

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council and SSC Members
FROM: Chris Oliver *DO for*
Executive Director
DATE: November 28, 2011
SUBJECT: Halibut mortality on trawlers EFP

ESTIMATED TIME 8 HOURS All D-1 Items
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ACTION REQUIRED

Review application for Exempted Fishing Permit

BACKGROUND

NMFS recently received an application from the Alaska Seafood Cooperative (AKSC) for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) to allow operators of non-pelagic trawl vessels to assess the operational feasibility of reducing halibut mortality in fisheries for flatfish by removing and releasing halibut from a codend on deck of a catcher/processor. The applicant developed the EFP application in cooperation with NMFS staff, and in October the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) found the EFP application constitutes a valid fishing experiment appropriate for further consideration. The study conducted under this EFP would begin in early April 2012 and continue until the end of September 2012, when a sufficient number of halibut have been sampled and assessed for condition and likelihood of survival. The EFP would allow seven AKSC non-pelagic trawl vessels to sort halibut removed from a codend on the deck of the vessel and release those fish back into the water after sampling halibut for length and condition using IPHC halibut mortality assessment methods. The EFP is intended to provide operators of non-pelagic trawl vessels with new information for reducing halibut mortality in trawl fisheries by evaluating various fishing and handling practices.

NMFS has determined that the proposed EFP research would not have a significant effect on the human environment and qualifies for a Categorical Exclusion under section 6.03c.3(a) because it is a research program of limited size and magnitude with no effect on the environment and for which any cumulative effects are negligible.

NMFS is initiating consultation with the Council by forwarding the application, as required by 50 CFR 679.6(c)(2). During this meeting the Council will hear a presentation from representatives of the applicant, and may choose to approve or deny the EFP application.