

CDQ Village Pacific Cod Fishery

Introduction

The six CDQ organizations: Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association, Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation, Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association, Coastal Villages Region Fund, Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation and Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association, are seeking regulatory changes or exemptions that would encourage local development and participation in the harvest of CDQ Pacific cod (Pcod) allocations, both in a directed cod fishery and when targeting CDQ and IFQ halibut. This proposed fishery would allow CDQ village residents with vessels ranging in size from 16' to 46' in length, mainly using hook-and-line gear, to develop and participate in a CDQ village Pacific cod fishery.

The proposal is consistent with the National Standards (NS) established in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) (16 U.S.C. 1851 et seq.) regarding fisheries management measures. These standards where practicable include: preventing overfishing while achieving optimum yield (NS 1); managing interrelated stocks as a unit or in close coordination (NS 3); promoting efficiency, minimizing costs, and avoiding duplications (NS 5 & 7); taking into account the importance of fishery resources to fishing communities (NS 8); minimizing bycatch or mortality from bycatch (NS 9); and promoting the safety of human life at sea (NS 10). The CDQ Village Pcod Fishery Proposal meets all of the above standards.

In addition, the proposal fulfills the objectives of 16 U.S.C. 1855(i)(1)(A)(i)(ii)(iii) and (iv) of the MSA, which establishes the Community Development Quota (CDQ) program in order to: provide eligible western Alaska villages with the opportunity to participate and invest in fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area; and support economic development, alleviate poverty and provide economic and social benefits, and achieve sustainable and diversified economies for the residents of western Alaska.

Problem Statement

Current federal regulations for the direct harvest of CDQ Pacific cod allocations are restrictive and discourage village fleets from participating in a directed CDQ Pcod fishery. The regulations of concern are:

- 1) License Limitation Program permit (LLP) – Vessels over 32' in length are required to have an LLP to harvest CDQ Pcod with hook-and-line gear. There are only eighty-seven (87) <60' hook-and-line/pot LLP's endorsed to fish Pcod in the Bering Sea. The supply of permits for sale on the major brokerage websites is very limited and the price per Bering Sea endorsed LLP is often in excess of \$100,000 – prohibitively expensive for small vessel operators in CDQ villages. The CDQ village fleets of 105-116 small vessels, for the most part, do not possess Pcod endorsed LLP's. As there is no LLP category specific to the smaller vessels in the Bering Sea, they must compete with the larger vessels for the available LLP's and there are not nearly enough available to accommodate the CDQ village small boat fleets. It is important to note that the jig

fishery is exempted from the Pcod LLP requirement, and the CDQ village fleets are very similar in size and vessel type to those participating in the jig fishery.

2) Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) – All vessels, regardless of size, are required to have VMS while targeting CDQ Pcod with hook-and-line gear. The CDQ village fleets are more similar to vessels that participate in the Pcod jig fishery than larger catcher vessels or catcher processors utilizing hook-and-line gear. There is no regulation requiring VMS for the small vessels participating in the Bering Sea Pcod jig fishery. In addition, VMS systems are not currently designed for the many open boats in the CDQ small boat fleets. Although the systems are weatherproof they have AC power requirements and electronic components that are not conducive to successful installation in small open vessels. The range of the CDQ small boat fleets is very limited and their participation will be in close proximity to CDQ villages. There may need to be VMS coverage for vessels fishing near SSL restricted areas, however.

3) Observer Coverage – The current observer coverage regulation for hook-and-line catcher vessels harvesting CDQ Pcod is more restrictive than for non-CDQ state and federal Pcod fisheries, and requires full (100%) observer coverage regardless of vessel size. The CDQ village fleets, with vessels up to 46' in length, range from small open skiffs to gillnet style vessels. Having 100% observer coverage for fifty or more small vessels seems problematic. A better solution would be to adopt observer coverage regulations currently utilized in non-CDQ CV Pcod fisheries, which require only partial coverage. This would put CDQ village boats over 40' in length in the Vessel Selection pool.

4) Maximum Retainable Amount (MRA) – The MRA of Pcod while targeting halibut is 20% of the target weight. Any additional Pcod harvested must be discarded and returned to sea. This constitutes an unnecessary waste of the Pcod resource. Pcod in excess of the 20% MRA could be retained and used as a source of income for the CDQ village fishermen, if the CDQ organizations allocate Pcod to their small boat halibut fleets, and these vessels comply with or are exempt from the regulations to be in the Pacific cod directed fishery.

Proposal

The CDQ groups request the Council to initiate a discussion paper, considering the problem statement, and the adoption of proposed regulation changes or exemptions that will: 1) promote the development of a CDQ village directed Pacific cod fishery; and 2) allow village CDQ and IFQ halibut harvesters to retain CDQ Pacific cod in excess of the 20% MRA.

Proposed regulation changes:

1) Exempt vessels between 32' and 46' in length from LLP requirements while harvesting CDQ Pacific cod.

2) Exempt vessels up to 46' in length from VMS requirements while harvesting CDQ Pacific cod.

3) Align observer requirements for hook-and-line catcher vessels targeting CDQ Pacific cod with observer requirements for hook-and-line catcher vessels targeting non-CDQ Pacific cod. As part of a discussion paper, it would be useful to identify and address options for determining discard mortality rates, particularly for halibut in a directed CDQ Pcod fishery.

4) Require 100% retention of CDQ Pacific cod, on vessels with the exemption in 1) and 2) above, while directed fishing for CDQ and/or IFQ halibut, only if an allocation of CDQ Pcod is available to those vessels.

Discussion

The CDQ organizations would like to develop a directed CDQ Pcod fishery that would take place before, during and/or after directed halibut fishing. Currently, regulations applicable to vessels targeting CDQ Pcod with hook and line gear are prohibitive for the CDQ village fleets, but easing the regulations identified above would make the development of these local fisheries more viable. The proposed changes would also require the CDQ groups to set aside an adequate amount of Prohibited Species Quota (PSQ) and other allocated species to adequately cover bycatch.

Because of the nature of the CDQ villages' small boat fleets and the harsh Bering Sea conditions, fishing would likely occur between the months of May and September. The number of vessels that may participate will vary from community to community and within the six CDQ regions. It is expected that the number of participating vessels, in total, will increase with time as CDQ groups continue to gain expertise and equip processing plants and platforms with necessary processing equipment. It is anticipated that vessels will fish both state and federal waters in close proximity to CDQ villages along the western Alaska coast and Aleutian and Pribilof Islands.

There is no CDQ Pacific cod Seasonal Allowance for non-trawl catcher vessels (CV) under 60' in length. Therefore the CDQ allocations committed to the CDQ village fleets could be harvested during the proposed months of May through September as opposed to being broken up into A and B seasons.

Considering current and future anticipated declines in the halibut TAC's in Western Alaska, the CDQ village fishermen would benefit from the removal of impediments to the opportunity to harvest Pcod with small vessels. In addition, the development of a regional Pcod fishery would supplement halibut production and increase processing efficiencies for plants in and near the villages.

For the same reasons, and the added reason of avoiding wastage of the Pcod resource, the CDQ organizations would also like the ability to retain up to 100% of the Pacific cod caught while directed CDQ and IFQ halibut fishing, as described in proposed change 4 above. Throughout the halibut season, CDQ village vessels catch Pcod as bycatch, much of which has to be returned to sea due to MRA limitations. It is common practice for some CDQ village fleets to target both CDQ and IFQ halibut in the same trip. It would be most efficient and conservative to allow retention of CDQ Pcod when an allocation is available to the village fleets targeting CDQ and/or IFQ halibut.

CDQ Village Pacific Cod Fishery Proposal

