

Alaska Groundfish Cooperative 2016 Halibut Performance Report

At the June 2015 North Pacific Fishery Management meeting, the Council urged the Amendment 80 fleet to voluntarily reduce halibut mortality for the remainder of the year to enhance the prospects for an Area 4cde directed halibut fishery. Special emphasis was placed on reducing halibut mortality in Area 4cde and in the 4th quarter fishery. AGC exceeded its goals for reducing halibut mortality in each aspect of the Council's request. In addition, all AGC vessels conducted their fishing operations within the guidelines of the Amendment 80 Halibut Avoidance Program, with no vessel exceeding its benchmark in any fishery.

2016 PERFORMANCE

Annual Halibut Bycatch Mortality

2016	277 mt
2015.	455 mt
2014.	696 mt

Area 4CDE

2016	176 mt
2015.	302 mt
2014.	542 mt

4th Quarter

2016	19 mt
2015.	14 mt
2014.	209 mt

These reductions were achieved through a combination of adherence to the Amendment 80 Halibut Avoidance Protocol (below) and a reduction in flatfish effort by the fleet. In 2017, it is expected that each AGC vessel will enter the halibut deck sorting EFP for the first time.

HALIBUT MORTALITY REDUCTION EFFORTS

Adopt Amendment 80 Halibut Mortality Reduction Rules

In order reduce bycatch mortality of halibut, the members of the Alaska Groundfish Cooperative (AGC) agree to the following terms:

Notice of entry to/exit from the BSAI fisheries - Each vessel will notify both Seastate and the other fishery participants on entry to or exit from the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands fisheries to facilitate communication.

On grounds communication among captains – Captains will communicate on the grounds concerning halibut bycatch rates. On grounds communication provides the most up to date and complete information concerning halibut avoidance – includes discussions of:

- 1) prevailing bycatch rates and changes in those rates,
- 2) catch rates of O26 halibut (particularly in the 4CDE accounting area),
- 3) effectiveness of deck sorting in the different target fisheries under various conditions and bycatch levels,
- 4) effectiveness of excluders in the different target fisheries under various conditions and bycatch levels, and
- 5) any factor that may be relevant to bycatch rates and O26 bycatch rates, including the effects on halibut rates and O26 halibut rates of:
 - a. time of day
 - b. fishing depth
 - c. water temperature
 - d. areas of halibut concentrations
 - e. excluder performance (including type and mesh size)
 - f. effects of any gear modifications.

Test tows – When appropriate, vessels will use smaller test tows to ensure that halibut rate is acceptable prior to fishing an area.

Attention to Haul Composition –Wheelhouse personnel will give increased attention to haul composition by watching the bag dump and assessing the halibut bycatch rate and halibut O26 bycatch rate and to increase communication with deck crew concerning halibut bycatch (and halibut O26 bycatch) trends.

Excluder Use – The use of excluders is encouraged. Since excluders may have limited benefits (and sometimes increase bycatch) in the high volume, low bycatch periods, vessels are also encouraged to share information concerning the effectiveness of excluders when fishing different areas and under different conditions.

Seastate Reporting – Seastate is commissioned to develop bycatch charts on a regular basis that display the halibut bycatch rates (including O26 bycatch rates) in the fisheries. These charts will show halibut bycatch (including O26 bycatch) by target fishery.

Decksorting - On approval of the cooperative's 2016 decksorting Exempted Fishing Permit, vessels are encouraged to use decksorting to reduce mortality of halibut (particularly O26 halibut in the 4CDE accounting area).

Night Towing – Night towing is discouraged in fisheries with historically higher night halibut bycatch rates. Cooperative members are directed to give extra attention to halibut bycatch rates (and 4CDE O26 halibut bycatch) if fishing at night. If a vessel cannot achieve night fishing bycatch rates that are measurably similar to day fishing bycatch rates, the vessel is strongly encouraged to end night fishing.

Rate Standard — As fishing progresses during the season, cooperative members will consider whether any halibut rate standards may be beneficial for achieving halibut bycatch reductions. Rate standards could be applied at the target fishery level to compel certain avoidance measures, if appropriate rate levels and monitoring requirements and effective response measures can be identified.

Weekly meetings – Cooperative members agree to meet weekly to discuss overall Bering Sea halibut PSC performance and 4CDE accounting area O26 halibut bycatch performance. Meetings will include discussions of:

- 1) Prevailing halibut bycatch rates and performance (and particularly 4CDE accounting area O26 rates and performance).
- 2) Success of the various bycatch avoidance strategies identified in this agreement and the effects of any other strategy or factor on bycatch avoidance and rates
- 3) Development of additional measures to reduce bycatch, including whether sufficient information exists to develop any new or additional bycatch avoidance requirements or practices to supplement those identified in this agreement

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