



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:GF 18-024

Agenda Date10/1/2018

Agenda Number:C2

William Tweit, Interim Chair
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Groundfish harvest specifications - Proposed specifications, Plan Team reports

STAFF CONTACT: Diana Stram and Jim Armstrong (NPFMC)

ACTION REQUIRED:

- A. Review Groundfish Plan Team reports
- B. Recommend proposed BSAI and GOA groundfish harvest specifications for 2019-2020

BACKGROUND:

A. Plan Team Reports

The BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Teams met during September 18-21, 2018, to review and recommend, for proposed rulemaking, groundfish harvest specifications for the upcoming 2019 and 2020 fishing years. The Teams also reviewed reports from assessment authors to identify items for inclusion in stock assessments that will be presented at the November Plan Team meetings. Minutes from the Joint BSAI/GOA Groundfish Plan Team and individual BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Team meetings are attached (**item C2-1**).

B. Proposed Harvest Specifications

At this meeting the Council will recommend, for proposed rulemaking, BSAI and GOA groundfish harvest specifications for the upcoming two-year period (2019 and 2020) which will notify the public of expected Council action to set final harvest specifications in December 2018. Existing 2019 harvest specifications were published as a final rule in the *Federal Register* in February 2018 and will be in place for January 2019 when the groundfish fishing year begins. Proposed harvest specifications for the year after next (2020) are typically set equal to the proposed upcoming year (2019) harvest specifications. In addition to harvest specifications, the Council will recommend, for proposed rulemaking, gear and target fishery apportionments of prohibited species catch (PSC) limits for halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *opilio* crab, and herring. The Council will also recommend updated halibut discard mortality rates. Final harvest specifications will be based on stock assessment reports included in the groundfish SAFEs for BSAI and GOA that will be released in late November 2018.

Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish

The BSAI Plan Team recommendations for proposed 2019 and 2020 BSAI groundfish annual harvest specifications are attached (**item C2-2**, Table 1). The Team adopted proposed 2019 and 2020 BSAI OFLs and ABCs which rollover, except for squids, the existing final 2019 harvest specifications that were published in the *Federal Register* last year. Amendment 117 to the BSAI FMP reclassifies squids as a non-target ecosystem component species. As a result, 2019 and future years OFL, ABC, and TAC are not, and will not be specified for squids.

TAC considerations for State waters Pacific cod fishery

In setting proposed specifications for TACs for 2019 and 2020 the Council must account for guideline harvest levels (GHLs) for groundfish fisheries in state waters. The Alaska Board of Fisheries took action in 2015 that modified how GHLs in the Bering Sea (BS) and Aleutian Islands (AI) are set for Pacific cod. In 2019, the GHL in the AI will be set at 31% of the AI ABC. The BS GHL will be set at 6.4% of the EBS Pacific cod ABC.

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Flatfish flexibility ABC reserve

Under Amendment 105, an ABC reserve is specified for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole. These species are allocated to CDQ groups and Amendment 80 cooperatives using formulas from the annual harvest specifications process. The ABC reserve for each species is specified by the Council by evaluating the difference between the ABC and TAC for each species (i.e., ABC surplus), and considering whether the amount needs to be reduced by a discretionary buffer based on social, economic, or ecological considerations. The Council then designates some, all, or none of the ABC surplus as the ABC reserve. The Council provides its rationale for setting the ABC reserve at a particular level each year. The 2019 and 2020 CDQ and Amendment 80 ABC reserves have been provided by NMFS staff based on 2018 TAC levels and an assumption of the maximum ABC reserve (attached **item C2-3** Table 7).

A report on flatfish exchanges by the Amendment 80 cooperatives will be provided to the Council by NMFS at the December meeting, but exchanges in 2018 so far are reported below. The December report will include information on the number of vessels used to harvest cooperative quota, the number of flatfish exchanges and the dates those exchanges were approved, the types of and amounts of cooperative quota and Amendment 80 ABC reserve utilized, and the dates, types, and amounts of inter-cooperative quota transfers. This report is provided each year in December to help the Council make appropriate adjustments, as needed.

2018 Changes in Flatfish TACs from Flatfish Exchanges

Group	Date	Flathead Sole		Rock Sole		Yellowfin Sole	
		TAC ¹	Exchange	TAC	Exchange	TAC	Exchange
	27-Feb	14,500		47,100		154,000	
ASC ²	pending	17,150	2,650	43,450	-3,650	155,000	1,000
APICDA ³	pending	17,150	0	43,200	-250	155,250	250
CVRF ⁴	pending	17,105	-45	42,950	-250	155,545	295

¹ Total Allowable Catch

² Alaska Seafood Cooperative

³ Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association

⁴ Coastal Villages Regional Fund

BSAI Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) Limits

Final BSAI harvest specifications include PSC limits for halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *opilio* crab, and herring and their gear type and target fishery apportionments, which are set in federal regulations. The 2019 and 2020 crab PSC limits have been revised using current biomass amounts and herring PSC limits will be revised when the most current biomass amounts are known. Proposed harvest specifications for these PSC limits and apportionments based on 2018 are attached (**item C2-4**, Tables 8-11).

BSAI Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

At their September meeting, the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams reviewed updated halibut DMRs for implementation in 2019 in the BSAI and GOA. The Teams supported the Halibut DMR Working Group's recommendations, which are provided in **item C2-5** (Table 12).

Three-River Index for EBS Pollock fishery Chinook PSC threshold

Under BSAI groundfish FMP amendment 110, in addition to other bycatch reduction measures, the Council recommended, and NMFS implemented, a reduction to overall Chinook PSC levels for the EBS pollock fishery sectors in times of low western Alaskan Chinook salmon abundance. The PSC limits are specifically reduced (from a performance standard of 47,491 to 33,318, and a PSC limit from 60,000 to 45,000 Chinook overall) when an index of western Alaskan and Upper Yukon Chinook salmon abundance is below a 250,000 Chinook salmon threshold. This reduction in cap levels in times of low abundance is designed to provide for increased incentives to the pollock fleet to reduce bycatch to the maximum extent practicable to help in efforts to rebuild critically low western Alaskan Chinook stocks. These reduced cap levels are enacted in all years where the index for assessing the status of western Alaskan Chinook stocks is below a designated threshold (of 250,000 fish) that indicates very poor run sizes. All other provisions of bycatch management will also be in place in those years.

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Has established under Amendment 110, historically low Western Alaskan Chinook salmon abundance is assessed annually using a 3-system index of inriver adult Chinook salmon run sizes from the Unalakleet, Upper Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers combined. Under the Council's specified process, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) provides post-season abundance estimates to NMFS by October 1 to determine if adult Chinook abundance in the index systems falls at or below the threshold level of 250,000. The performance standard and hard cap applicable to the Bering Sea pollock fishery will be lowered in the year following the year in which the index was $\leq 250,000$. A letter from ADFG to NMFS is posted under Agenda Item B3 which reports that the estimated Chinook abundance is below the threshold. As a result, for 2019, the PSC caps will drop to the lower level. These caps (with seasonal and sector apportionments) are shown below and are also attached as a **supplemental**:

2019 Overall PSC Limit

AFA sector	A season		B season		Annual total	
	Allocation	Chinook	Allocation	Chinook	Allocation	Chinook
1 Catcher/processor	22.9	10,363	17.9	2,415	28.4	12,780
2 Mothership	8	2,520	7.3	987	7.8	3,510
3 Inshore	49.8	15,887	69.3	9,355	55.6	25,020
4 CDD Program	9.3	2,930	5.5	743	8.2	3,680

2019 Performance Standard

AFA sector	A season		B season		Annual total	
	Allocation	Chinook	Allocation	Chinook	Allocation	Chinook
1 Catcher/processor	22.9	7,879	17.9	1,789	28.4	9,462
2 Mothership	8	1,886	7.3	750	7.8	2,599
3 Inshore	49.8	11,815	69.3	9,328	55.6	21,325
4 CDD Program	9.3	2,160	5.5	560	8.2	2,750

Gulf of Alaska Groundfish

The GOA Plan Team's harvest recommendations for 2019 and 2020 are listed in the attached table (**item C2-6**, Table 1). The Team adopted proposed 2019 and 2020 GOA OFLs and ABCs which rollover the existing final 2019 harvest specifications that were published in the *Federal Register* last year. Amendment 106 to the GOA FMP reclassified squids as a non-target ecosystem component species. As a result, 2019 and future years OFL, ABC, and TAC are not, and will not be specified for squids.

Pacific cod TAC Adjustments

The Council will need to recommend Pacific cod TACs for the GOA that are a 25% to 30% reduction from ABC to account for State GHF fisheries. Using the area apportionments from the proposed 2018 Pacific cod ABCs recommended by the Plan Team, the 2019 and 2020 Federal TACs for Pacific cod would be adjusted as listed in attached table (**item C2-7**).

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GOA Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) Limits

Recommended 2019 and 2020 halibut PSC apportionments (**item C2-8**, Tables 14-16) are based on the recommended 2019 apportionments for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. Salmon PSC limits are set in regulation.

GOA Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

At their September meeting, the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams reviewed updated halibut DMRs for implementation in 2019 in the BSAI and GOA. The Teams supported the Halibut DMR Working Group's recommendations, which are provided in **item C2-9** (Table 17).