



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:GF 17-082

Agenda Date12/4/2017

Agenda Number:D3

Dan Hull, Chairman
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Western GOA Pollock Trip Limits - Discussion Paper

STAFF CONTACT: Sam Cunningham and Jim Armstrong (NPFMC)

ACTION REQUIRED:

- Review discussion paper
- Decide what further action is warranted

BACKGROUND:

In December 2016 the Council requested that staff evaluate the impacts of lowering the Western Gulf of Alaska (GOA) pollock trip limit from 300,000 lbs. to 200,000 lbs. The Council requested this paper in the context of exploring "potential options to reduce [Chinook salmon] prohibited species catch (PSC)" in the wake of a motion to table the development of the GOA Trawl Bycatch Management Program. Given that context, this document includes Chinook salmon PSC rates and encounter levels across vessel size categories, trip-level landings, and areas that tend to be fished more or less so by "small" (58' LOA) and "large" (all other) trawl catcher vessels (CV).

The pollock trip limit is rooted in Steller sea lion protection measures, so any change to that regulation would require a review of potential marine mammal impacts. Two appendices are provided to describe the "ESA Section 7" consultation process, and to update the public on the history and stock status of sea lions whose breeding range occurs in the GOA.

The paper includes data on the area distribution of pollock harvest in Area 610 (Western GOA), as well as catch and bycatch data that is broken out by vessel size and by the amount of pollock that was delivered on that particular trip (relative to the considered 200,000 lb. threshold that could constitute a new limit). PSC rate information is taken from trips that carried an observer onboard; observed PSC events are mapped across Western GOA fishing areas to show patterns of Chinook encounter across areas that tend to be fished by different segments of the trawl fleet.

The discussion section of the paper (Section 2) considers whether there is evidence that smaller-volume pollock trips would have a predictable effect on Chinook salmon PSC rates and levels. The paper also considers whether a slower-paced fishery would affect the fleet's ability to fully harvest the TAC, and whether reducing trip limits might have distributional effects across relatively smaller or larger vessel-size groups.