



# **C2 BSAI and GOA Groundfish Harvest – Proposed Specifications, Plan Teams Report**

October 2020 Council Meeting

## **Action Memo**

- Council Staff: Sara Cleaver (GOA), Steve MacLean (BSAI)
- Other Presenters: Dr. Grant Thompson (AFSC), Dr. Jim Ianelli (AFSC), Dr. Steve Barbeaux (AFSC)
- Action Required:
1. Review Joint, BSAI, and GOA Plan Team reports
  2. Recommend proposed BSAI and GOA groundfish harvest limits, prohibited species catch limits, and halibut discard mortality rates for 2021-2022.

### **1. Plan Team Reports**

The Council's BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Teams met during September 8-11, 2020, to review and recommend, for proposed rulemaking, groundfish harvest specifications for the upcoming 2021 and 2022 fishing years. The teams reviewed reports from assessment authors to identify items for inclusion in stock assessments that will be presented at the November Groundfish Plan Team meetings. The teams also received a preliminary report on the Ecosystem Status Report which will be finalized for the November Plan Team meeting. The complete list of items covered at the meeting can be found on each Plan Team [agenda](#). The Joint BSAI/GOA Groundfish Plan Teams report will be presented during this agenda item, along with the individual BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Team reports. All three reports are attached to the eAgenda.

### **2. 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 (2021 and 2022) which will notify the public of expected Council action to set final harvest specifications in December 2020. Proposed harvest specifications for the year after next (2022) are typically set equal to the proposed upcoming year (2021) 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 (DMRs). Final harvest specifications in December 2020 will be based on stock assessment reports included in the Groundfish SAFE reports for the BSAI and GOA that will be released in late November 2020.

In December 2019, the Council adopted final harvest specifications for 2020 and 2021, which were published as a final rule in the Federal Register in March 2020 (85 FR 13553, March 9, 2020 (BSAI); 85 FR 13802, March 10, 2020 (GOA)). These existing 2021 specifications will be effective for the beginning of the 2021 groundfish fishing year.

## **Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish**

The BSAI Groundfish Plan Team recommendations for the proposed 2021 and 2022 BSAI groundfish annual harvest specifications are shown in Table 1 in the BSAI PT Proposed Specs Tables attachment on the eAgenda. The Team adopted proposed 2021 and 2022 BSAI Overfishing Limits (OFLs) and Allowable Biological Catch limits (ABCs) which match the existing final 2021 harvest specifications that were published in the Federal Register in March 2020, and rollover the same limits for 2022, except for Northern rock sole. The northern rock sole OFL and ABC were updated by the Plan Team in response to an error correction from the stock assessment authors.

### TAC considerations for State waters Pacific cod fishery

In setting TACs for 2021 and 2022, 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 and Aleutian Islands are set for Pacific cod. The GHL in the AI will be set at 39% of the AI Pacific cod ABC (to a maximum of 15,000,000 pounds). The GHL in the BS will be set at 10% of the eastern BS Pacific cod ABC. An additional 45 t is taken from the remaining eastern BS available maxTAC for the Area O jig fishery.

### 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 the Amendment 80 cooperative 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., the 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 2021 and 2022 CDQ and Amendment 80 ABC reserves have been provided by NMFS staff based on 2021 TAC levels and past Council action to set ABC reserve at the maximum amount. The proposed 2021 and 2022 ABC Surplus, ABC Reserves, CDQ ABC Reserves, and Amendment 80 ABC Reserves in the BSAI for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole are shown in Table 7 of the BSAI PT Proposed Specs Tables attachment on the eAgenda.

### 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 gear type and target fishery apportionments, which are set in Federal regulations. The 2021 and 2022 crab PSC limits have been revised using current biomass estimates and herring PSC limits will be revised when the most current biomass estimates are known. Proposed harvest specifications for these PSC limits and apportionments based on 2020 are shown as Tables 8, 9, 10, and 11 of the BSAI PT Proposed Specs Tables attachment on the eAgenda.

### BSAI Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

At the September meeting the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams reviewed halibut Discard Mortality Rates (DMRs) for implementation in 2021 and 2022 in the BSAI and GOA, and supported the Halibut DMR Working Group's recommendations. Proposed 2021 and 2022 Pacific halibut DMRs for the BSAI are shown in Table 12 of the BSAI PT Proposed Specs Tables attachment on the eAgenda.

### Three-River Index for EBS Pollock Fishery Chinook Salmon 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

reduced when an index of Western Alaskan and Upper Yukon Chinook salmon abundance is below a threshold of 250,000 Chinook salmon. Cap levels are reduced from a performance standard of 47,491 to 33,318 and a PSC limit from 60,000 to 45,000. This reduction in cap levels in times of low abundance is designed to provide increased incentives for the pollock fleet to reduce bycatch to the maximum extent practicable to help in efforts to rebuild critically low Western Alaskan Chinook salmon stocks. Reduced cap levels are enacted in all years when the index is below the designated threshold of 250,000 Western Alaskan Chinook salmon, which indicates very poor run sizes. All other provisions of Chinook salmon bycatch management will also be in place in these years.

As established under Amendment 110, historically low Western Alaskan Chinook salmon abundance is assessed annually using a three-system index of in-river 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 system 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 this agenda item. The letter reports that **the three-system index of in-river adult Chinook salmon run sizes from the Unalakleet, Upper Yukon, and Kuskokwim Rivers is 173,416 and is below the threshold level of 250,000**. Therefore, the performance standard will decrease from 47,491 to 33,318 Chinook salmon and the PSC limit will decrease from 60,000 to 45,000 Chinook salmon, as identified at 50 CFR 679.21.

## **Gulf of Alaska Groundfish**

The GOA Groundfish Plan Team's harvest recommendations for 2021 and 2022 are shown in Table 1 of the GOA PT Proposed Specs Tables attachment on the eAgenda. The Team adopted proposed 2021 and 2022 GOA OFLs and ABCs which match the existing final 2021 harvest specifications that were published in the Federal Register in March 2020, and rollover the same limits for 2022. Final harvest specifications will be based on stock assessment reports included in the GOA Groundfish SAFE report that will be released in late November 2020.

### 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 2021 Pacific cod ABCs recommended by the Plan Team, the 2021 and 2022 Federal TACs for Pacific cod would be adjusted as listed in Table 2 of the GOA PT Proposed Specs Tables attachment on the eAgenda.

### GOA Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) Limits

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. Recommended 2021 and 2022 halibut PSC apportionments (Tables 9-11 in the posted attachment) are based on the recommended 2021 apportionments for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. Salmon PSC limits in the GOA groundfish fisheries are not specified on an annual basis because they are set in regulation.

### GOA Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

At the September meeting the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams reviewed halibut Discard Mortality Rates (DMRs) for implementation in 2021 in the GOA and BSAI, and supported the Halibut DMR Working Group's recommendations. Proposed 2021 and 2022 Pacific halibut DMRs for the GOA are shown in Table 12 of the GOA PT Proposed Specs Tables attachment on the eAgenda.