



## **C3 BSAI Groundfish Specifications**

December 2021 Council Meeting

### **Action Memo**

- Council Staff: Dr. Diana Stram
- Other Presenters: Dr. Elizabeth Siddon (AFSC – presenting BS ESR), Dr. Ivonne Ortiz (U. Wash – presenting AI ESR), Dr. Grant Thompson (AFSC, BSAI Plan Team Co-Chair – presenting to SSC), Dr. Steve Barbeaux (AFSC, BSAI Co-Chair – presenting to AP & Council)
- Action Required:
1. Review 2021 Ecosystem Status Reports for the Eastern Bering Sea and the Aleutian Islands
  2. Approve the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report
  3. Recommend Final 2022 and 2023 BSAI groundfish harvest specifications, including:
    - Overfishing Level (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for all stocks
    - 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 season 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, ABC reserves for three flatfish species PSC limits, and halibut Discard Mortality Rates (DMRs) to manage the 2022 and 2023 BSAI groundfish fisheries. Once published in the Federal Register, these 2022/2023 final harvest specifications will replace harvest specifications implemented February 25, 2021 for the 2022 fisheries ([86 FR 11449](#)).

### **Joint Plan Team Meeting**

The Joint BSAI and GOA Plan Teams met, virtually over the internet, on November 15 to address issues common to the BSAI and GOA. Primary agenda items were a report on the BSAI groundfish surveys, EFH, the Economic SAFE Report, and the assessment of sablefish in the GOA and BSAI. Minutes of the joint team meeting are available on the eAgenda.

## **BSAI SAFE Report and Ecosystem Status Report**

The BSAI Groundfish Plan Team met, virtually over the internet, on November 16-19, 2021 to prepare the BSAI Groundfish SAFE report. The SAFE report forms the basis for setting BSAI groundfish harvest specifications for the next two fishing years. The SAFE report introduction summarizes the Plan Team recommendations for each stock/complex. Links to the full report are posted on the eAgenda. The Council will review and adopt the full SAFE report at this meeting. The Teams also reviewed Ecosystem Status Reports for the Eastern Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands, as context for assessing BSAI species.

Minutes of the BSAI Groundfish Plan Team meeting are posted on the eAgenda. Some stocks are assessed annually while other are assessed less frequently, based on stock prioritization that includes assessment methods and data availability. Full assessments were produced for 10 stocks. For stocks for which partial assessments were produced, specifications were rolled over from the last assessment for that stock. The revised stock assessment schedule shows when the next full assessment will occur for each stock and is included in the SAFE introduction chapter.

## **OFLs, ABCs, TACs, and Apportionments**

The Plan Team's recommendations for final 2022 and 2023 harvest specification are in the SAFE report introduction, and also attached separately on the eAgenda (Table 1 BSAI Plan Team Recommendations). In October, the Council adopted proposed harvest specifications of OFLs and ABCs that were based on the 2020 assessments. In this 2021 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 recommendations, 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 2022 and 2023 are compared below to those adopted by the Council for 2020 and 2021.

2020	2021	2022	2023
3,273,825	2,747,727	2,322,082	2,564, 366

Overall, the status of the stocks continues to appear favorable.

## **TAC considerations for State waters Pacific cod fishery**

In setting TACs for 2022 and 2023, 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 39% of the AI ABC, or a maximum of 15 million pounds (6,804 t). The BS GHL will be set at 11% of the EBS Pacific cod. 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 eAgenda.

## **Flatfish flexibility ABC reserve**

The Council annually recommends an 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 ABC 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 eAgenda (Table 7 in BSAI Groundfish Tables 7-12).

During the Inseason Management Report (Agenda Item B2), NMFS will provide a report on flatfish exchanges by the Amendment 80 cooperative this year. This informs the Council's decision whether to establish a buffer reducing the amount of ABC reserve available to the exchanged by eligible entities. The report will include information on the number of vessels used to harvest cooperative quota, the number of 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**

Apportionments of 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. PSC limit tables are attached to the eAgenda (Tables 8-11 in BSAI Groundfish Tables 7-12).

### 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. The Council recommends target fishery apportionments of these limits for the BSAI trawl limited access sector. The 2022 and 2023 crab PSC limits have been revised using the current crab biomass amounts.

Federal regulations at §679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)(I) state that the Red King Crab Savings Subarea is closed to nonpelagic trawl gear if Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) does not set a TAC for red king crab in the Bristol Bay area in the previous year. A GHF is not set for the 2021/2022 Bristol Bay red king crab season, thus the area will be closed to nonpelagic trawl gear in 2022.

### 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 for 2022 are attached to the eAgenda (Table 9), based on the most current biomass estimates from the ADF&G that are available on the eAgenda.

### Halibut PSC in Trawl Fisheries

The overall trawl gear halibut 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 to BSAI Trawl Limited Access Sector, and 315 t to CDQ. Within the BSAI Trawl Limited Access sector, the Council recommends apportionments of the halibut PSC limit to the trawl fishery categories. Additional reduction of 5% would occur if PSC limits 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 PSC 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 sector. 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.

Information to evaluate these factors can be found on the IPHC website, in the NMFS Fisheries Catch and Landings Reports for BSAI prohibited species, and in the BSAI Groundfish SAFE reports.

Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

The recommended discard mortality rates for use in the BSAI for 2022-2023 are attached to the eAgenda (Table 12 in BSAI Groundfish Tables 7-12).