



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
Alaska Fisheries Science Center
7600 Sand Point Way N.E.
Seattle, Washington 98115-6349

June 4, 2018

Dave Witherell, Executive Director
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Dave:

I am writing to inform the Council of our ongoing commitment of staff resources in support of completion of the Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review (EA/RIR) for the proposed alternatives for setting abundance-based Prohibited Species Catch limits for Pacific halibut in the Bering Sea groundfish fisheries (Agenda Item D4). The Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) continues to place a high priority on providing analytical support for this assessment and our staff are committed to providing the best available scientific evaluation of the potential impacts of the action on both groundfish fisheries and directed halibut fisheries.

The AFSC recognizes that the Council and the public require the best available scientific analysis of the implications of the proposed action to make informed choices on alternatives. In the discussion paper submitted under agenda item D4, members of the Council's abundance-based management (ABM) halibut workgroup have outlined the pros and cons of proposed analytical methods. The white paper demonstrates that there are trade-offs with respect to timelines required to complete the analysis and the ability to provide the comprehensive information needed for decision-making. The timelines incorporate the ongoing agency obligation for members of the ABM halibut workgroup to complete their stock assessments in the fall.

We encourage the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee to consider the potential benefits to the Council and the public associated with selection of the more complex approaches.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeremy Rusin".

Jeremy Rusin
Deputy Science Director

