

Staff Tasking –At-Sea Processors Association and US Seafoods – Oct 2015 NPFMC Meeting

I move the Council initiate an analysis to limit entry into the Bering Sea yellowfin sole limited access fishery including the following Purpose and Need Statement and Alternatives.

Purpose and need statement

Historical participants in the Bering Sea yellowfin sole limited access fishery have responded to halibut concerns expressed by the Council through development of agreements that include protocols for avoiding halibut, as well as division of the available halibut among those participants. Entry to the fishery in 2015 is disruptive to those halibut avoidance measures. Reductions in halibut PSC that will take effect in 2016 will further pressure historical participants, as they attempt to control their PSC usage. Limiting entry to the offshore sector will aid historical participants' in their efforts to advance the Council's PSC goals.

Alternatives

The Council adopts the following alternatives for analysis:

1. No action – existing LLP limits apply
2. For a catcher vessel to participate in the Bering Sea directed yellowfin sole limited access fishery making deliveries to an offshore processor that vessel must be assigned an LLP that was used in the directed yellowfin sole fishery to deliver its catch to an offshore processor in at least two years between 2008 and 2015.

Rationale

The Council has heard concerns that increases in harvesting capacity from entering catcher vessels could be detrimental to the otherwise relatively stable yellowfin sole limited access fishery in the Bering Sea. Historical participants have several years of dependence on the fishery. In recent years, participants coordinated their halibut avoidance and harvest efforts to achieve Council objectives. These included proposing voluntary halibut savings at the 2015 IPHC meeting to allow for fully funding the Area 4CDE halibut catch limit. Since that time, entry of additional harvest capacity and offshore processors has threatened the halibut avoidance agreement and achieving the proposed savings.

Participants in the yellowfin limited access fishery have several years' dependence on the fishery, as well as other limited access fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. These vessels recent lost some access to historical fisheries due to decreases availability of cod in the Aleutian Islands and our action to protect Adak earlier at this meeting. Council action to prevent entry to the yellowfin sole fishery will prevent further loss of access to fisheries by these vessels, as well as allowing the vessels to maintain halibut avoidance efforts that we seek to encourage.

Limiting entry to the offshore sector will prevent the potential for disruptive entry without proscribing future entry by vessels that intend to develop an inshore component to the fishery.