



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

May 16, 2018

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

Dear Mr. ^{Dave}Witherell,

I am writing to inform you that the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) and NOAA's Acquisition and Grants Office (AGO) were unable, after multiple attempts, to procure a charter fishing vessel for the Bering Sea slope bottom trawl survey. This year we needed to compete three new contracts to maintain our regular groundfish and crab survey schedule: two boats for the eastern Bering Sea shelf and one boat for the slope. The two Aleutian Island charter vessels are already on contract. Too few operators of qualified vessels responded to the request for bids this year; we were able to secure the two shelf boats, but not a slope boat. After the initial competition was concluded without success, NOAA AGO tried several different additional means to get us a third boat, but without success.

Completing our annual and biennial groundfish surveys is one of AFSC's highest priorities. AFSC was prepared to execute all three surveys this year: Bering Sea shelf, slope, and Aleutian Islands, at the expense of other lesser, but still high priorities. Data generated from the slope survey are critical to reduce uncertainty in the stock assessment and fishery evaluations for multiple, high value fisheries in the eastern Bering Sea (e.g. Pacific Ocean perch, walleye pollock, Greenland turbot, sablefish).

AFSC will work with NOAA AGO in the coming year to reduce hurdles to competition so the next solicitation will receive more bids that meet the minimum technical specifications. In addition, AFSC staff will conduct outreach and education to vessel owners from both large and small businesses who potentially have technically qualified vessels to try and increase the number of bids next year. Once we are successful in the acquisitions process, that charter will be placed on contract for a total of 4 years and tasked with conducting the Gulf of Alaska bottom trawl survey in odd years, and the eastern Bering Sea slope in even years. Thus, if we can get that boat on contract next year for the Gulf, the chances for executing a slope survey in 2020 are greatly increased.

Sincerely,

Douglas P. DeMaster
Science and Research Director

Cc: J. Rusin, AFSC
J. Balsiger, AKRO

