


M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Council, SSC, and AP Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke 
Executive Director

DATE: November 28, 1988

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. Every year you have 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 in the RAD. A halibut mortality ceiling of 2,000 mt was recommended by the IPHC and several members of the fishing industry as a gulf-wide cap on halibut mortality in the groundfish fisheries. Last December the Council adopted this recommendation as their management goal for 1988.

Estimates of 1988 halibut bycatch and mortality in the groundfish fisheries were calculated using a computer model that incorporates bycatch and mortality rates from the NMFS Foreign Observer Program, IPHC, and gear shares as estimated by the fishing industry. The Council needs to review the model's bycatch/mortality rates and gear share assumptions that are used to predict halibut bycatch. The plan team believes that previous estimates of bycatch rates are no longer valid based on current domestic and joint venture observations. This and the biological and socioeconomic information required under the framework was included in the final RAD sent to you on November 18. Extra copies of the RAD are available. A table showing the plan team's recommended bycatch rates for 1989 is provided as item D-1(b)(1). If the Council desires, they can use this model with initial 1989 TACs and apportionments to predict 1989 halibut bycatch and mortality.

The Council released an initial 1989 halibut mortality goal set at 2,000 mt and bycatch/mortality rate data for public review on October 20, 1988. Only one comment has been received on the goal and it is included here as item D-1(b)(2).

The staff recommends the Council take the following steps:

Step 1. Examine estimated bycatches of halibut using initial TACs. Adopt a tentative halibut mortality ceiling as a 1989 management goal.

Step 2. Set an initial halibut PSC bycatch limit for domestic bottom trawl gear. Apportion the 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.

Table B-2.--Assumed rates used in estimating 1989 Gulf of Alaska halibut bycatch by gear.

	Bottom Trawl - All Areas			Midwater Trawl		
				Western	Central	
DAP	4.50%	^{1/}		0.02%	0.06%	
JVP	5.15%	^{1/}		0.02%	0.06%	
TALFF	2.53%			0.02%	0.06%	
	Pacific Cod Longline			Sablefish Longline		
	Western	Central	Eastern	Western	Central	Eastern
DAP	5.23%	9.15%	9.15%	1.20%	1.20%	1.20%
JVP	5.23%	9.15%	9.15%	1.20%	1.20%	1.20%
TALFF	1.49%	4.97%	4.97%	1.20%	1.20%	1.20%

1/ These rates were 2.53% in 1988.

Source: NMFS Foreign Observer Program Data 1982-1988.
 ADF&G Domestic Observer Program Data 1987-1988.
 NPFMC Pilot Domestic Observer Program Data 1987-1988.

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INTERNATIONAL PACIFIC HALIBUT COMMISSION

AGENDA D-1(b)(2)
DECEMBER 1988

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ESTABLISHED BY A CONVENTION BETWEEN CANADA
AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NOV 23 1988

November 21, 1988

Dr. Clarence Pautzke, Executive Director
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
P.O. Box 103136
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

Dear Clarence:

The Staff of the IPHC has reviewed your letters requesting recommendations for groundfish harvests and related items for the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands fisheries in 1989. Our comments will be limited to the effects of the groundfish harvest on halibut. We recommend that the Gulf of Alaska halibut bycatch mortality limit remain at 2,000 mt, on the assumption that Bering Sea bycatch mortality will be set at about 3,900 mt. This would result in a total of 5,900 mt of halibut bycatch mortality for 1989.

We have recommended in previous correspondence that groundfish harvests be managed such that halibut bycatch mortality remains at status quo levels until objective criteria are developed to justify an increase or decrease. For the past five years, total halibut bycatch mortality in Alaskan waters has averaged about 4,200 mt, and averaged about 6,000 mt for the past 10 years. Of this mortality, the Bering Sea has accounted for 2,400 mt to 3,100 mt for the five and 10 year averages, respectively, with the Gulf of Alaska accounting for 1,800 mt and 2,900 mt.

We believe that 6,000 mt of halibut bycatch mortality for Alaskan waters is too high, and that in no case should the total Alaskan halibut bycatch mortality upper limit be higher than 6,000 mt. The halibut resource was rebuilt and the directed fishery was able to grow at this level of bycatch. Further, adequate bycatch is available for the domestic groundfish fisheries under the aforementioned bycatch ceilings. Bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea is linked in its effect on the directed halibut fishery. Increases in one area should be balanced by reductions in the other, not to exceed whatever total bycatch cap the Council may set.

We caution against using the present high harvest of halibut as justification for increasing bycatch. Halibut bycatch occurs on juvenile animals prior to recruitment to the commercial fishery. We are seeing evidence that halibut recruitment is entering a period of decline. If the declining pattern continues, bycatch will occur on a smaller abundance of juvenile halibut that is not comparable to the current high abundance of adult halibut. A further reduction in recruitment will only serve to curtail the directed commercial longline fishery in years to come.

We agree with the recommendation of the Gulf of Alaska Plan Team to use bottom trawl bycatch rates gathered by the domestic observer programs to estimate halibut bycatch in Gulf bottom trawl fisheries in 1989. The rates formerly used in predicting halibut bycatch in these fisheries were based on the 1982-1986 foreign and joint venture fisheries and may misrepresent current conditions. The use of bycatch rates from the 1987 and 1988 observer data can only serve to more reliably predict halibut bycatch in 1989.

Sincerely,



Donald A. McCaughran
Director

cc: IPHC Commissioners