ABC buffer levels higher than the maximum permissible for all three stocks with 10% for NSRKC, 40% for WAIRKC and 25% for AIGKC. The SSC also recommended that a workshop be conducted for assessment of all North Pacific data-poor stocks as well as the consideration of how best to approximate uncertainty in the ABC control rule. The Crab Plan Team in September will begin this process by detailing how uncertainty is addressed in the current crab ABC control rule and its application across stocks in September. Additional information on the data-poor workshop will be posted as topics and timing for it are developed. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

Vacancy: Staff Fishery Analyst

Position serves as a fisheries management analyst, working closely with other biologists and economists in the identification and analysis of issues pertaining to fishery management plan development and amendments, with specific focus on potential effects of management measures on fish stocks and other resources. More information available on the website. Closing date July 25, 2014.



The Advisory Panel met in Old St. Joe's Church in Anvil City Square. Photo: Joy Berger

CDQ Pacific Cod Development

An analysis for initial review was presented to the Council on the development of a CDQ small vessel Pacific cod fishery. The action alternatives in the analysis focused on increasing opportunities for the retention of Pacific cod for commercial sale. The measures analyzed would be applicable to vessels ≤ 46 ft LOA using hook-and-line gear that fish on behalf of a CDQ group. The Council reviewed four alternatives including: 1) no action, 2) increasing the maximum retainable amount (MRA) of Pacific cod in the halibut CDQ fishery for this group of vessels, from 20 percent of a halibut harvest, up to 100 percent of the halibut harvest, 3) create a new CDQ License Limitation Program (LLP) license that is annually distributed to eligible CDQ participants, with options to move this group into the partial observer coverage category, and 4) a direct exemption for participating CDQ vessels from the LLP that also moves these vessels into a partial observer category consistent with the Annual Deployment Plan.

The Council chose to release the EA/RIR /IRFA for public review after revising Alternative 4, to incorporate additional elements outlined in a "NMFS Recommendations" document (elements 1 (i) through (ix)). This document makes clear the extent of the LLP exemption and the requirements for documentation of eligibility for this exemption. It describes CDQ Pacific cod, halibut and other groundfish retention requirements and the catch accounting process that would take effect in a directed CDQ Pacific cod fishery under this alternative. The document describes how the directed CDQ Pacific cod fishery would be constrained to the halibut CDQ season and

area closures as well as Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) requirements would remain consistent with the status quo. With the incorporation of these elements, Alternative 4 would constitute a Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA).

The document is moving forward with the addition of three new options for future analysis under the PPA. These options are not mutually exclusive. The first is applying the management measures proposed Alternative 4 to all vessels ≤ 46 ft LOA using hook-and-line gear while directed fishing for any CDQ groundfish species, in addition to Pacific cod. The second option would analyze whether to expand the current prohibition against discarding legal sized halibut while IFQ fishing to participates of the CDQ halibut fishery, while the CDQ group has remaining halibut CDQ. Finally, Option 3 would allow the Pacific cod CDQ directed fishery to operate if there was no halibut CDQ or IFQ available to fund the incidental catch of halibut in this fishery. In a situation where there is no targeted halibut quota available (CDQ or IFQ), all incidentally caught halibut would be considered prohibited species catch (PSC). Analysts will consider alternative approaches to estimating the halibut PSC using data from observed vessels in the partial coverage category for the Council's consideration.

It was made clear during staff tasking that the Council wants to review the revised analysis in October 2014. If analysis of Option 3 cannot be completed by then, the Council may consider taking final action on the other alternatives and options and consider further analysis of Option 3 as a trailing amendment. The revised draft analysis will be released in September. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

Jane DiCosimo, the Council's senior plan team coordinator, is leaving the Council after 20 years. She will be moving on to NMFS headquarters in Silver Spring, MD to be the National Observer Program Coordinator. Thank you Jane, for your work on the Council and for your work in maintaining the sustainability of our nation's fisheries.



Observer Program

The Council reviewed the 2013 Annual Report for the Observer Program, the first report assessing a full year of fishing under the restructured program, and addressed a number of observer and electronic monitoring (EM) issues. Motions are available on the Council website. Staff contact is Diana Evans.

Annual Deployment Plan (ADP) and Report

The Council supported NMFS' recommendation to move participants in the vessel selection pool (vessels 40 to 57.5 ft LOA) into the trip selection pool for the 2015 ADP, in order to resolve a source of bias that is affecting observer data quality for this vessel group. The Council also expressed concern about the policy of allowing conditional releases for these vessels, another source of potential bias. The Council requested more analysis of 2013 vessel selection pool data, as well as the likely burdens associated with carrying an observer in the trip selection pool, in order to consider removing provisions for conditional release. The Council will review the draft 2015 ADP in October 2014.

The Council also discussed coverage rates for the 2015 ADP. Consistent with its recommendation of the past two years, the Council requested NMFS to maintain a higher observer coverage rate for all trawl vessels, and fixed gear vessels over 57.5 ft LOA, in the revised trip selection pool, in order to have expanded coverage of PSC-limited fisheries. In order to maintain consistent levels of coverage in the early years of the restructured program, there was also support for continuing to request supplementary Federal funding, given that some of the collected fees have been set aside, due to Federal sequestration rules and as a reserve against overspending.

Lead Level 2 Availability

The Annual Report responded to Council queries about the availability of fixed gear lead level 2 observers, which are required in the full coverage freezer longline fleet. The Council asked the Observer Program to develop a system to credit observers for sampling longline sets, even if the observer is a second observer taken voluntarily by the vessel, for purposes of certification. Additionally, the Council initiated a discussion paper on long-term regulatory and non-regulatory solutions for developing a sustainable pool of fixed gear lead level 2 observers.

Observer Tendering Analysis

The Council reviewed a discussion paper on the proposed regulatory amendment to change the deployment of observers on catcher vessels in the partial coverage observer category when they are delivering to tender vessels. The Council initiated the amendment package in 2013 based on preliminary information from the first four months of 2013, which indicated that GOA vessels delivering to a tender were making longer trips when unobserved than when they were observed, and that this unrepresentative behavior could be an important source of variance and/or bias in catch data. In the 2013 Annual Report, the agency assessed data from the whole year, and no longer found the same acute difference in fishing behavior between observed and unobserved vessels, although noting that sample sizes were small. The Council also heard a report about the interaction between the observer tendering amendment and the GOA trawl bycatch management action, in which 100% observer coverage is proposed for trawl vessels, resolving the issue of bias for this gear type. It was noted that the issue of trawl vessels delivering to tenders will have to be considered in that action, especially with respect to salmon sampling practices.

Given these discussions, the Council opted to reconsider the priority of the observer tendering amendment, and requested that NMFS evaluate and report back on tendering data for the first part of 2014, in order to assess whether there is a seasonal aspect to the tendering bias that is masked by aggregating to the annual scale. Additionally, the Council removed Option 2 from the analysis, which allows observer to monitor trawl offloads at the tender in order to census salmon, and asked that it be included directly in the GOA trawl bycatch management action.



Observer recording data. Photo: Megan Petersen

Electronic Monitoring Workgroup

The Council reviewed the minutes from the first Electronic Monitoring Workgroup, which took place on May 15-16, 2014 in Anchorage, and supported the conceptual approach outlined. The Council appointed the Workgroup at the April 2014 meeting, in order to bring industry members, observer providers, and agency staff together to address cooperative research needs to advance the Council's goal of integrating EM for fixed gear vessels into the Observer Program. The Workgroup reported agreement on overall goals and objectives for the various components of the cooperative research, including summaries of the four research tracks, and how the tracks will be integrated. Over the summer, Workgroup members will continue to identify protocols to ensure that data from the various EM research projects is gathered consistently. The Council agreed with the work to date, and asked the SSC to review study designs and data review protocols in order to evaluate the program's ability to inform a regulatory amendment package for integrating EM. A preliminary discussion of the timeline for the program, and how it will merge into an implementation process, was included in the minutes, and the EM Workgroup will meet in September to further develop decision points and timelines for the Council to consider in initiating an amendment package. Staff contact is Diana Evans.

DRAFT NPFMC THREE-MEETING OUTLOOK - updated 6/17/2014

October 6-14, 2014 Anchorage, AK	December 8-16, 2014 Anchorage, AK	February 2-10 Seattle, WA
MSA Reauthorization: Update Fishing Guide Definition: Review Draft Regulations	VMS Discussion paper: Review	
GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Discussion papers	Bering Sea Salmon Bycatch: Initial Review	GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Action as necessary
AI Pcod Allocation: Initial Review	AI Pcod Allocation: Final Action (T)	GOA Tendering (2015): Discussion Paper
Draft Observer Annual Deployment Plan: Review EM Workgroup report; OAC report	Observer coverage on small CPs: Discussion paper Observer coverage on BSAI trawl CVs: Discussion paper Electronic Monitoring: Discuss alternatives (T)	Bering Sea Halibut PSC, deck sorting: Initial Review (T) Industry sector reports on Bering Sea halibut bycatch
Charter Halibut Common Pool: CATCH proposal/Disc paper	Charter Halibut Management Measures for 2015 GOA sablefish longline pots: Initial Review IFQ Vessel Caps: Discussion paper	GOA sablefish longline pots: Final Action Area 4A halibut retention in sablefish pots: Initial Review (T)
Crab ROFR contract terms: Final Action ROFR Aleutia PQS: Final Action	Pribilof canyon corals: Receive comments re range of alternatives	
CDQ P.cod fishery development: Final Action		
BSAI Crab SAFE report: set ABC/OFL for 7 stocks: PT report		Norton Sound Red King Crab OFL/ABC Crab modeling report (SSC Only)
Proposed groundfish harvest specs: Approve; PT report	Final groundfish harvest specs: Approve; PT reports	
GOA Skate MRA revisions: Initial Review MRA enforcement period; all fisheries: Discussion Paper	GOA Skate MRA revisions: Final Action	ITEMS BELOW NOT YET SCHEDULED
Bering Sea FEP: Update/review objectives Ecosystem Committee report		Greenland Turbot allocation: Initial Review EFH 5-year Review (2015) BSAI Crab bycatch: Discussion paper Observer Lead Level 2: Discussion paper Observer fee collection methods: Discussion paper Observer exemption for deminimus IFQ: Discussion paper Observer requirements for multiple area fishing: Discussion paper Halibut DMRs 2016-2018; CDQ rates
EFH 5-year Review update: SSC only		
Am 80 5-year review: Final Report		

AI - Aleutian Islands
AFA - American Fisheries Act
BiOp - Biological Opinion
BSAI - Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands
BKC - Blue King Crab
BOF - Board of Fisheries
CQE - Community Quota Entity
CDQ - Community Development Quota
EDR - Economic Data Reporting
EFH - Essential Fish Habitat
EFP - Exempted Fishing Permit
EIS - Environmental Impact Statement
FEP - Fishery Ecosystem Plan
FLL - Freezer longliners

HAPC - Habitat Areas of Particular Concern
IFQ - Individual Fishing Quota
ICA - Inter-cooperative Agreements
IPA - Incentive Program Agreements
LLP - Limited License Plan
MPA - Marine Protected Area
MRA - Maximum Retainable Allowance
PSC - Prohibited Species Catch
RKC - Red King Crab
ROFR - Right of First Refusal
SIR - Supplemental Information Report
SSC - Scientific and Statistical Committee
SAFE - Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation
SSL - Steller Sea Lion

Future Meeting Dates and Locations
October 6-14, 2014 Anchorage
December 8-16, 2014, Anchorage
February 2-10, 2015, Seattle
April 6-14, 2015, Anchorage
June 1-9, 2015, Sitka
October 5-13, 2015 Anchorage
December 7-15, 2015, Anchorage
February 1-9, 2016, Portland
April 4 - 12, 2016, Anchorage
June - , 2016, TBA
October 3 -11, 2016 Anchorage
December 5-13, 2016, Anchorage