

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members  
FROM: Chris Oliver *DO*  
Executive Director *foe*  
DATE: November 28, 2011  
SUBJECT: Final GOA Groundfish Specifications for 2012 and 2013

ESTIMATED TIME All C-3 Items
---------------------------------

**ACTION REQUIRED**

Review and approve GOA SAFE report (including Ecosystem and Economic SAFEs) and approve final GOA Harvest Specifications for 2012-2013 including:

1. Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), and annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC).
2. TAC considerations for the State Pacific cod 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 2012 and 2013 Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries.

GOA SAFE Document

The groundfish Plan Teams met in Seattle November 14-18, 2011 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 2012 and 2013 fishing years. Note that there are three volumes to the SAFE report: a stock assessment volume, a fishery evaluation volume ("economic SAFE"), and an ecosystems considerations volume. The introduction to the GOA SAFE report was mailed to the Council and Advisory Panel in late November 2011. The full GOA SAFE report, the economic SAFE report and the ecosystem considerations volume were mailed to the SSC. The GOA Plan Team minutes are attached as Item C-3(a)(1). The Joint Plan Team minutes are attached as Item C-3(a)(2). An overview of the GOA SAFE report and ecosystem considerations volume will be provided to you at the meeting.

Two year OFL and ABC Determinations

Amendment 48/48 to the GOA and BSAI Groundfish FMPs, implemented in 2005, removed the requirement for annual assessments of rockfishes, flatfish, and Atka mackerel since new survey data were unavailable in alternating years. Full assessments were provided in 2011 to coincide with new survey data available from the 2011 GOA trawl and longline surveys.

This amendment also requires proposed and final specifications for a minimum of two years thus ABC and OFL levels are provided for 2012 and 2013. In the case of stocks managed under Tier 3, 2012 and 2013 ABC and OFL projections are typically based on the output for Scenarios 1 or 2 from the standard projection model using assumed (best estimates) of actual catch levels. For stocks managed under Tiers 4 and 5 the latest survey data (2011) was used. Tier 6 stocks may have alternatives based on updated catch information.

The 2013 ABC and OFL values recommended in next year's SAFE report are likely to differ from this year's projections for 2013 because data from 2013 surveys are anticipated and a re-evaluation on the status of stocks will improve on the current available information for recommendations.

ABCs, TACs, and Apportionments

At this meeting, the Council will establish final catch specifications for the 2012 and 2013 fisheries. The SSC and AP recommendations will be provided to the Council during the meeting. **Item C-1(a)(3)** provides a summary of the current status of the groundfish stocks, including catch statistics, ABCs, and TACs for 2011, and Plan Team recommendations for ABCs and overfishing levels (OFLs) for 2012 and 2013. These tables should also replace Tables 1 and 2 from the SAFE introduction that was mailed to you. The added year was included to assist NMFS management since the TAC setting process allows for a period of up to two years to review harvest specifications.

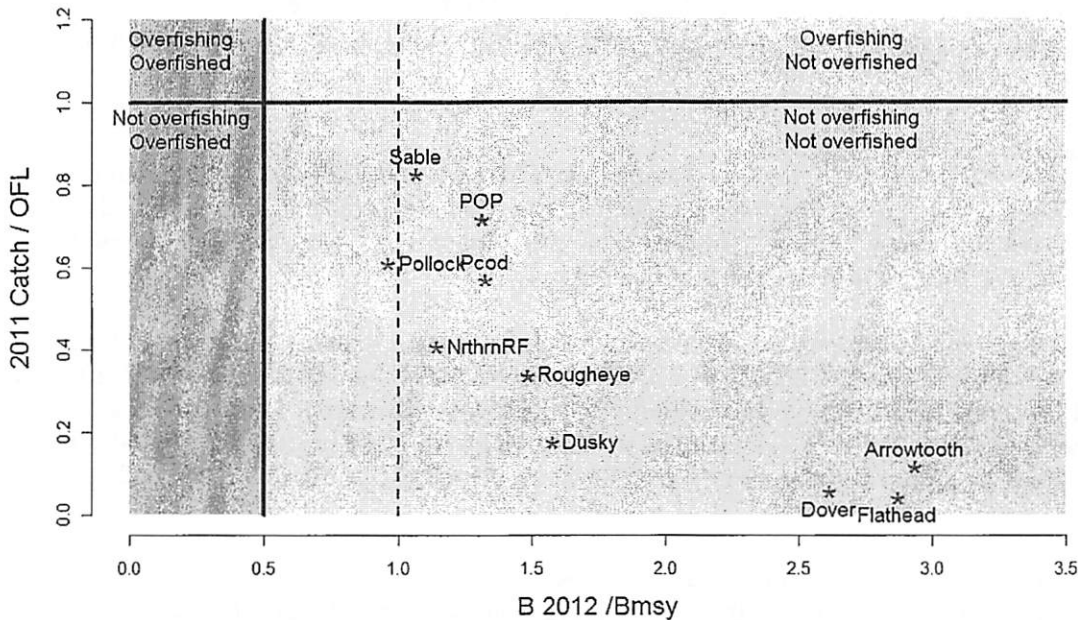
The sum of the preliminary 2012 ABCs for target species is 606,048 t (2012), which is within the FMP-approved optimum yield (OY) of 116,000 - 800,000 t for the Gulf of Alaska. The sum of 2012 and 2013 OFLs are 747,780 t and 756,621 t, respectively. The Team notes that because of halibut bycatch mortality considerations in the high-biomass flatfish fisheries, an overall OY for 2012 will be considerably under this upper limit. For perspective, the sum of the 2011 TACs was 318,291 t, and the sum of the ABCs was 590,124 t.

The sum of the ABCs increased by 3% (15,927 t) compared with last year. This is primarily driven by increases in pollock 20,229 t (21%) and sablefish 1,670 t (15%). Based on projections, ABC levels for groundfish (pollock, Pacific cod, and sablefish) are up by 22,699 t (12%) whereas flatfish declined by 8,685 t (-3%). Rockfish ABCs increased 3% (1,197 t) and the largest percentage increase was seen for octopus at 53% (501 t). Combined, the skates ABC increased by 2% (149 t).

The abundances of Pacific cod, sablefish, flathead sole, arrowtooth flounder, northern and southern rocksole, Pacific ocean perch, roughey and blackspotted rockfish, northern rockfish, and dusky rockfish are above  $B_{MSY}$ . The abundance of pollock is below  $B_{MSY}$  (see figure below). The target biomass levels for other deep-water flatfish (including Dover sole), other shallow-water flatfish, rex sole, shortraker rockfish, demersal shelf rockfish, other rockfish, thornyhead rockfish, Atka mackerel, skates, sculpins, squid, octopus, and sharks are unknown.

Summary status of age-structured GOA species relative to 2011 catch levels (vertical axis) and projected 2012 spawning biomass relative to  $B_{msy}$  levels. Note that the 2011 MSY level is defined as the 2011 catch at  $F_{OFL}$ .

Gulf of Alaska



TAC Considerations for State Pacific Cod Fishery

Since 1997, the Council has reduced the GOA Pacific cod TAC to account for removals of not more than 25% of the Federal P. cod TAC from the state parallel fisheries. The relative percentage in the Central GOA was increased by the Board of Fisheries in March 2005 from 24.25 in 2004 to 25% while the relative percentage in the Eastern GOA was increased to 25% in 2010. Using the area apportionments of the 2012 and 2013 P. cod ABC recommended by the Plan Team, the Federal TAC for P. cod would be adjusted as listed below.

**Plan Team recommended 2012 Gulf of Alaska Pacific cod ABCs, and resulting TACs and state Guideline Harvest Levels (GHLs) (t).**

Specifications	Western	Central	Eastern	Total
ABC	28,032	56,940	2,628	87,600
State GHL	7,008	14,235	657	21,900
(%)	25	25	25	25
Federal TAC	21,024	42,705	1,971	65,700

**Plan Team recommended 2013 Gulf of Alaska Pacific cod ABCs, and resulting TACs and state Guideline Harvest Levels (GHLs) (t).**

Specifications	Western	Central	Eastern	Total
ABC	29,120	59,150	2,730	91,000
State GHL	7,280	14,787	683	22,750
(%)	25	25	25	25
Federal TAC	21,840	44,363	2,047	68,250

Prohibited Species Catch Limits

In the GOA, Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits are established for halibut. Since 1995, total halibut PSC limits for all fisheries and gear types have totaled 2,300 t. This cap was reduced from 2,750 t after the sablefish IFQ fishery was exempted from the halibut PSC requirements in 1995. The halibut PSC apportionments recommended based upon the 2010 apportionments for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries are shown below.

**GOA Pacific halibut PSC Limits**

2012-2013 Trawl		2012-2013 Hook and Line		
Jan 20 - Apr 1	550 t	1st trimester	Jan 1 - Jun 10	250 t
Apr 1 - Jul 1	400 t	2nd trimester	Jun 10 - Sep 1	5 t
Jul 1 - Sep 1	600 t	3rd trimester	Sept 1 - Dec 31	35 t
Sept 1 - Oct 1	150 t			
Oct 1 - Dec 31	300 t	DSR	Jan 1 - Dec 31	10 t
TOTAL	2,000 t			300 t

Trawl fishery categories			
Season	Shallow Water	Deep Water	Total
Jan 1 - Apr 1	450 t	100 t	550 t
Apr 1 - Jul 1	100 t	300 t	400 t
Jul 1 - Sep 1	200 t	400 t	600 t
Sept 1 - Oct 1	150 t	any rollover	150 t
Oct 1 - Dec 31	no apportionment		300 t
TOTAL	900 t	800 t	2,000 t