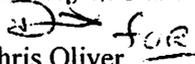


MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members

FROM: 
Chris Oliver
Executive Director

ESTIMATED TIME 2 HOURS

DATE: September 28, 2010

SUBJECT: Groundfish Management – Adjust MRAs in BSAI Arrowtooth Fishery

ACTION REQUIRED

Final action Arrowtooth Flounder MRA.

BACKGROUND

In 1994, the Council set most of the groundfish MRAs at zero, relative to retained amounts of arrowtooth flounder, to prevent vessels from using arrowtooth flounder (a species for which no market existed) as a basis species for retention of more readily marketable species. At that time, there were concerns that fishing vessel operators would target arrowtooth flounder to increase the retainable amounts of valuable species, closed to directed fishing, resulting in increased bycatch amounts of Pacific halibut, salmon, and crab. Increased halibut bycatch rates could have resulted in reaching halibut bycatch limits before the total allowable catches (TACs) established for other trawl target fisheries were harvested. However, since 1997, markets for arrowtooth flounder have developed and this species now supports a viable target fishery. To take advantage of the growing arrowtooth flounder market, the Council, in December 2009, initiated an analysis to consider changes to the MRAs of groundfish in the arrowtooth flounder fishery in the BSAI.

In June 2010, the Council completed an initial review of the arrowtooth analysis and released the document for public review. The analysis for this agenda item was mailed out on September 6, 2010; an executive summary of that analysis is attached (Item C-6(1)).

This analysis considers three alternatives. Alternative 1 (no action) would leave the MRAs for groundfish in the arrowtooth fishery unchanged from those in current regulations. Alternative 2 would set the MRAs for incidental catch species at the current Pacific cod level. Alternative 3 would set the MRAs for incidental catch species at the current flathead sole level. At its June 2010 meeting, the Council added a new suboption to Alternatives 2 and 3 that would set the MRA for Greenland turbot at 15 percent.

At the September Plan Team meeting, the BSAI Plan Team proposed breaking Kamchatka flounder out of the Arrowtooth/Kamchatka flounder complex due to a change in the fishery. In recent years, the catch of Kamchatka flounder has increased from about 12,000 t in 2007 to 32,000 in 2010. The potential creation of a new quota category for Kamchatka flounder may have some effects on the proposed arrowtooth flounder MRA action, and NMFS staff will be on hand to explain these effects in more detail at the Council meeting.