



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:Catch 15-027

Agenda Date4/6/2015

Agenda Number:C6

Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:
GOA Sablefish Longline Pots - Final Action

ESTIMATED TIME:
4 hours

ACTION REQUIRED:
Review EA/RIR/IRFA analysis for allowing pot longline gear in the GOA sablefish IFQ fishery.

BACKGROUND:

The Council is considering amendments to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska and regulations to allow the use of pot longline gear in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) sablefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) fishery. Currently, the IFQ sablefish fishery is conducted with hook-and-line (HAL) gear and experiences significant whale depredation. Depredation has negative consequences for the sablefish IFQ fleet through reduced catch rates and increased operating costs. Depredation also has negative consequences for the whales through increased risk of vessel strike, and for both whales and seabirds through gear entanglement and altered foraging strategies. An additional management concern stems from the impact that whale depredation may have on the precision of sablefish stock abundance indices. The action is proposed to minimize fishery interactions and potential entanglements with marine mammals and seabirds, adverse impacts on the sablefish IFQ fleet from depredation by sperm whales and killer whales, and gear conflicts and grounds preemption that could result from allowing pot longline and HAL gear to fish in the same regulatory areas.

The analysis examines the Council's proposed action alternative (Alternative 2) which would apply exclusively to a pot longline fishery for sablefish in the GOA IFQ fishery. The Council could choose to allow pot longline gear on an area-by-area basis, including or excluding any of the following sablefish management areas: Southeast Outside, West Yakutat, Central GOA, and Western GOA. Alternative 2 includes 4 elements: (1) pot limits; (2) gear retrieval; (3) gear specification; and (4) retention of incidentally caught halibut. Elements 1 and 2 have additional options. Selecting Alternative 2 would include all four elements, unless the Council amends Alternative 2 through its action. Including Element 4 (halibut retention in sablefish pot longline gear) would require complimentary action by the IPHC prior to implementation.

The EA concludes that the impacts to the various environmental components of the regulated fishery are not likely to be significant. The RIR examines the benefits and costs of allowing pot longline gear in addition to HAL gear, and highlights issues that cannot be definitively analyzed due to a lack of available data. The RIR also identifies management and enforcement challenges associated with Alternative 2, making suggestions for viable approaches where appropriate. The IRFA analysis discusses potential impacts on small entities that are directly regulated by this action (harvesters), and considers whether other management approaches could lessen those impacts. At this meeting, the Council may take final action and select a preferred alternative.