



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:GF 14-052

Agenda Date12/8/2014

Agenda Number:C6

Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:
GOA Sablefish Longline Pots - Initial Review

ESTIMATED TIME:
2 hours

ACTION REQUIRED:
Review Draft EA/RIR/IRFA and select Preliminary Preferred Alternative.

BACKGROUND:

The Council is considering amendments to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska and regulations to allow the use of pot longline gear in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) sablefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) fishery. Currently, the IFQ sablefish fishery is conducted with hook-and-line (HAL) gear, and has significant whale depredation. Depredation has negative consequences for the sablefish IFQ fleet through reduced catch rates and increased operating costs. Depredation also has negative consequences for the whales through increased risk of vessel strike, and for both whales and seabirds through gear entanglement and altered foraging strategies. An additional management concern stems from the impact that whale depredation may have on the precision of sablefish stock abundance indices. The action is proposed to minimize fishery interactions and potential entanglements with marine mammals and seabirds, adverse impacts on the sablefish IFQ fleet from depredation by sperm whales and killer whales, and gear conflicts that could result from allowing pot longline and HAL gear to fish in the same regulatory areas.

The analysis examines the Council's proposed action alternative (Alternative 2) which would apply exclusively to a pot longline fishery for sablefish in the GOA IFQ fishery. Alternative 2 includes 4 elements: (1) pot limits; (2) gear retrieval; (3) gear specification; and (4) retention of incidentally caught halibut. Elements 1 through 3 have additional options. The Council could select any of the elements under Alternative 2, in combination. The analysts have streamlined the options for analysis and suggested a potential option under Element 4 for a halibut MRA in a sablefish IFQ pot longline fishery in the GOA. This suggestion is based on the Council's intent that retained halibut bycatch in sablefish IFQ pot longline gear be "incidental" in nature. Unless further action is taken, selecting gear specifications (Element 3) would affect all pot longline fishing in the GOA, since there is no regulatory definition of a "sablefish pot". Selecting Element 4 may require coordination with the IPHC, and changes to IPHC regulations so that pot longlines are identified as legal gear.

The executive summary of the analysis is attached.