

D3 Halibut Retention in Pot Gear Council Motion | October 9, 2017

The Council initiates an analysis to allow retention of halibut in pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands with the following purpose and need statement and alternatives:

Purpose and Need:

Interactions with whales throughout the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands affect the ability of sablefish and halibut quota share holders to harvest their IFQ by reducing catch per unit of effort and increasing fishing costs. Whale depredation on discarded halibut increasing for vessels using pot gear in the sablefish IFQ fishery and vessels fishing halibut IFQ with longline gear in the BSAI. Research into developing technological solutions to deter whales and changes in fishing strategies has not resolved the problem. The problem may be addressed by revisions to current regulations that authorize pot gear as legal gear for retention of halibut in the BSAI. Allowing retention of halibut caught in pot gear in the BSAI could address the negative impacts of whale interactions on sablefish and halibut quota share holders by reducing the amount of halibut lost to whale depredation. The Council seeks to reduce the problems associated with whale depredation while minimizing gear conflicts. The Council seeks to reduce the amount of unaccounted mortality occurring due to whale depredation.

Alternative 1: No Action

Alternative 2: Allow retention of legal-size halibut in pot gear used to fish sablefish IFQ in the BSAI, provided the IFQ holder also holds sufficient halibut IFQ for that IPHC regulatory area.

Element 1: Applies to both single pots and longline pots

Element 2: Gear retrieval

Option 1: No gear tending requirements (status quo)

Option 2: A vessel with unfished sablefish IFQ onboard cannot leave gear on the grounds untended for more than (Suboptions) 5-10 days

Element 3: Limit of 9-inch maximum width of tunnel openings does not apply when vessel has unfished halibut IFQ onboard

Element 4: All vessels using pot gear to fish IFQ are required to use logbooks and VMS

NMFS will include pot gear effort and catch of IFQ species in its annual management report to the Council. The Council intends to review the effects of allowing retention of halibut in pot gear 3 years after implementation.