



D2 Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) Applications and Reports

February 2021 Council Meeting

Action Memo

Staff: Anna Henry (NPFMC), Megan Mackey (NMFS)

Other Presenters: Halibut Excluder: John Gauvin (Alaska Seafood Cooperative),
AI pollock: George Pollock (Aleut Corporation).

Action Required: 1. Review Halibut Excluder EFP application and provide feedback
2. (SSC Only) Review AI pollock EFP report and provide feedback

D2a Halibut Excluder EFP application

NMFS received an exempted fishing permit (EFP) application from John Gauvin on behalf of the Alaska Seafood Cooperative (ASC) to test halibut excluders in the Bering Sea flatfish trawl fishery. By regulation, NMFS is required to consult with the Council before issuing an EFP. The EFP package includes the following:

- Letter to Council chairman from Dr. Jim Balsiger (NMFS AKR) regarding receipt of the application;
- The EFP application;
- AFSC memorandum of approval of the experimental design;
- NMFS' draft determination for categorical exclusion under NEPA.

This EFP would enable a collaborative study with Amendment 80 fishermen of halibut excluders in the Bering Sea flatfish trawl fishery and to conduct field testing to explore improved designs. To conduct this experiment, exemptions would be necessary from the requirements to minimize catch of prohibited species and careful handling and immediate release of PSC. These exemptions are necessary in the event that higher than average catch of halibut is encountered during field testing, and to allow the collection of caudal fin clips from a sample of the halibut encountered, and allow crew members to collect and measure the halibut that make it to the factory, before releasing the fish via the standard conveyor belt pathway.

The Principal Investigator, John Gauvin, will be available to present a description of the study.

D2b Northern Bering Sea application

This application was not ready for Council review at this time so will not be taken up at this meeting.

D2c (SSC Only) AI Pollock EFP Final Report

An EFP was approved to test methods to minimize bycatch of Pacific ocean perch (POP) in the 2019 and 2020 Aleutian Islands (AI) pollock fishery. The goal of the EFP was to potentially provide an opportunity for the Aleut Corporation to develop an economically viable AI pollock fishery while improving safety at sea and reducing POP bycatch mortality. The EFP exempted participating vessels fishing for AI pollock from the POP maximum retainable amount (MRA) of 5%, and from the halibut PSC limit applicable to directed fishing for POP in the BSAI.

Three vessels participated in the EFP. One vessel completed five hauls in March 2019 and all three vessels completed a total of 28 hauls in February and March 2020 while recording relevant data to test whether it was possible to avoid or minimize POP bycatch that POP based on distinctions in hydro-acoustic sign or by correlations with time of day, time of year, depth of net, depth of bottom, characteristics of the thermocline, net modifications, etc.

George Pollock, a Co-Principal Investigator on the EFP, will be available to give a brief presentation summarizing the research and results.