



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

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Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Groundfish Harvest Specifications; Stock Structure Report; Three-River Index review - Proposed Specs

STAFF CONTACT: Diana Stram / Jim Armstrong

ACTION REQUIRED:

Review Groundfish Plan Team Reports, Recommend, for proposal, BSAI and GOA groundfish harvest specifications for 2017-2018.

BACKGROUND:

Plan Team Reports

The BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Teams met during September 13-16, 2016, to review and recommend groundfish harvest specifications to be proposed for the upcoming 2017 and 2018 fishing years. The Teams also reviewed reports from assessment authors to identify items for inclusion in stock assessments that will be presented at the November Plan Team meetings. Team recommendations for the upcoming two fishing years consist of rollovers of existing final 2017 harvest specifications. Those harvest specifications were adopted by the Council in December 2015. Minutes from the Joint BSAI/GOA Groundfish Plan Team and individual BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Team meetings are attached (**Item 1**).

Proposed Harvest Specifications

At this meeting the Council will recommend, for proposed rulemaking, BSAI and GOA groundfish harvest specifications for the upcoming two-year period (2017 and 2018) which will notify the public of expected Council action to set final harvest specifications in December 2016. Existing 2017 harvest specifications were published as a final rule in the *Federal Register* in March 2016 and will be in place January 2017 when the groundfish fishing year begins. Proposed harvest specifications for the year after next (2018) are typically set equal to the proposed upcoming year (2017) harvest specifications. In addition to harvest specifications, the Council will recommend, for proposal, gear and target fishery apportionments of prohibited species catch (PSC) limits for halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *opilio* crab, and herring. Final harvest specifications will be based on stock assessment reports included in the groundfish SAFEs for BSAI and GOA that will be released in late November 2016.

Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands

The BSAI Plan Team recommendations for proposed 2017 and 2018 BSAI groundfish annual harvest specifications are attached (**Item 2**). The Team adopted proposed 2017 BSAI OFLs and ABCs that were published in the *Federal Register* last year for the purpose of notifying the public of potential final harvest specifications. Final BSAI harvest specifications include PSC limits for halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *opilio* crab, and herring and their gear type and target fishery apportionments, which are set in federal regulations. The 2017 and 2018 crab PSC limits have been revised using current biomass amounts and herring PSC limits will be revised when the most current biomass amounts are known. Proposed harvest specifications for these PSC limits and apportionments based on 2017 are attached (**Item 3**). At the June

2015 meeting, the Council took action to reduce BSAI halibut PSC limits by 21%. The specific reductions are 25% for Amendment 80 cooperatives, 15% for BSAI trawl limited access fisheries, 20% for CDQ fisheries, and 15% for non-trawl fisheries. These reductions, implemented in 2016 following Secretarial approval of Amendment 111, resulted in a reductions of halibut PSC limits in 2016 and 2017.

Flatfish flexibility ABC reserve

Under Amendment 105, an ABC reserve is specified for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole. These species are allocated to CDQ groups and Amendment 80 cooperatives using formulas from the annual harvest specifications process. The ABC reserve for each species is specified by the Council by evaluating the difference between the ABC and TAC for each species (i.e., ABC surplus), and considering whether the amount needs to be reduced by a discretionary buffer based on social, economic, or ecological considerations. The Council then designates some, all, or none of the ABC surplus as the ABC reserve. The Council provides its rationale for setting the ABC reserve at a particular level each year. The 2017 and 2018 CDQ ABC reserves have been provided by NMFS staff based on 2017 TAC levels and an assumption of the maximum ABC reserve.

Current 2016 Changes in Flatfish TACs from Flatfish Exchanges

Group	Date	Flathead Sole		Rock Sole		Yellowfin Sole	
		TAC	Exchange	TAC	Exchange	TAC	Exchange
Specified TAC	18 Mar	21,000		57,100		144,000	
NSEDC¹	12 Apr	21,000	0	56,700	-400	144,400	400
YDFDA²	24 Jun	20,985	-15	56,750	50	144,365	-35
NSEDC¹	26 Jul	20,585	-400	57,150	400	144,365	0
APICDA³	13 Sep	20,585	0	56,450	-700	145,065	700
ASC⁴	16 Sep	16,685	-3,900	55,425	-1025	149,990	4,925
CVRF⁵	21 Sep	16,470	-215	55,180	-245	150,450	460

¹ Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation

² Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association

³ Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association

⁴ Alaska Seafood Cooperative

⁵ Coastal Villages Region Fund

A report on flatfish exchanges by the Amendment 80 cooperatives will be provided to the Council by NMFS at the December meeting. The report will include information on the number of vessels used to harvest cooperative quota, the number of flatfish exchanges and the dates those exchanges were approved, the types of and amounts of cooperative quota and Amendment 80 ABC reserve utilized, and the dates, types, and amounts of inter-cooperative quota transfers. This report is provided each year in December to help the Council make appropriate adjustments, as needed.

Three-River Index for EBS Pollock fishery Chinook PSC threshold

Under BSAI groundfish FMP amendment 110, in addition to other bycatch reduction measures, the Council recommended and NMFS implemented a reduction to overall Chinook PSC levels for the EBS pollock fishery sectors in times of low western Alaskan Chinook salmon abundance. The PSC limits are specifically reduced (from 47,491 to 33,318, and from 60,000 to 45,000 overall) when an index of western Alaskan and Upper Yukon Chinook salmon abundance is below a designated threshold. This reduction in cap levels in times of low abundance is designed to provide for increased incentives to the pollock fleet to reduce bycatch to the maximum extent practicable to help in efforts to rebuild critically low western Alaskan Chinook stocks. These reduced cap levels will be enacted in all years where the index for assessing the status of western Alaskan Chinook stocks is below a designated threshold that indicates very poor run sizes. All other provisions of

bycatch management will also be in place in those years.

Historically low Western Alaskan Chinook salmon abundance is assessed under the Council's action using a three-system index of inriver adult Chinook salmon run sizes from the Unalakeet, Upper Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers combined. The Council's specified process entails that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG) would provide post-season abundance estimates to NMFS by October 1 to determine if adult Chinook abundance in the index systems falls at or below the identified threshold level of 250,000. The performance standard and hard cap applicable to the Bering Sea pollock fishery would be lowered in the year following the year in which the index was $\leq 250,000$. The letter from ADFG to NMFS is posted under Agenda item B3.

Stock Structure Workshop

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) convened a workshop on July 21, 2016 at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center in Seattle, WA to discuss issues related to stock structure and spatial management focused specifically on BSAI blackspotted/rougheye (BS/RE) management in the western Aleutian Islands. The report from the workshop is attached (**Item 4**) and BSAI Plan Team recommendations for BS/RE management in 2017 are contained in the Plan Team report.

Gulf of Alaska.

The GOA Team's harvest recommendations for 2017 and 2018 are listed in the attached table (**Item 5**). For the purpose of notifying the public of potential final harvest specifications, the Team adopted proposed 2017 OFLs and ABCs that had previously been published in the Federal Register in 2016. The Council will need to recommend Pacific cod TACs for the GOA that are a 25 to 30 percent reduction from ABC to account for State GHL fisheries. Using the area apportionments from the proposed 2017 Pacific cod ABCs recommended by the Plan Team, the 2017 and 2018 Federal TACs for Pacific cod would be adjusted as listed in the attached table (**Item 6**). Recommended 2017 and 2018 halibut PSC apportionments (**Item 7**) are based on the recommended 2017 apportionments for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. Salmon PSC limits are set in regulation.