

ADVISORY PANEL
Motions and Rationale
January 28-31, 2020 - Anchorage, AK

D4 Halibut ABM

Alternatives

As an overall simplification measure, the AP recommends that the Council **reduce the number of alternatives to four** in addition to the status quo:

1. The directed halibut alternative from the coalition (current Alternative 3.3a);
2. The FVOA proposal (current Alternative 2.4 as modified by FVOA);
3. A trawl sector proposal; and
4. The freezer longline proposal (Alternative current 3.2).

Option: combine the two directed halibut alternatives.

Index (for Alternative 3.3a)

The AP recommends that the Council further simplify the action by using one index for the directed halibut users alternative (current Alternative 3.3a): the setline survey.

Option: use the Bering Sea halibut stock assessment as the single index.

Elements (for Alternative 3.3a)

In the directed halibut users alternative, Elements 1, 2, 3 and 6 remain the same. Elements 4 and 5 (which apply to the use of the secondary index) are removed.

New Element: Protect halibut stocks at low levels of abundance (can be applied to any of the four alternatives)

When the coastwide spawning biomass falls below B30, multiply PSC limit by B/B30

²**Look at mechanisms to have PSC reductions stay in the water, or some portion.**

⁴**New Element: Establish an abundance-based O26 performance standard that is 35% below the annual PSC cap (can be applied to any of the four alternatives).**

- Performance standard does not trigger in-season fishery closure
- ³**Only the bycatch of O26 halibut counts toward the performance standard.**
- If reached or exceeded, industry provides details to Council of voluntary measures that will be implemented by the fleet in the following year to reduce bycatch
- If exceeded in three straight years or more than 2 out of 5 years, PSC cap reduced by 10%
- Cap restored to initial level if fleet adheres to performance standard 3 out of 5 years or 3 straight years

Amendment¹ (to remove the word 'O26' as well as listed bullets from new element) failed 9-12

Amendment² passed 15-7

Amendment³ passed 22-0

Motion as amended passed 14-8

Rationale in Support of Main Motion as Amended:

- *This motion is in direct response to the Council's request for stakeholders to provide input on additional management alternatives that serve to streamline the action and meet the Council's objectives to establish abundance-based PSC limits that minimize halibut PSC to the extent practicable, and aid the directed halibut fisheries at low levels of abundance. This motion is responsive to public comment, incorporates all changes proposed, drops alternatives that are no longer relevant and/or do not meet Council objectives.*
- *Public input from several stakeholder groups was provided with these groups proposing specific changes to the original modeling alternatives. This motion proposes to move those changes forward (industry alternatives 2.4, 3.2, 3.3a) along with the Status Quo alternative and whatever alternative is preferred by the trawl industry.*
- *Alternative 3.3a originally used the setline survey as the primary index and the trawl survey as the secondary index. The trawl survey was included as a secondary index to modify PSC cap when abundance of U26 fish changed significantly, since U26 fish are a small component of the setline survey. However, since the trawl survey index is based on pounds, not numbers of fish, the trawl survey does a poor job of capturing the changes in U26 abundance. The setline survey tracks the abundance relative to meeting the Council's goal of "providing for a directed fishery," hence is the appropriate index on which to base further analysis. Using one index greatly simplifies the analysis and action and removes the need for Elements 4 and 5. With the removal of the secondary index from the directed halibut coalition alternative, the two directed halibut alternatives are almost identical (2.4 and 3.3a).*
- *The new element for protecting halibut stocks at low levels of abundance, the action requires an additional element that would have a direct effect on the control rule in response to low halibut abundance. The slope of the control rule would decline more steeply when the halibut biomass falls below B30. This corresponds to the harvest policy for Council-managed groundfish species and also corresponds to biological benchmarks identified by the IPHC.*
- *The new element for an O26 performance standard is necessary because the O26 component of halibut bycatch is deducted in the area where that bycatch occurs, therefore it directly reduces the halibut available to the directed fishery. Public testimony emphasized that the directed fishery in St. Paul is in real danger of being eliminated, and this year it may be only 16% of the mortality in their area. This performance standard, or incentive program, will incentivize bycatch reductions "to the extent practicable", particularly of the O26 component, and promote opportunity for the directed fishery without overly restricting the groundfish fisheries.*

Rationale Against Main Motion as Amended:

- *Acknowledging that Council direction was conflicting by asking stakeholders for recommendations on ways to simplify the action while also asking for new ideas, and that stakeholders did actively respond to this request, the addition of the two new elements to the*

overall package will complicate the analysis and potentially slow down the adoption and implementation of an abundance-based management program. This comes at a time when directed fishery users are asking for a workable program as soon as possible due to the condition of the halibut stock. While the Amendment 91 Chinook salmon performance standard can serve as a model upon which to formulate a halibut performance standard, the development of that performance standard was not a simple task and involved significant stakeholder involvement, staff resources, and lengthy analytical documents. It would be more prudent to bifurcate responses to the Council's request by exploring the new elements separate (i.e., initiate a new discussion paper) from the current suite of ABM alternatives and analysis.

Rationale Against (failed) Amendment 1:

- *Removing the reference to O26 halibut is not responsive to the purpose of the new element for providing for a directed fishery since O26 halibut are the component of the population important to directed fishery.*

Rationale in Support of (failed) Amendment 1:

- *A performance standard 35% below the PSC cap results in a de facto lower PSC cap that is also structured to stair step down even further when combined with the other elements of the action.*
- *In 2018, the Council previously considered an O26 focused performance standard but the idea was not carried forward because of the multiple concerns associated with length data and enforcement limitations.*
- *The concept of a performance standard should be explored more generally at this time, without automatic prescriptive reductions, in order to better understand the mechanics and execution of how such a performance standard would function and the impact such a performance standard would have upon the PSC users.*

Rationale in Support of Amendment 2:

- *Currently any reductions in halibut PSC amounts become available to the directed fishery (reallocating O26 mortality as part of the FCEY) via the IPHC process. Because the conservation of halibut (protection of SSB) is one of the goals of the halibut ABM action, it is important to consider mechanisms to have at least some portion of PSC reductions stay in the water to help with conservation at low levels of halibut abundance (in addition to the percentage of PSC reduction that is U26).*
- *In previous years, at times the IPHC has set the TCEY higher than the policy reference levels (for reasons that are not always transparent). In these situations, any conservation goals for this Council action may not be achieved if there is not some mechanism developed to ensure that reductions in halibut PSC remain in the water for the future benefit of the stock and all user groups. In this way, a clearer distinction and understanding can be drawn between*

allocation (providing for a directed fishery) and conservation (protection of SSB) goals, which is necessary for this action given some of its competing objectives.

Rationale Against Amendment 2:

- *The U26 component of any reduction in PSC mortality is already left in the water, serving a conservation purpose. The IPHC ramps down the harvest rate for the directed fleet when the stock is below B30, leaving additional fish in the water in times of extremely low abundance.*
- *Providing for a directed fishery is a Council objective and O26 bycatch savings would help restore equity among user groups and help maintain viable catch levels in Area 4CDE.*

Rationale in Support of Amendment 3:

- *This additional bullet was included to better clarify the intent of the new performance standard element.*