



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 15-153

Agenda Date12/7/2015

Agenda Number:

Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:
BSAI Groundfish Harvest Specifications - Final Action

STAFF CONTACT: Diana Stram

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

Approve the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report, including the Ecosystem Considerations Chapter and final BSAI groundfish harvest specifications for 2016 and 2017:

1. Overfishing Level, Acceptable Biological Catch, and Total Allowable Catch for all stocks.
2. Annual ABC reserve for 3 flatfish fisheries in 2016-2017.
3. Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits and seasonal apportionments of Pacific halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, opilio crab, and herring to target fishery categories.
4. TAC considerations for the State Waters Pacific cod fishery.

Receive report from workgroup addressing spatial management and stock structure issues; action as necessary.

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 2016 and 2017 BSAI groundfish fisheries. Upon publication in the *Federal Register*, the 2016/2017 final harvest specifications will replace harvest specifications adopted last year for the start of the 2016 fisheries.

BSAI SAFE Report. The BSAI Groundfish Plan Team met in Seattle on November 16-20, 2015 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 and the executive summary of the Ecosystem Considerations chapter are attached and were distributed to the Council and Advisory Panel; the SAFE introduction summarizes the Plan Team recommendations for each stock/complex. The full report, including the 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 2016 and 2017 are attached as C-2. 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 2015 Joint Team and BSAI Plan Team

Agenda Date 12/7/2015

Agenda Number:

minutes are attached. 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 2016 and 2017 are 3,236,762 t and 3,128,135 t, respectively. These compare with the sums of the 2015 ABCs (2,848,454 t) and 2014 ABCs (2,572,819t). The primary increase from previous years is due to EBS pollock. The Team recommended maximum permissible ABCs for all stocks, except for EBS pollock, and EBS Pacific cod.

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 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 2016. The abundances of three stocks are projected to be below $B_{35\%}$ for 2016: AI pollock by about 2 percent, sablefish by about 4 percent, and Greenland turbot by about 30 percent.

The sum of the biomasses for 2015 represents a 7% increase from 2014. The 2014 value, in turn, was nearly the same as reported for 2013, following declines of 5 percent from 2012 to 2013 and 6 percent from 2011 to 2012.

TAC-setting. In setting TACs for 2016 and 2017 the Council accounts for guideline harvest levels (GHLs) for groundfish fisheries in state waters. The Board of Fisheries took action on December 1, 2015 to modify how GHLs in the Bering Sea (BS) and Aleutian Islands (AI) are set for Pacific cod. The GHL in the AI will be set at 27% of the AI ABC, with annual step up provisions if the GHL is achieved to a maximum of 39% of the ABC. The BS GHL will be set at 6.4% of the EBS Pacific cod ABC. A table listing the ABCs, GHLs, and resulting maximum possible Federal TACs for 2016-2017 Pacific cod is attached.

Flatfish flexibility ABC reserve. Amendment 105 modified the annual harvest specifications for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole, beginning in 2015. An ABC reserve is now annually 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. A table is attached provided by NMFS staff based upon TAC levels for 2015 specifications.

NMFS will provide a report on flatfish exchanges by the Amendment 80 cooperatives to the Council each year at this 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.

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 attached for summary tables of all allocations and PSC limits by species).

Halibut PSC limits in trawl and fixed gear fisheries: The Council took final action on amendment 111 to the BSAI Groundfish FMP in June 2015 to reduce the total halibut limit from 4,426 mt to 3,515 mt. This limit is expected to be implemented in early 2016. As such information is provided in tables (attached) as to the

Agenda Date 12/7/2015

Agenda Number:

apportionments under the new limits. For comparison the current status quo limits are listed below and shown in attached tables.

Halibut PSC in Trawl Fisheries: The current 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 percent 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	
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 2015 estimate of effective spawning biomass of 46.5 million pounds, the PSC limit for 2016 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 2015 model estimated total abundance (329,000,000 crabs), the PSC limit in 2016 for *C. bairdi* is unchanged from last year: 830,000 crabs in Zone 1 and 2,520,000 crabs in Zone 2.

Snow crab (*C. opilio*) PSC limits are based on total abundance of *opilio* crab. The limit is set at 0.1133% 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 2015 model estimate of 4,288,000,000 crabs result in a 2016 PSC limit of 4,708,314 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 percent of the EBS biomass of herring. This limit is apportioned to the seven PSC fishery categories. Due to State budget costs there were no surveys in 2015 thus the department recommends using the sum of the Togiak 2016-forecast biomass and the general indication of recent population sizes for the other managed stocks (which equates to the 10-year mean biomass for years with sufficient surveys) for purposes of estimating bycatch caps. This results in an estimate of herring spawning biomass for the eastern Bering Sea for 2016 of 263,098 t. The corresponding herring PSC limit for 2016 at 1 percent of this amount is 2,631 t. A letter of explanation from ADF&G containing the data used to calculate the estimate is attached.

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.

Agenda Date 12/7/2015

Agenda Number:

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