



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number: HAL 18-013

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William Tweit, Interim Chairman
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Halibut retention in BSAI pots - Final action

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ACTION REQUIRED:

- Review Public Review Draft of analysis
- Identify Preferred Alternative and Elements; adopt a final recommendation

BACKGROUND:

The Council is considering a regulatory amendment to allow retention of legal-size halibut in pot gear used to fish IFQ/CDQ in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI), provided the operator also holds sufficient halibut IFQ/CDQ for the appropriate regulatory area. Currently in the BSAI, halibut may only be retained using hook-and-line gear. This action would not allow for the retention of halibut IFQ/CDQ in other directed (non-sablefish) groundfish or shellfish pot fisheries. This is a Public Review draft which means the Council is scheduled to identify a preferred alternative and take final action at this meeting.

In June 2018, the Council identified a preliminary preferred alternative, which includes five elements under which the Council will consider:

- (1) adding gear retrieval requirements;
- (2) an exemption to 9-inch maximum tunnel opening in pot gear;
- (3) adding logbook and VMS requirements;
- (4) adding a requirement for an escapement mechanism on pots used to fish halibut;
- (5) establishing regulations that would allow NMFS to close IFQ fishing for halibut if an overfishing limit for other species is approached.

The intent of this proposed action is to improve the economic and resource efficiency associated with harvesting halibut IFQ/CDQ. Killer whale depredation of both hook-and-line gear as well as of regulatory discards of halibut in the sablefish IFQ/CDQ pot fishery has negative consequences for both the IFQ/CDQ fleet as well as the halibut resource. This action is proposed to allow for: (1) more efficient harvest of the halibut resource by decreasing the wastage of legal-size halibut discarded in the BSAI sablefish pot fishery, and (2) reduced whale depredation of halibut caught on hook-and-line gear by allowing operators that hold both halibut IFQ or CDQ the opportunity to retain halibut in pot gear.

This analysis highlights the possible environmental and socio-economic impacts of allowing for this harvest flexibility and provides a discussion of potential management measures that may be necessary to achieve the Council's preliminary preferred alternative.