



C1 BSAI Groundfish Specifications

December 2019 Council Meeting

Action Memo

- Council Staff: Steve MacLean
- Other Presenters: Stephani Zador (AFSC), Elizabeth Siddon (AFSC), Grant Thompson (AFSC, BSAI Plan Team Co-chair, SSC only), Steve Barbeaux (AFSC, BSAI Co-chair, AP & Council)
- Action Required:
1. Review the 2019 Ecosystem Status Report for the Eastern Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands.
 2. Approve the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report
 3. Recommend final BSAI groundfish harvest specifications for 2020 and 2021, including:
 - Overfishing Level (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for all stocks **[SSC]**
 - Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for all stocks, taking into account the State waters Pacific cod fishery.
 - Annual ABC reserve for three flatfish species.
 - Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits and seasonal apportionments of Pacific halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *C. opilio* crab, and herring to target fishery categories.
 - Halibut Discard Mortality Rates (DMRs).

Action

At this meeting the Council will review the Ecosystem Status Report (ESR) for the Eastern Bering Sea; adopt the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report; and make final recommendations on groundfish harvest specifications, PSC limits, and halibut DMRSs to manage the 2020 and 2021 BSAI groundfish fisheries. Once published in the Federal Register the 2020/2021 final harvest specifications will replace harvest specifications adopted last year for the start of the 2020 fisheries.

BSAI SAFE Report and Ecosystem Status Report

The BSAI Groundfish Plan Team met in Seattle at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center on November 12-15, 2019 to prepare the BSAI Groundfish SAFE report. The SAFE report forms the basis for BSAI groundfish harvest specifications for the next two fishing years. The SAFE introduction summarizes the Plan Team recommendations for each stock/complex. Hyperlinks to the full report, the Eastern Bering Sea Ecosystem Status Report, and Aleutian Islands Ecosystem Status Report are posted. The Council will review and adopt the full SAFE report at this meeting.

Minutes of the Joint BSAI and GOA Plan Team, and BSAI Groundfish Plan Team meetings are posted on the electronic agenda (Joint PT Minutes, BSAI PT Minutes). Some stocks are assessed annually while others are assessed less frequently, based on stock prioritization that includes assessment methods and data availability. Full assessments were produced for 7 stocks, partial assessments were produced for 10 stocks, and no assessments were produced for 7 stocks. For stocks for which partial or no assessments were produced, specifications were rolled over from the last assessment for that stock. The revised stock assessment schedule shows the year of next full assessment for all stocks and is included in the SAFE introduction chapter.

In 2019 the Council took final action to amend the FMPs for the BSAI (Amendment 121) and GOA (Amendment 110) to move the sculpin stock complex into the ecosystem component category and establish a Maximum Retainable Amount (MRA) of 20% for sculpins for all basis species in both the BSAI and GOA. If Amendments 121/110 and their implementing regulations are approved by the Secretary of Commerce, full assessments for sculpins will no longer be produced. A report on their status and catch will be included every four years.

OFLs, ABCs, TACs, and Apportionments

The Plan Team's recommendations for final harvest specifications for 2020 and 2021 are in the SAFE report introduction, and also attached separately on the electronic agenda ([Table 1 BSAI Plan Team Recommendations](#)). In October, the Council adopted proposed harvest specifications of OFLs and ABCs that were based on the 2018 assessments. In this 2019 SAFE report, the Plan Team has revised projections based on development of new models; collection of new catch, survey, age composition, or size composition data; or use of new methods for recommending OFLs and ABCs. The SSC's OFL and ABC, and the AP's TAC recommendations will be provided to the Council during the meeting.

The sum of the Plan Team's recommended ABCs for 2020 and 2021 are compared to those for 2018 and 2019, below.

2018	2019	2020	2021
3,766,809 t	3,367,578 t	3,273,825 t	2,968,033 t

The declines are attributable, primarily to decreases in in the EBS pollock and EBS Pacific cod. The Team recommended maximum ABCs for all stocks except EBS pollock and sablefish.

Overall, the status of the stocks continues to appear favorable. Nearly all stocks are above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy of $B_{35\%}$. The abundances of EBS pollock, EBS Pacific cod, all rockfishes managed under Tier 3, and all flatfishes managed under Tier 1 or Tier 3 are projected to be above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy of $B_{35\%}$ in 2020 while Blackspotted/Rougheye rockfish remain below this target level.

TAC considerations for State waters Pacific cod fishery

In setting TACs for 2020 and 2021, the Council accounts for Guideline Harvest Levels (GHLs) for groundfish fisheries in State waters. The Alaska Board of Fisheries took action in 2018 that modified how GHLs in the Bering Sea (BS) and Aleutian Islands (AI) are set for Pacific cod. The GHL in the AI will be set at 35% of the AI ABC, or a maximum of 15 million pounds (6804 t). The BS GHL will be set at 9% of the EBS Pacific cod ABC. An additional reduction of 45 t is taken from the remaining EBS Pacific cod maxTAC for the Area O jig fishery. A table showing ABCs, GHLs, and resulting Federal maxTAC is attached on the electronic agenda ([Table 13 BSAI Gfish Specs Tables](#)).

Flatfish flexibility ABC reserve

The Council annually recommends and ABC reserve for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole, which will be allocated to CDQ groups and the Amendment 80 cooperative using the same formulas that are used in the annual harvest specification process. The ABC reserve for each species will be specified by the Council, by evaluating the ABBC surplus for the species (i.e. the differences between the ABC and TAC), and considering whether that amount needs to be reduced by a discretionary buffer based on social, economic, or ecological considerations. The Council will then designate some, all, or none of the ABC surplus as the ABC reserve. The Council should provide its rationale each year for setting the ABC reserve at a particular level for these three flatfish species. A table of ABCs, TACs, ABC surplus, and ABC reserves is attached to the electronic agenda ([Table 7 BSAI Gfish Specs Tables](#)).

During the Inseason Management Report (Agenda Item B2), NMFS will have provided a report on flatfish exchanges by the Amendment 80 cooperative this year. This informs the Council's decision as to whether to establish a buffer reducing the amount of the ABC reserve available to be exchanged by eligible entities. The report will include information on the number of vessels used to harvest cooperative quota, the number and dates of flatfish exchanges, the types and amounts of cooperative quota and Amendment 80 ABC reserves utilized. The report also includes the dates, types, and amounts of quota transfers.

Prohibited Species Catch limits

Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits are established for halibut, crab, and herring during the specifications process and are allocated between sectors and season as described below. A table of PSC limits is attached to the electronic agenda ([Tables 8-11 BSAI Gfish Specs Tables](#)).

Crab PSC in Trawl Fisheries

Final BSAI harvest specifications include PSC limits for red king crab, Tanner crab, and *C. opilio* crab, which are established based on formulas in the FMP and regulations, and the Council recommends target fishery apportionments of these limits for the BSAI trawl limited access sector. The 2020 and 2021 crab PSC limits have been revised using current crab biomass amounts.

Herring

An overall herring PSC limit is established as 1% of the EBS herring biomass. This limit is apportioned to seven PSC target fishery categories. Herring PSC limits from 2019 are attached to the electronic agenda (Table 9). Revisions based on the most current biomass estimates may be provided during the meeting.

Halibut PSC in Trawl Fisheries

The overall PSC limit is fixed under BSAI Groundfish FMP Amendment 111 at 2,805 t, which is apportioned as 1,745 t to Amendment 80, 745 t to Trawl Limited Access, and 315 t to CDQ. Within the Trawl Limited Access sector, the Council recommends apportionments of the halibut PSC limit to the trawl fishery categories. Additional reductions of 5% would occur if PSC limit amounts are transferred from the BSAI Trawl Limited Access sector to the Amendment 80 trawl sector during a fishing year.

Halibut PSC in Hook-and-line Gear Fisheries

The 710 t non-trawl gear halibut mortality limit, which is established in the FMP, can be apportioned by fishery categories. The halibut PSC limit for the hook-and-line Pacific cod fishery is divided between the hook-and-line CP and CV sectors. The Council can provide varying amounts of halibut PSC by season to each sector, tailoring PSC limits based on the factors to be considered below.

Seasonal apportionment of PSC limits

The Council may also seasonally apportion the PSC limits listed above for the hook-and-line gear and BSAI Trawl Limited Access sector. Regulations require that seasonal apportionments of bycatch allowances be based on information listed below:

Factors to be considered for seasonal apportionments of bycatch allowances

1. Seasonal distribution of prohibited species;
2. Seasonal distribution of target groundfish species relative to prohibited species distribution;
3. Expected prohibited species bycatch needs on a seasonal basis relevant to change in prohibited species biomass and expected catches of target groundfish species;
4. Expected variations in bycatch rates throughout the fishing year;
5. Expected changes in directed groundfish fishing seasons;
6. Expected start of fishing efforts; and
7. Economic effects of establishing seasonal prohibited species apportionments on segments of the target groundfish industry.

Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

The recommended discard mortality rates for use in the BSAI for 2020-2021 are attached to the electronic agenda ([Table 12 BSAI Gfish Specs Tables](#)).