



C1 MRA Adjustments – Final Action

October 2025

Action Memo

Council Staff: Taylor Holman
Other Presenters: Josh Keaton (NMFS SF), Krista Milani (NMFS SF)
Action Required: 1) Review analysis, provide any input and recommendations
2) Recommend preferred alternative for final action, or request additional analysis

BACKGROUND

The Council is considering taking final action to adjust the maximum retainable amount (MRA) regulations for groundfish fisheries. Federal regulations limit a vessel's retention of primarily groundfish species closed to directed fishing to a percentage of catch of species open to directed fishing, called an MRA. At this meeting, the Council will review an Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review (EA/RIR) document that analyzes several proposed management measures that would revise MRA regulations.

The action under consideration was initiated by Council motion at their April 2024 meeting, and initial review of an EA/RIR analysis occurred in April 2025. This action is intended to improve the regulations that implement the MRA of species that are closed to directed fishing (incidental catch species) while a vessel operator is engaged in fishing for species or species groups that are open to directed fishing. The alternatives under consideration would revise MRA regulations to clarify the definition of a fishing trip, calculations for MRAs, and applications of MRAs (options under Alternative 2); revise the triggers that end a fishing trip (Alternative 3); add additional species to an offload-to-offload MRA application in the BSAI and GOA for all vessel sectors (Alternative 4); revise the calculation period for Bering Sea (BS) pollock by Amendment 80 to an annual calculation (Alternative 5); and provide exemptions in regulation from MRA requirements in cases of medical emergencies, mechanical emergencies, or poor weather that ends a fishing trip (Alternative 6). The Council may select multiple alternatives.

Analysts have identified several items and sections within the analysis that would benefit from Council attention or consideration. These items are highlighted within the Executive Summary, under "Specific Items for Council Attention," and will be discussed during the presentation to the Council.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1: Status Quo. Federal Regulations at 50 CFR 679.20(e) establish MRAs as a percent of a basis species in Table 10 of part 679 for the Gulf of Alaska (GOA), Table 11 for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI), and Table 30 for the Central GOA Rockfish Program. The percentage of a species closed to directed fishing that is retained in relation to a basis species must not be exceeded. In most cases, any additional catch amounts must be discarded at sea.

Alternative 2: Revise MRA regulations to clarify (1) the definition of a fishing trip, (2) calculations for MRAs, and (3) applications of MRAs. These changes provide clarification and make minor modifications in how the MRA regulations are currently implemented.

Option 1 – Modify the definition of a fishing trip to make it clear that motherships are responsible for the overall MRA of any catcher vessel delivering unsorted codends.

Option 2 – Clarify that MRAs are calculated by fishery management program due to different fishing prohibitions in place for each fishery management program.

Option 3 – Correct regulation citations for American Fisheries Act (AFA) vessels and AFA replacement vessels.

Option 4 – Clarify that when Community Development Quota (CDQ) uses an AFA vessel to harvest Amendment 80 species BSAI pollock and Bering Sea (BS) Atka mackerel MRAs are calculated at the time of the offload and any species open to directed fishing may be used as a basis species for compliance with MRAs.

Option 5 – Clarify that MRAs take precedence over improved retention/improved utilization (IR/IU) regulations for catcher vessels delivering catch to a shoreside processor or stationary floating processor when catcher vessels fish in areas with different fishing prohibitions.

Option 6 – Update IR/IU regulations for Amendment 80 vessels to reflect past Council actions.

Option 7 – Revise the definition of directed fishing at 50 CFR 679.2 for vessels participating in the pelagic trawl EM program such that vessels deploying pelagic trawl gear are directed fishing for pollock if the amount of pollock is

Suboptions: 51-90 percent or greater of total catch.

Alternative 3: Revise the triggers that end a fishing trip from five to two triggers in the definition of a fishing trip for catcher/processors and motherships (not including current offload-to-offload species: BSAI pollock, BS Atka mackerel, and weekly reporting period species in the Central GOA Rockfish Program). Two triggers would remain: (1) when all fish or fish product is offloaded and (2) if the vessel changes authorized gear type. Three triggers would be removed: (1) the effective date of a different fishing prohibition in the area the vessel is fishing, (2) when a vessel enters or leaves an area with a different fishing prohibition, and (3) the end of a weekly reporting period.

Method 1 - Use all basis species accumulated on the vessel when calculating MRAs for each trip regardless of fishery closures and protection areas.

Method 2 - Only use basis species accumulated after a change in directed fishing has occurred due to an inseason action or entering a protection area for the species that had a change in status for each trip.

Alternative 4: Add additional species to an offload-to-offload MRA application in the BSAI and GOA for all vessel sectors.

Option 1 – Add BSAI Pacific cod, GOA Pacific cod, GOA pollock, BSAI skates, Central GOA Rockfish Program, and GOA shallow-water flatfish.

Option 2 – Include all groundfish species.

Methods 1 and 2 would only apply to catcher processors and motherships.

Method 1 – Use all basis species accumulated on the vessel when calculating MRAs for each trip regardless of fishery closures and protection areas.

Method 2 – Only use basis species accumulated after a change in directed fishing has occurred due to an inseason action or entering a protection area for the species that had a change in status for each trip.

Alternative 5: Apply Bering Sea pollock MRA provisions to Amendment 80 vessels on an annual basis with the implementation of an incentive plan or other controls to prevent increases in average pollock catch. Establish similar measures for CDQ groups harvesting Amendment 80 species to ensure consistency with regulation of harvest statutory requirements.

Alternative 6: Provide exemptions in regulation from MRA requirements in cases when medical emergencies, mechanical emergencies, or poor weather end a fishing trip.

Alternatives 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are not mutually exclusive.