



C3 BSAI Groundfish Harvest Specifications

December 2018 Council Meeting

Action Memo

Staff: Diana Stram (NPFMC)

Other Presenters: Stephani Zador (AFSC), Elizabeth Siddon (AFSC)
SSC only: Grant Thompson (AFSC, BSAI Plan Team Chair), Martin Dorn (AFSC)

Action Required:

1. Review the 2018 Ecosystem Status report for the Eastern Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands.
2. Approve the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report.
3. Recommend final BSAI groundfish harvest specifications for 2019 and 2020, including:
 - Overfishing Level (OFL), Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for all stocks [**SSC**]
 - 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 seasonal apportionments of Pacific halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *C. opilio* crab, and herring to target fishery categories.
 - Halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs).

BACKGROUND

At this meeting, the Council will review the Ecosystem Status Report 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, PSC limits and halibut DMRs, to manage the 2019 and 2020 BSAI groundfish fisheries. Upon publication in the Federal Register, the 2019/2020 final harvest specifications will replace harvest specifications adopted last year for the start of the 2018 fisheries.

BSAI SAFE Report and Ecosystem Status Reports

The BSAI Groundfish Plan Team met in Seattle on November 13-16, 2018 to prepare the BSAI Groundfish SAFE report. The SAFE report forms the basis for BSAI groundfish harvest specifications for the next two fishing years. The SAFE introduction summarizes the Plan Team recommendations for each stock/complex. Hyperlinks to the full report, the Eastern Bering Sea Ecosystem Status report, and Aleutian Islands Ecosystem Status Report are posted. The Council will review and adopt the full SAFE report at this meeting.

The November 2018 Joint BSAI and GOA Plan Team, and BSAI Groundfish Plan Team minutes are [attached as C3b Joint](#) and [C3b BSAI](#) (Groundfish Plan Team minutes). Based on consideration of

stock prioritization including assessment methods and data availability, some stocks are assessed on an annual basis while others are assessed less frequently. Full assessments were produced for all stocks in the BSAI in 2018 with the following exceptions: partial assessments were produced for Alaska plaice, Other flatfish and northern rockfish, and no assessment was produced for sculpins. For these exceptions, specifications were rolled over from the previous assessment for that stock. No reports were produced for grenadiers and Forage Species in 2018. Both of these are Ecosystem Component species, which is a category of non-target species that are not in need of conservation and management.

Squids have been reclassified (BSAI Groundfish FMP Amendment 117) in the FMP as an Ecosystem Component species. Therefore, starting in 2019, harvest specifications (OFL, ABC, and TAC) for squids in the BSAI are no longer necessary. Amendment 117 prohibits directed fishing for squids, while maintaining recordkeeping and reporting requirements for squid. A report on their status and catch was produced as an appendix to the SAFE report this year. In future years, the Team suggests this information be included with the Forage Species report. The catch of squids will be reported on the NMFS weekly report for forage fish and grenadiers. Squids catch is associated with the Bering Sea pollock seasons, with catch increasing in the B season that starts on June 10 each year.

OFLs, ABCs, TACs and Apportionments

The Plan Team's recommendations for final harvest specifications for 2019 and 2020 are in the SAFE report introduction and also [attached as C3a](#) (Table 1 OFLs-ABCs). In October, the Council adopted proposed harvest specifications of OFL and ABC that were based on last year's stock assessments. In this 2018 SAFE report, the Plan Team has revised those projections due to the development of new models; collection of new catch, survey, age composition, or size composition data; or use of new methodology for recommending OFLs and ABCs. The SSC and AP recommendations will be provided to the Council during the meeting.

The sum of the Plan Team's recommended ABCs for 2019 and 2020 are 3,331,274 t and 2,953,299, respectively. These compare with the sums of the 2018 (3,766,809 t) and 2017 ABCs (4,013,993t). The primary decrease from previous years is due to declines in EBS pollock, and Pacific cod. The Team recommended maximum permissible ABCs for all stocks, except for EBS pollock, EBS Pacific cod and Sablefish.

Overall, the status of the stocks continues to appear favorable. Nearly all stocks are above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy of $B_{35\%}$. The abundances of EBS pollock, EBS Pacific cod, all rockfishes managed under Tier 3, and all flatfishes managed under Tiers 1 or 3 are projected to be above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy of $B_{35\%}$ in 2019 while Sablefish and Blackspotted/Rougheye rockfish remain below this target level.

TAC considerations for State waters Pacific cod fishery

In setting TACs for 2019 and 2020, 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 31% of the AI ABC. The BS GHL will be set at 8% of the EBS Pacific cod ABC. An additional reduction of 45 t is taken from the remaining EBS available maxTAC for the Area O jig fishery. A table listing the ABCs, GHLs, and resulting federal TACs for 2019-2020 Pacific cod is [attached as C3c](#) (Pacific cod GHL-maxTAC).

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 specifications process. The ABC reserve for each species will be specified by the Council, by evaluating the ABC surplus for the species (i.e., the difference between the ABC and TAC), and considering whether that amount needs to be reduced by a discretionary buffer amount 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 as C3d](#) (Flatfish Flexibility ABC Reserve) based upon last year's TAC amounts.

During the Inseason Management Report (Agenda item B3), NMFS will have provided a report on flatfish exchanges by the Amendment 80 cooperative during the course of this year. This is to inform the Council's decision as to whether to establish a buffer reducing the amount of the ABC reserve available to be exchanged by eligible entities. The report will include information on the number of vessels used to harvest cooperative quota, the number of flatfish exchanges and the dates those exchanges were approved, the types of and amounts of cooperative quota and Amendment 80 ABC reserve utilized, and the dates, types, and amounts of inter-cooperative quota transfers.

Prohibited Species Catch limits

Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits are established for halibut, crab, and herring during the specifications process and are allocated amongst sectors and seasons as described below. See [attachment C3e](#) (Tables 14-17 PSCs & Apportionments) for summary tables of all allocations and PSC limits by species.

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, and the Council recommends target fishery apportionments of these limits for the BSAI trawl limited access sector. The 2019 and 2020 crab PSC limits have been revised using current crab biomass amounts.

Herring

An overall herring PSC limit is established as 1% of the EBS biomass of herring. This limit is further apportioned to seven PSC target fishery categories. Herring PSC limits from 2018 are listed in Table 15 in the PSC attachment; revisions based on the most current biomass amounts may be provided during the meeting.

Halibut PSC in Trawl Fisheries

The overall 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 t to Trawl Limited Access, and 315 t to CDQ. Within the Trawl Limited Access sector only, the Council recommends apportionments of the halibut PSC limit to the trawl fishery categories. Additional reductions of 5% would occur if PSC limit amounts are transferred from the BSAI trawl limited access sector to the Amendment 80 trawl sector during a fishing year.

Halibut PSC in Fixed Gear Fisheries

The 710 t non-trawl gear halibut mortality 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 sectors. The Council can provide varying amounts of halibut PSC by season to each sector, tailoring PSC limits to suit the needs and timing of each sector.

Seasonal apportionment of PSC limits

The Council may also seasonally apportion the above listed PSC limits (for the fixed 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.

Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

The recommended discard mortality rates for use in the BSAI for 2018-2019 are [attached as C3f](#) (Table 18 Halibut DMRs).