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News & Notes

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

February 2015



Election of Officers

The Council's Advisory Panel unanimously re-elected Becca Robbins-Gisclair as Chairman of the Advisory Panel, and Ruth Christiansen and Ernie Weiss as Co-Vice Chairs. The SSC appointed Farron Wallace as Chairman, and re-appointed Robert Clark as Vice Chair.

Council Reception

Fishing industry groups sponsored a reception for those attending the Council meeting. Thanks to the groups that organized and donated to make the evening a success.

Adios, John Henderschedt

A Council member for 8 years, and on the AP for 3, John Henderschedt has accepted a position with NOAA Fisheries in DC, as Director of International Affairs, Seafood Inspection and Trade. It was noted that he has spent 10 + birthdays at the June Council meeting, and may now have one at home! Best of luck in your new position, John.

Bering Sea Halibut Bycatch

The Council reviewed an analysis to reduce Pacific halibut prohibited species catch (PSC) limits in the BSAI groundfish fisheries. PSC limit reductions are considered for various sectors, including the BSAI trawl limited access sector, the Amendment 80 sector, longline catcher vessels, longline catcher processors, and the CDQ sector (i.e., a reduction to the CDQ's allocated prohibited species quota reserve).

During their review, the Council modified the alternatives under evaluation. A substantive change was to expand the range of potential reduction for each PSC limit under consideration. The draft analysis included potential reductions from zero to thirty-five percent of the existing PSC. The Council expanded the potential reductions to each sector's PSC limit up to 50 percent (the motion with specific break points is posted online). The Council also adopted staff recommendations in the document to align the language of the PSC reduction options to the Council's intent of evaluating a reduced limit for all target fisheries currently subject to halibut limits, and in the same vein, included separate suboptions for Amendment 80 cooperatives and limited access (the latter with a reduction range up to 60 percent).

The Council removed an alternative to implement regulatory measures to allow deck sorting of Pacific halibut on non-pelagic trawl catcher processor vessels, as a means of reducing halibut bycatch mortalities on Amendment 80 vessels. This is consistent with previous discussions that the deck sorting procedures are not yet sufficiently established to allow implementation in regulation.

Instead, the Council supports efforts by the Alaska Seafood Cooperative (one of the Amendment 80 cooperatives) to use deck sorting in 2015 through an exempted fishing permit (EFP). The 2015 EFP builds on previous work, and will allow deck sorting to be used on more vessels in the cooperative. It should inform the question of how effective the deck sorting tool might be in reducing halibut PSC without decreasing groundfish harvest, and whether it is feasible to extend that tool to other vessels.

Further additions were requested in the revised draft, to address a number of issues. As identified by the SSC, the economic model used to evaluate the proposed action needs to be more clearly explained, and should include a discussion of how to interpret the model results in the broader context of Council decisionmaking. This should take into account the impact of changing yields in the halibut fishery on communities in the BSAI, the ability of groundfish fleets to reduce halibut bycatch without foregoing groundfish harvest, and the additional impact of reducing bycatch of halibut under 26 inches, which is not addressed in the model. The Council also asked for more discussion of the status of the halibut stock, especially relative to overfishing thresholds; the differences between the IPHC's harvest policy guidance and that for groundfish in the Council context; and changes in IPHC management and stock assessment both in the recent past, and currently under discussion. Final action on the analysis is scheduled for June.

(continued)

Recreational Quota Entity Workgroup

During Staff Tasking, Chairman Hull announced the formation of the Recreational Quota Entity (RQE) Workgroup. Council member Ed Dersham will be the chairman of the workgroup. The members of the workgroup are:

Ken Dole, Area 2C charter; Richard Yamada, Area 2C charter; Open, Area 2C longliner; Andy Mezirow, Area 3A Charter; Martin Spargo, Area 3A Charter; Bruce Gabrys, Area 3A longliner; Duncan Fields, Community Quota Entity

The Council continues to solicit nominations for the open Area 2C longliner seat. It is anticipated that an organizational meeting will be held around the time of the April Council meeting, the date and location will be announced later. Staff contact is Steve MacLean.

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The Council also received reports from five BSAI groundfish industry sectors about voluntary efforts to comply with the Council's request to reduce halibut PSC mortality by 10% in the second half of 2014, compared to the 2009 to 2013 average. Representatives of the two Amendment 80 cooperatives, the AFA catcher processor and catcher vessel cooperatives, the freezer longline cooperative, and the CDQ groups all spoke to the Council about the extent to which they had achieved the target for 2014, and their intended bycatch reduction efforts for 2015.

In staff tasking, the Council initiated a discussion paper to evaluate possible approaches to link BSAI halibut PSC limits to model-based abundance estimates of halibut. During the joint IPHC meeting, the Council had reviewed an IPHC discussion paper on abundance-based limits, which concluded that while efforts to scale bycatch with direct metrics of halibut abundance were not promising, linking bycatch limits to metrics from the halibut model had potential. Staff will work with the IPHC to further develop such options.

Staff contact is Diana Evans.

Electronic Monitoring

The SSC and the Council endorsed the EM Workgroup's Cooperative Research Plan for 2015, and provided feedback. 2015 fieldwork will focus both on operational testing of EM camera systems in the under 58 ft longline fleet, as well as further research on EM systems to evaluate whether they will successfully achieve the Council's goal to integrate EM used for catch estimation into the Observer Program. The Council also received the final draft of the Alaska Regional Implementation Plan for Electronic Technologies. The plan addresses proposed costs for Alaska electronic monitoring and reporting programs, including a first estimate of funding needs for the planned 2016 EM pre-implementation.

The Council also received testimony on three grant applications to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, for projects that support electronic monitoring development in Alaska. The Council will be writing a letter of support for these proposals. Council staff for this issue is Diana Evans.

Pcod CDQ Development

The Council took final action on a package that would allow small hook-and-line vessel operators, generally fishing for halibut CDQ, more of an opportunity to diversify their operations with Pacific cod CDQ fishing.

The Council chose as the preferred alternative of Alternative 4, with Option 1 and Sub-option 3.3. If approved, this amendment would exempt vessels less than or equal to 46 ft LOA using hook-and-line gear from an LLP license while fishing any CDQ groundfish and it would move these vessels from full observer coverage to partial observer coverage. Rather than being required to purchase an LLP license, interested participants would be placed on an online eligible vessel list by a CDQ manager, and vessels greater than 32 ft and less than or equal to 46 ft LOA would be required to carry a certificate of eligibility (obtained without charge) onboard to signal their exemption. Vessels directed fishing for Pacific cod CDQ would still be required to carry VMS.

The adoption of Sub-option 3.3 adds the flexibility for individual vessel operators to integrate a Pacific cod CDQ fishery before, during, and after their harvest of halibut CDQ. This Sub-option details a procedure that accounts for halibut and allows for directed Pacific cod CDQ fishing to occur even in the event that a participant does not have access to halibut quota (CDQ or IFQ). If halibut quota is not available to a small vessel hook-and-line participant fishing Pacific cod CDQ, they will be required to discard all halibut they catch alongside Pacific cod. At the time of landing, the absence of halibut will signal to the catch accounting system to calculate a small vessel PSC rate. This estimate will be charged to the "small vessel PSC limit" within a group's transferable PSQ. NMFS In-season management and CDQ managers will jointly monitor this account to ensure the prohibition against exceeding the PSQ is not violated. If a participant does have an available quota of halibut and they are retaining both halibut CDQ and Pacific cod CDQ no PSC rate will be estimated for that trip. In this type of dual fishing trip, once the vessel operator begins to retain halibut CDQ or IFQ, they are prohibited from discarding legally-sized halibut for the duration of the trip.

Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

Norton Sound Red King Crab

The Council reviewed the final stock assessment for the Norton Sound red king crab stock and accepted the SSC's recommended OFL and ABC for this stock. Due to timing constraints of the opening of the May CDQ fishery, the specification process for this stock has been modified to occur annually in January (Crab Plan Team review and recommendations) and February (SSC and Council recommendations) cycle. The stock is in Tier 4a with estimated biomass above the target B_{MSY} level. The SSC recommended a retained catch OFL of 330 tons and an ABC of 262 tons. This ABC reflects a 20% buffer on the OFL to account for additional uncertainty. The remaining crab stocks will be assessed in June (for 3 stocks) and in October (for 6 stocks). Minutes from the Crab Plan Team meeting and a report from a special crab modeling workshop are available on the Council's website. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

AI Pacific Cod

At this meeting, the Council reviewed an initial review draft of a proposed action to establish an exclusive fishing period for Aleutian Islands (AI) Pacific cod for catcher vessels and designate that the AI Pacific cod be delivered to shoreplants in the AI management area. The proposed action also includes performance measures for AI shoreplants that, if not met, would remove the delivery requirement for the remaining year. The proposed action would also limit harvest of the A season trawl catcher vessel sector's Bering Sea (BS) Pacific cod allocation to prevent the sector from harvest its entire A season allocation in the BS prior to the end of the AI Pacific cod fishery. The intent of the Council's proposed action is to provide stability to shoreplant operations in the AI, which in turn will provide stability to the communities where the shoreplants are located.

After reviewing the document, the Council modified the problem statement and the proposed action, and released the analysis for public review. The problem statement was modified to include the Council's concern of the continued risk of increased processing participation by rationalized sectors in the non-rationalized AI cod fishery, the impacts to the AI shoreside processors and communities, the need for community protections as a result of the recent BS and AI Pacific cod total allowable catch split, and the relatively low Pacific cod stock abundance in the AI.

The Council modified Alternative 2 to clarify the proposed action prohibits directed fishing for AI Pacific cod for all vessels except catcher vessels delivering to shoreplants west of 170° longitude.

The Council also added 7,000 mt harvest limit for the BS A season trawl catcher vessel Pacific cod and a date of March 1 for removing both the BS A season trawl catcher vessel Pacific cod harvest limit and catcher vessel exclusive fishing period and delivery requirement within Alternative 2.

The Council modified the existing options to include additional dates for removing the exclusive fishing period for catcher vessels and shoreside delivery requirement if there is insufficient shorebased processing to allow additional time for at-sea processors to harvest AI Pacific cod.

The Council added two new options for consideration. The new option 1 would clarify that the amount of AI Pacific cod available for the catcher vessel exclusive fishing period is equal to the harvest limit for A season trawl catcher vessel BSAI allocation to be used in the AI, and any amount of AI Pacific cod over that limit would be available to any sector for directed fishing and is not subject to the regional delivery requirement. The new option 5 would provide an exemption from shorebased delivery requirements up to 2,000 mt for offshore processors that have processed AI Pacific cod in at least 12 years between 2000 and 2014.

Lastly, the Council requested staff explore with NMFS whether there is an approach that would allow community notification and application of the regional delivery requirement specific to the processing capacity of the community.

The action is tentatively scheduled for final action during the June 2015 meeting. Staff contact for this action is Jon McCracken.

GOA Tendering

The Council reviewed an updated report on tendering activity in the GOA pollock and Pacific cod. The Council requested an updated report for the February 2016 meeting. The updated report should include 2015 GOA pollock and Pacific cod tendering activity. The Council recognized that recent changes is the GOA pollock and Pacific cod fisheries are potentially linked to the development of a GOA trawl bycatch management action, and therefore noted the importance of continuing to monitor the GOA pollock and Pacific cod fisheries for changes in tendering activity during the 2015 fishing season. Staff contact is Jon McCracken.

GOA Trawl Observers

The Council tasked staff to develop a discussion paper on the effects of moving all GOA trawl vessels into the 100% observer coverage category. Staff will consider how such a requirement might impact the observer fee pool that would support the non-trawl fleet remaining in partial coverage. The paper will characterize potential additional cost to trawl vessels, as a percentage of ex-vessel revenue. Finally staff will identify any challenges faced by the observer companies that service the full coverage fleet in meeting increased demand for observer-days. Staff contact is Sam Cunningham.

Upcoming Meetings

Scallop Plan Team meeting:
Monday February 23rd, 2015.
Anchorage, Old Federal Building

Salmon Outreach at Bristol Bay
RAC meeting: February 24,
Naknek, AK

Salmon Outreach at Yukon
Kuskokwim RAC meeting, Bethel,
AK February 25

Observer Program Southeast
Alaska Outreach Meeting : February
26, 2015; Sitka, AK

Ecosystem Committee meeting:
March 17-18, 2015; Seattle, WA

Recreational Quota Entity
Workgroup: April during the Council
meeting

Enforcement Committee: April 7,
Anchorage

EM Workgroup: April 27, 2015 (T)
Anchorage/teleconference

Crab Plan Meeting: May 4-7, 2015.
Anchorage, AK place TBD

Observer Advisory Committee: May
29, 2015; Anchorage, AK

Groundfish Plan Team Meetings:
September 21-September 24, AFSC

Staff Tasking

In addition to discussing the timing and relative priority of previously tasked projects, and tasking for various workgroups and committees, the Council provided clarifications on several important issues. Additionally, the Council tasked the following be prepared by staff:

- Letter to the USCG Commandant highlighting concerns with potential reductions in C-130 and cutter days.
- Letter to the NOAA regarding funding needs to support implementation of electronic monitoring, incorporating additional information from the upcoming CCC meeting.
- Letter to the State Department regarding Council interest in Arctic issues, including participation in the Arctic Council and other international forums.
- Letter of support for NFWF proposals that advance Council interests, in EM development and implementation.
- Status report on issues raised at joint Council/IPHC meeting after staff coordination among agencies.
- Discussion paper on possible approaches to link BSAI halibut PSC limits to abundance estimates of halibut.
- Discussion paper on the effects of moving all GOA trawl vessels currently in the partial coverage to full (100%) observer coverage category.
- Discussion paper on the conservation and management issues associated with establishing a seasonal split for the AI pacific cod TAC.
- An Amendment package to allow partial offload deliveries of Western AI golden king crab.

BSAI Crab 10-year Review

The Council approved a work-plan for the 10 – year program review of the BSAI Crab Rationalization program. The work-plan included details of the requirements to produce such a review, guidance for establishing the scope, and an annotated table of contents based on the outline of the 5-year program review. The review intends to place most of the focus around the past five years of the program, only expanding the scope to pre-rationalization and full program evaluation as appropriate.

The Council made it clear that they would like the review to take a comprehensive look at the program. They directed the scope to be broad, to provide a basic illustration of the dynamics within the crab program, without necessarily serving as an initial review or discussion paper on one specific issue. If concerns arose based on descriptive information provided additional action may be considered from that point. Additionally the Council encouraged members of the public with specific time-critical concerns to consider other avenues to elicit Council action, such as proposing a discussion paper during staff tasking.

The proposed work-plan is scheduled to be presented to the SSC at the April 2015 Council meeting for additional feedback on the methodology within the established policy scope. This may include a discussion on the methodology and use of extensive interview data collection by the Alaska Fisheries Science Center. The first evaluation of the review is scheduled for February 2016 to incorporate several years of EDR data. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

Joint NPFMC/IPHC Meeting

On February 5 the Council recessed its regular plenary session to hold a joint meeting with the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC). The objectives of the meeting were to gain a better understanding of the respective authorities and responsibilities of the respective management bodies, to facilitate improved communications, and to facilitate a more collaborative approach to overall management of the halibut resources, including objectives relative to management of both the directed fisheries and Council managed fisheries which take halibut as bycatch. The meeting was well attended and public comment was received from nearly 40 persons. The discussions between the Council and the IPHC Commissioners resulted in the identification of a number of common themes and objectives, as well as identification of several items for future analysis and consideration. While a formal schedule for future joint meetings was not identified, it was agreed that future collaboration on these issues will be beneficial to both management bodies. For further details, a meeting summary is posted on both the Council and Commission websites. Council contact is Chris Oliver.

DRAFT NPFMC THREE-MEETING OUTLOOK - updated 2/13/2015

April 6-14, 2015 Anchorage, AK	June 1-9, 2015 Sitka, AK	October 5-13, 2015 Anchorage, AK
National Standard 1 Guidelines: SSC Review	North Pacific Climate Vulnerability Assessment: Review (T)	GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Preliminary Analysis
GOA sablefish longline pots: Final Action Area 4A halibut retention in sablefish pots: Disc Paper (T)	National Standard 1 Guidelines: Review and Comment	Charter Halibut RQE Program: Initial Review (T)
Bering Sea Salmon Bycatch: Final Action Salmon ICA and IPA: Reports from Industry Salmon Bycatch Genetics: Update	Charter Halibut RQE Program: Preliminary Review (T)	AI Pcod A/B Seasonal Apportionment: Discussion paper
Observer coverage on small CPs: Initial Review	AI Pcod Allocation: Final Action (T)	AFA program review: Review Workplan (T)
Cooperative Reports (AFA, Amendment 80, CGOA Rockfish, and BSAI Crab): Action as necessary	OAC report: Review Observer Program Supplemental EA: Review Observer Program Annual Report: Review Observer coverage on small CPs: Final Action Observer coverage on BSAI trawl CVs: Initial Review (T) 100% Observer coverage for GOA Trawl: Discussion paper	Observer coverage on BSAI trawl CVs: Final Action (T)
Research Priorities: Review Classification, management priorities	Biomass based BSAI Halibut PSC Limits: Discussion paper (T) Bering Sea Halibut PSC: Final Action	WAI GKC Partial Offloads: Initial Review (T)
BSAI Crab 10-year Review: Review methodology (SSC only)	BSAI Greenland Turbot Allocation: Initial Review (T)	Halibut Deck Sorting Scales 2016 EFP: Review
Scallop SAFE and plan team report: Adopt OFL/ABC Scallop Age Structured Model: SSC review	Research Priorities: Determine priorities	BSAI Greenland Turbot Allocation: Final Action (T)
Ecosystem Committee report: Review	BSAI Crab: Plan team report; OFL/ABC for 3 stocks	Groundfish Policy and Workplan: Review
	BS Slope and Canyon Survey: Final Report	Proposed groundfish harvest specs: Approve; PT report
		BSAI Crab SAFE/ specs for 6 stocks: Approve; PT report
		ITEMS BELOW NOT YET SCHEDULED
		Halibut/Sablefish IFQ program review per MSA requirements EFH 5-year Review (December -T) BSAI Crab bycatch limits/area closure evaluation: Disc paper Observer Lead Level 2: Discussion paper for Reg Am Observer Tendering: Initial Review

AI - Aleutian Islands
AFA - American Fisheries Act
BiOp - Biological Opinion
BSAI - Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands
BKC - Blue King Crab
BOF - Board of Fisheries
CQE - Community Quota Entity
CDQ - Community Development Quota
EDR - Economic Data Reporting
EFH - Essential Fish Habitat
EFP - Exempted Fishing Permit
EIS - Environmental Impact Statement
FEP - Fishery Ecosystem Plan
FLL - Freezer longliners
GOA - Gulf of Alaska
GKC - Golden King Crab
GHL - Guideline Harvest Level

HAPC - Habitat Areas of Particular Concern
IFQ - Individual Fishing Quota
ICA - Inter-cooperative Agreements
IPA - Incentive Program Agreements
LLP - Limited License Plan
MPA - Marine Protected Area
MRA - Maximum Retainable Allowance
PSC - Prohibited Species Catch
RKC - Red King Crab
ROFR - Right of First Refusal
RQE - Recreational Quota Entity
SIR - Supplemental Information Report
SSC - Scientific and Statistical Committee
SAFE - Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation
SSL - Steller Sea Lion
TAC - Total Allowable Catch
VMS - Vessel Monitoring System

Future Meeting Dates and Locations

April 6-14, 2015, Anchorage
June 1-9, 2015, Sitka
October 5-13, 2015 Anchorage
December 7-15, 2015, Anchorage
February 1-9, 2016, Portland
April 4 - 12, 2016, Anchorage
June 6-14, 2016, Kodiak
October 3 - 11, 2016 Anchorage
December 5-13, 2016, Anchorage

(T) = Tentative