



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:GF 14-049

Agenda Date12/8/2014

Agenda Number:C5

Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Final GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications: Approve Specs; Plan Team reports

ESTIMATED TIME:

4 Hours

ACTION REQUIRED:

Review and approve GOA SAFE report (including Ecosystem and Economic SAFEs) and approve final GOA Harvest Specifications for 2015-2016 including:

1. Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), and annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC).
2. TAC considerations for the State Pacific cod fishery, Prince William Sound Pollock fishery.
3. Prohibited Species Catch Limits.

BACKGROUND:

At this meeting, the Council makes final recommendations on groundfish and bycatch specifications as listed above to manage the 2015 and 2016 Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries.

GOA SAFE Document

The groundfish Plan Teams met in Seattle November 17-21, 2014 to prepare the final SAFE reports and to review the status of groundfish stocks. The GOA SAFE report forms the basis for the recommended GOA groundfish specifications for the 2015 and 2016 fishing years. The introduction to the GOA SAFE report previously distributed to the Council and Advisory Panel. The full GOA SAFE report, the economic SAFE report and the ecosystem considerations volume was sent to the SSC. The GOA Plan Team recommended OFLs and ABCs for 2015-2016 are attached as **Item 1**. The GOA Plan Team minutes are attached as **Item 2**. The Joint Plan Team minutes are included with the BSAI Plan Team minutes under **Agenda C4 Items 2 and 3**. An overview of the GOA SAFE report and ecosystem considerations volume will be provided to you at the meeting.

ABCs, TACs, and Apportionments

At this meeting, the Council will establish final catch specifications for the 2015 and 2016 fisheries. The SSC and AP recommendations will be provided to the Council during the meeting.

The sum of the Plan Team recommended ABCs increased by 7% (+44,922 t) compared with last year. This is primarily driven by projected increases in pollock 28,958 t (+17%), Pacific cod 14,350 t (+16%), Pacific ocean perch 1,703 t (+9%), and shallow water flatfish 3,400 (+8%). Notable declines were projected in demersal shelf rockfish -49 t (-18%), big skate - 507 t (-13%), roughey and blackspotted rockfish -122 t (-10%), dusky rockfish -377 t (-7%), and northern rockfish -324 t (6%).

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The abundances of Pacific cod, Dover sole, flathead sole, northern and southern rocksole, arrowtooth flounder, Pacific ocean perch, rougheye and blackspotted rockfish, northern rockfish, and dusky rockfish are above target stock size. The abundances of pollock and sablefish are below target stock size. The target biomass levels for deep-water flatfish (excluding Dover sole), shallow-water flatfish (excluding northern and southern rocksole), rex sole, shorttraker rockfish, other rockfish, demersal shelf rockfish, thornyhead rockfish, Atka mackerel, skates, sculpins, squid, octopus, and sharks are unknown.

TAC Considerations for State Pacific Cod Fishery

Using the area apportionments for the 2015 and 2016 Pacific cod ABC recommended by the Plan Team, the Federal TAC for P. cod would be adjusted as listed in [Item 3](#). Note that because the same ABC is recommended for both years, the apportionment values are identical for both years.

TAC Considerations for State Pollock Fishery

The federal GOA Pollock TACs include reductions due to State waters GHL. State waters, specifically PWS GHL, is presently computed as 2.5% of the total W/C/WYAK ABC. If TAC = ABC for 2015 and 2016, the values corresponding to the PWS GHL are reflected in [Item 3](#).

Prohibited Species Catch Limits

In the GOA, Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits are established for halibut by fishery and gear, and Chinook salmon (for the Pollock fishery only). Chinook salmon PSC limits are fixed at 25,000 fish and allocated by area and season. From 1995 until 2013, total halibut PSC limits for all fisheries and gear types totaled 2,300 t. See attached [Item 4](#).

The FMP authorizes the Council to exempt specific gear from the halibut PSC limits. NMFS, after consultation with the Council, has exempted pot gear, jig gear, and the sablefish IFQ hook-and-line gear fishery categories from the non-trawl halibut limit since 1995. The Council recommended, and NMFS approved, these exemptions because: (1) the pot gear fisheries have low annual halibut bycatch mortality; (2) IFQ program regulations prohibit discard of halibut if any halibut IFQ permit holder on board a catcher vessel holds unused halibut IFQ (§ 679.7(f)(11)); (3) sablefish IFQ fishermen typically hold halibut IFQ permits and are therefore required to retain the halibut they catch while fishing sablefish IFQ; and (4) NMFS estimates negligible halibut mortality for the jig gear fisheries.

The Secretary of Commerce approved Amendment 95 on November 29, 2013 and final rulemaking was complete in February 2014. The FMP amendment provides the Council with the authority during the annual harvest specification process to reduce the GOA halibut PSC limits for the: (1) groundfish trawl gear sector, (2) groundfish catcher vessel (CV) hook-and-line gear sector by 15%, and (3) catcher/processor (CP) hook-and-line gear sector by 7%. These reductions began with the final 2014 and 2015 harvest specifications. The cumulative reductions for the trawl sector and hook-and-line CV sector are being phased in over three years: 7% in year 1, 5% in year 2 (subtotal 12%), and 3% in year 3 (total 15%).

The reduction for the CP hook-and-line gear would be 7%, which was implemented in one step beginning in 2014 for the trawl sector; this action results in caps of 1,759 mt (in 2015) and 1,705 mt (in 2016 and later years). The new hook-and-line halibut PSC limit is based on the GOA Pacific cod split formula proscribed in regulation. Based on Pacific cod TACs in the Western and Central GOA, the hook-and-line CP sector would fish under a 115 mt halibut PSC limit. The hook-and-line CV sector PSC limit is 146 mt (in 2015) and 141 mt (in 2016 and beyond). Amendment 95 reduced the demersal shelf rockfish fishery halibut bycatch limit from 10 mt to 9 mt.