



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

16 September 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR: Jonathan M. Kurland
 Regional Administrator

FROM: Jamal Moss, Ph.D.
 Performing the duties of Director, Alaska Fisheries Science Center

SUBJECT: Request for Trawl Survey Halibut Data

November 4, 2023, NMFS published a final rule ([88 FR 82740](#)) to implement Amendment 123 to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (BSAI FMP). The final rule implementing Amendment 123 established an annual process that links the Amendment 80 sector PSC limit to indices of halibut abundance. NMFS proposed Table 58 to Part 679 that specifies a halibut PSC limit for each of several specified halibut abundance ranges, or index states, derived from the annual International Pacific Halibut Commission's (IPHC's) Fishery Independent Setline Survey (FISS) for IPHC's management area 4ABCDE, referred to as the IPHC Index, and Alaska Fisheries Science Center's (AFSC's) Eastern Bering Sea (EBS) shelf trawl survey, referred to as the NMFS EBS Index. The IPHC index is a relative index of Pacific halibut biomass for all sizes of fish expressed as WPUE in areas 4A, 4B and 4CDE. The NMFS EBS Index is a relative index of Pacific halibut biomass for all sizes of fish expressed as weight in metric tonnes (mt) in the EBS. Each year, in Table 58 to Part 679, the intersection of the most recent abundance indices provided by the IPHC and AFSC will be used to establish the annual halibut PSC limit for the Amendment 80 sector. The final rule specified a process by which the AFSC would provide the NMFS EBS index of halibut abundance estimates to the NMFS Regional Administrator and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) by October 1 each year to provide the opportunity for review by the Council and the public, prior to the annual harvest specifications process.

The EBS shelf trawl survey is a stratified systematic survey conducted using standardized gear and methodology since 1982, and has sampled the same 376 survey stations annually since 1987. Beginning in 2024, the survey omitted the 26 high-density stations historically sampled near St. Matthew and the Pribilof Islands, leaving a total of 350 sample stations. A standard sample is an 83-112 Eastern trawl towed at 3 knots for 30 minutes. Unless retained for biological sampling by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), Pacific halibut are measured to fork length upon capture, then immediately returned to the sea in an effort to reduce mortality. The weights of all Pacific halibut are then estimated using the length-weight regression parameters specified for area 4CDE ($\alpha = 5.925 \times 10^{-6}$, $\beta = 3.161$) in IPHC Bulletin IPHC-2023-AM099-INF04. Area swept (ha) is computed for each haul as the linear distance towed, multiplied by the mean net width



(Alverson and Pereyra, 1969). Halibut CPUE for each haul is calculated as the total halibut weight, estimated by the regression, divided by the area swept. Mean catch per unit effort (CPUE) is calculated in kilograms per hectare (100 hectares (ha) = 1 km²) for each stratum (Alverson and Pereyra, 1969; Lauth and Kotwicki, 2014). A biomass estimate is calculated for each stratum by multiplying the stratum mean CPUE by the stratum area. Stratum estimates are then summed to create a biomass estimate for the total survey area (see Markowitz et al. 2023, for example).

Methods and analyses used to establish the NMFS EBS estimate of halibut abundance are described in Section 1.6.1 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement prepared for Amendment 123¹.

The 2026 Eastern Bering Sea shelf trawl survey index estimate of halibut abundance is 123,305 mt and is below the threshold level of 150,000 mt in the low abundance state.

There was a minor change in survey effort calculation in 2026. The Marport-Netmind correction factor (Lauth and Kotwicki, 2014) was developed to bring Marport-generated net spread values in line with historical Netmind measurements. This correction factor was applied to Marport spread measurements from 2013 forward to maintain the consistency of the time series. In 2024, GAP net mensuration sensors were upgraded to Marport's new generation digital units. It has now become clear that these new sensors provide measurements more consistent with historical Netmind data. Consequently, the application of the Marport-Netmind correction factor has been discontinued, and all biomass estimates generated for 2024 and later do not include this step. Biomass estimates reported in 2024 and 2025 for halibut and other species have been adjusted ~4% to reflect this change (125,145 to 120,249 mt for 2024; 133,705 to 128,518 mt for 2025). This calculation change has not impacted the abundance state for Pacific halibut over the past two years.

cc: Diana Evans, Executive Director
Angel Drobnica, NPFMC Chair

¹ <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/final-environmental-impact-statement-bering-sea-and-aleutian-islands-bsai-halibut>