




UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, AK 99802-1668

September 5, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR: Robert Foy, Ph.D.
Director, Alaska Fisheries Science Center

FROM: Jonathan M. Kurland
Regional Administrator 

SUBJECT: Request for Trawl Survey Halibut Data

The Alaska Region (AKR) requests that the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) provide Pacific halibut biomass data as detailed below to support implementation of a new abundance-based management regime for halibut prohibited species catch (PSC) in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands trawl fisheries.

On November 9, 2022 and December 9, 2022, NMFS published a Notice of Availability ([87 FR 67665](#)) and proposed rule ([87 FR 75570](#)) to implement Amendment 123 to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI FMP). NMFS approved Amendment 123 to the BSAI FMP on March 7, 2023. NMFS expects to publish a final rule in late 2023 in time to implement the new PSC limit for the 2024 fishing season. The final rule implementing Amendment 123 will establish a new annual process that links the Amendment 80 sector PSC limit to indices of halibut abundance. NMFS proposed Table 58 to Part 679 that specifies a halibut PSC limit for each of several specified halibut abundance ranges, or index states, derived from the annual International Pacific Halibut Commission's (IPHC's) Fishery Independent Setline Survey (FISS) for IPHC's management area 4ABCDE, referred to as the IPHC Index, and Alaska Fisheries Science Center's (AFSC's) Eastern Bering Sea (EBS) shelf trawl survey, referred to as the EBS Index. The IPHC index is a relative index of Pacific halibut biomass for all sizes of fish expressed as WPUE in areas 4A, 4B and 4CDE. The EBS Index is a relative index of Pacific halibut biomass for all sizes of fish expressed as weight in metric tonnes (mt) in the EBS. Each year, in the lookup table, the intersection of the most recent abundance indices provided by the IPHC and AFSC will be used to establish the annual halibut PSC limit for the Amendment 80 sector. The resulting halibut PSC limits range from 1,745 mt, when abundance is characterized as "high" for the IPHC index, down to 1,134 mt (35 percent reduction), when abundance is characterized as "very low" for the IPHC index.

AKR requests that the AFSC provide the Pacific halibut biomass for all sizes of fish expressed as weight in mt from the EBS shelf trawl survey for use as the EBS index in the lookup table by October 1 of each year to provide the opportunity for review by the Council, the Council's



Scientific and Statistical Committee, and the public, prior to the annual harvest specifications process.

This transparent public process is necessary to ensure that the EBS index represents the best available scientific information. As part of this process, we request that you include a summary of the supporting methods, data, and analysis used to generate the EBS annual biomass estimate for all sizes of fish expressed as WPUE in areas 4A, 4B and 4CDE when you provide the EBS index estimate to the Regional Administrator by October 1, of each year.

We are committed to working with the Council and the AFSC to develop a transparent process to ensure that the data and methods used in the halibut AMB lookup table continue to incorporate the best available scientific information and provide a reliable abundance index for the halibut biomass.

If you have any additional questions, please contact Gretchen Harrington, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, at gretchen.harrington@noaa.gov, or (907) 586-7228.

cc: David Witherell, Bill Tweit