



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

605 W. 4th Ave. Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 271-2809
Fax (907) 271-2817

Action Memo

File Number:GF 14-048

Agenda Date 12/8/2014

Agenda Number: C4

Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Final BSAI Groundfish Harvest Specifications: Approve Specs; PT reports; Am 80/AFA incidental catch reports

ESTIMATED TIME:

6 Hours

ACTION REQUIRED:

Adopt final BSAI Groundfish Harvest Specifications; receive Plan Team reports; receive Am 80 and AFA incidental catch reports.

BACKGROUND:

At this meeting, the Council will adopt the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report including the Ecosystem Considerations Chapter and final recommendations on groundfish harvest specifications and PSC limits to manage the 2015 and 2016 BSAI groundfish fisheries. Upon publication in the *Federal Register*, the 2015/2016 final harvest specifications will replace harvest specifications adopted last year for the start of the 2015 fisheries.

BSAI SAFE Report

The BSAI Groundfish Plan Team met in Seattle on November 17-21, 2014 to prepare the BSAI Groundfish SAFE report. The SAFE report forms the basis for BSAI groundfish harvest specifications for the next two fishing years. The introduction to the BSAI SAFE report was mailed to the Council and Advisory Panel; it summarizes the Plan Team recommendations for each stock/complex. The full report, including the Economic SAFE report and Ecosystems Considerations chapter, was distributed to the SSC and is available on the Council website. The Council will review and adopt the full report at this meeting.

The Plan Team's recommendations for final harvest specifications for 2015 and 2016 are attached as C4 (**Item 1**). In October, the Council adopted proposed harvest specifications of OFL and ABC that were based on last year's stock assessments. In this SAFE report, the Plan Team has revised those projections due to the development of new models; collection of new catch, survey, age composition, or size composition data; or use of new methodology for recommending OFLs and ABCs. The November 2014 Joint Team and BSAI Plan Team minutes are attached as C4 (**Item 2** and **Item 3**). The SSC and AP recommendations will be provided to the Council during the meeting.

OFLs, ABCs, TACs, and Apportionments. The sum of the recommended ABCs for 2015 and 2016 are 2,842,543 t and 2,728,127 t, respectively. These compare with the sums of the 2014 ABCs (2,572,819 t) and 2013 ABCs (2,639,317 t), indicating relative stability. The Team recommended maximum permissible ABCs for all stocks, except for EBS pollock, EBS Pacific cod, and BSAI skates.

Overall, the status of the stocks continues to appear favorable. Nearly all stocks are above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy of $B_{35\%}$. The abundances of EBS pollock, EBS Pacific cod, all rockfishes managed under Tier 3, and all

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flatfishes except Greenland turbot managed under Tiers 1 or 3 are projected to be above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy of $B_{35\%}$ in 2015. The abundances of three stocks are projected to be below $B_{35\%}$ for 2015: AI pollock by about %, sablefish by about 0.2%, and Greenland turbot by about 1%.

TAC-setting

In setting TACs for 2015 and 2016 the Council accounts for guideline harvest levels (GHLs) for groundfish fisheries in state waters. The State waters fishery in the Bering Sea (BS) and Aleutian Islands (AI), respectively receives 3% of the combined BSAI ABC in each area. The resulting ABC, GHL, and TACs for these areas are attached as C4 (**Item 4**).

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. 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 (and used for the proposed rule) is attached as C4 (**Item 5**).

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.

Amendment 80/AFA incidental catch report. In October 2014, the Council tasked staff to provide a brief data summary of catch, discards, and retention on a haul-by-haul basis for incidental catch of BSAI flathead sole and BSAI rock sole for American Fisheries Act (AFA) vessels and incidental catch of BS pollock for Amendment 80 vessels. The intent of the request was to improve understanding of incidental catch of flathead sole and rock sole in the BSAI trawl limited access fisheries for AFA vessels and incidental catch of pollock by the Amendment 80 vessels while targeting their Amendment 80 allocations. The summary attached as C4 (**Item 6**) provides incidental catch at the aggregated haul level by target from 2000 through November 3, 2014, for pollock by Amendment 80 vessels and for flathead sole and rock sole for AFA vessels. The summary also includes a spatial analysis of observed 2008 through 2014 incidental catch of pollock by Amendment 80 vessels and rock sole by AFA vessels.

Prohibited Species Catch limits

Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits are established for halibut, crab, and herring during the specifications process and are allocated amongst sectors and seasons as described below (see **Item 7** for summary tables of all allocations and PSC limits by species).

Halibut PSC in Trawl Fisheries: The halibut PSC limits are apportioned to the trawl fishery categories. The overall PSC limit is fixed under Amendment 80 at 3,526 t. Additional reductions of 5% would occur if PSC limit amounts are transferred from the BSAI trawl limited access sector to the Amendment 80 trawl sector during a fishing year.

Halibut Trawl PSC Limits

3,526 t	Total Trawl Halibut Apportionment
2,325 t	Amendment 80
875 t	Trawl Limited Access
326 t	CDQ

Halibut PSC in Fixed Gear Fisheries: A 900 t non-trawl gear halibut mortality limit can be apportioned by fishery categories. The halibut PSC limit for the hook-and-line Pacific cod fishery is divided between the hook-and-line CP and CV sectors (CVs ≥ 60 ft (18.3 m) LOA and CVs < 60 ft (18.3 m) LOA combined). The Council can provide varying amounts of halibut PSC by season to each sector, tailoring PSC limits to suit the needs and timing of each sector.

Crab PSC in Trawl Fisheries: Prescribed bottom trawl fisheries in specific areas are closed when PSC limits of Tanner crab *C. bairdi*, snow crab *C. opilio*, and red king crab are reached. A stair step procedure for determining PSC limits for red king crab taken in Zone 1 trawl fisheries is based on the abundance of mature Bristol Bay red king crab. Based on the 2014 estimate of effective spawning biomass of 51.3 million pounds, the PSC limit for 2014 remains unchanged at 97,000 red king crabs. Up to 25% of the red king crab PSC limit can be used in the 56° - 56°10'N strip of the Red King Crab Savings Area. The red king crab PSC limit has generally been allocated among the pollock/Atka mackerel/other species, Pacific cod, rock sole, and yellowfin sole fisheries.

PSC limits for *C. bairdi* in Zones 1 and 2 are based on a percentage of the total abundance minus an additional reduction implemented in 1999 of *C. bairdi* crab as indicated by the NMFS trawl survey. Based on the 2014 model estimated total abundance (757,571,058 crabs), the PSC limit in 2015 for *C. bairdi* is unchanged from last year: 980,000 crabs in Zone 1 and 2,970,000 crabs in Zone 2.

Snow crab (*C. opilio*) PSC limits are based on total abundance of *opilio* crab. The limit is set at 0.001133% of the total snow crab abundance index, with a minimum limit of 4.5 million snow crabs and a maximum limit of 13 million snow crabs; the limit is further reduced by 150,000 crabs. The 2014 model estimate of 9,851,700,000 crabs result in a 2015 PSC limit of 11,011,976 crabs. Snow crab taken within the “*C. opilio* Bycatch Limitation Zone” accrues toward the PSC limits established for the trawl sectors.

Herring: An overall herring PSC limit is established as 1% of the EBS biomass of herring. This limit is apportioned to the seven PSC fishery categories. The ADF&G estimate of herring spawning biomass for the eastern Bering Sea for 2015 is 274,236 t. The corresponding herring PSC limit for 2015 at 1% of this amount is 2,742 t.

Seasonal apportionment of PSC limits. The Council may also seasonally apportion the above listed PSC limits. Regulations require that seasonal apportionments of bycatch allowances be based on information listed below.

Factors to be considered for seasonal apportionments of bycatch allowances:

1. Seasonal distribution of prohibited species;
2. Seasonal distribution of target groundfish species relative to prohibited species distribution;
3. Expected prohibited species bycatch needs on a seasonal basis relevant to change in prohibited species biomass and expected catches of target groundfish species;
4. Expected variations in bycatch rates throughout the fishing year;
5. Expected changes in directed groundfish fishing seasons;
6. Expected start of fishing efforts; and

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7. Economic effects of establishing seasonal prohibited species apportionments on segments of the target groundfish industry.