



D2 Bering Sea Greenland Turbot Longline Pots

February 2022 Council Meeting

Action Memo

Council Staff:	Sam Cunningham
Other Presenters:	Dr. Kelly Cates (NMFS AKRO SF)
Action Required:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Review discussion paper on allowing longline pot gear in the Bering Sea Greenland turbot directed fishery2. Consider whether to initiate analysis of alternatives with a purpose and need statement, or request additional information prior to defining alternatives

Background

In April 2021 the Council requested a discussion paper to scope the need for, and potential issues related to, authorizing longline pot gear for use in the Bering Sea (BS) directed fishery for Greenland turbot. The request was responsive to testimony and an Advisory Panel recommendation that longline pots could be a viable way to prosecute the fishery in the setting of killer whales depredating hook-and-line (HAL) gear. The Greenland turbot fishery is prosecuted by trawl and non-trawl gear; the non-trawl component has historically been harvested by HAL catcher/processor vessels (CP). The number of HAL CPs targeting Greenland turbot fell from 3-5 per year to zero in 2021, while total retained turbot catch fell from roughly 250 to 1,000 mt per year to less than one ton. The five most recent years of observer data (2016-2020) indicate that the proportion of HAL CP hauls depredated by killer whales has doubled or tripled, and that Greenland turbot are the species most often observed being depredated.

Section 2 of the discussion paper covers existing gear and season regulations for BS an Aleutian Islands groundfish; fishery participation, catch, value, and dependency; and the best available evidence to estimate the present extent of killer whale depredation. Single pots (non-longline format) are currently permitted in the BS management area, but regulatory exceptions that allow the use of longline pots in the BS only cover directed fishing for sablefish or IFQ/CDQ halibut. The simplest action that the Council could take is adding another regulatory exception that applies to directed fishing for BS Greenland turbot. A simple exception could open up the fishery to a larger number of potential participants that have not historically participated – though whether new entry would occur is unknown. The Council could consider ways to prescribe which of the larger set of BS non-trawl license holders could use longline pots but doing so would be complicated by the fact that Greenland turbot catch limits are not allocated to any gear or processing sector.

Section 3 is a preliminary discussion of issues that might arise if a gear authorization leads to rebounding or additional participation in the non-trawl sector. Section 3.1 defines the universe of potential participants and identifies factors that could help determine “likely” participants. That section also describes how the fishery has operated in the context of voluntary agreements within the HAL sector and between the trawl and non-trawl sector. Section 3.2 considers whether longline pot gear would change the species distribution of bycatch. Section 3.3 identifies factors that influence any potential for impact on marine mammals. Section 3.4 overviews current and future monitoring requirements for non-trawl gear,

and ways in which the addition of a new gear type could change the monitoring burden on participants and managing agencies.

Section 4 summarizes the Council's decision point at this meeting: determining whether mitigating killer whale depredation provides benefits that could outweigh any uncertainties about future participation levels, bycatch, and management/monitoring challenges.