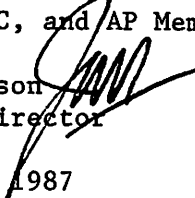


M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Council, SSC, and AP Members

FROM: Jim H. Branson 
Executive Director

DATE: December 1, 1987

SUBJECT: Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery Management Plan

ACTION REQUIRED

Set halibut PSCs.

BACKGROUND

Amendment 14 included a framework procedure to set annual halibut bycatch limits. Halibut is defined as a prohibited species in the FMP and when caught incidentally must be discarded. The framework allows the Council to review and set halibut bycatch limits annually without requiring an emergency rule or plan amendment. Bycatch limits (PSCs) specified using the framework are effective for an entire year and all bottom trawling is prohibited when they are reached.

The Council has used the framework since 1986. You reviewed the status of the halibut resource, estimates of halibut bycatch in previous years, estimated impacts of bycatches on the domestic halibut fishery, and other information. A halibut mortality ceiling of 2,000 mt was recommended by the IPHC and several members of the fishing industry as the Gulfwide cap on halibut mortality in the groundfish fisheries. The Council adopted their recommendation as their 1986 management goal. Estimates of 1986 and 1987 halibut bycatch and associated mortality in the groundfish fisheries were calculated using a computer model that incorporates bycatch and mortality rates from the NMFS Foreign Observer Program and IPHC, and gear shares as estimated by the fishing industry. The bycatch analysis estimated halibut mortality in 1987 would be 1,340 mt and the Council adopted that value as this year's management goal.

The Council needs to review the model's bycatch/mortality rates and gear share assumptions that predict halibut bycatch. This and the other biological and socioeconomic information required under the framework was included in the RAD sent to you on November 25. Extra copies of the RAD are available. The Council can then use the model with initial 1988 TACs and apportionments to predict 1988 halibut bycatch and mortality.

The Council released estimates of halibut bycatch and mortality using preliminary 1988 TAC, DAP, JVP, and TALFF apportionments for public review on October 10. Only one comment has been received and was sent to you prior to this meeting. A summary of that comment is included in your notebooks as item D-2(c)(1).

The staff recommends that the Council take the following steps:

Step 1. Examine estimated bycatches of halibut using initial TACs. Adopt a tentative halibut mortality ceiling as a 1988 management goal.

Step 2. Set an initial halibut PSC bycatch limit for domestic bottom trawl gear. Apportion that bycatch limit to DAP and JVP.

And, if necessary,

Step 3. Adjust groundfish TACs to reduce halibut mortality and bycatch to meet the desired goal.

GULF OF ALASKA PUBLIC COMMENT SUMMARY

Comments Received on the Halibut Mortality Limit

1. International Pacific Halibut Commission, Seattle - recommends that the Council continue using an upper limit of 2,000 mt as their mortality goal. If feasible, the limit should be reduced, as was the case in 1987. Migration of juvenile halibut and uncertain DAP bycatch rates suggest that PSC limits should be set conservatively.