



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

605 W. 4th Ave. Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 271-2809
Fax (907) 271-2817

Action Memo

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Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications and Region-wide Halibut Discard Mortality Rates - Final Action for 2017-2018.

STAFF CONTACT: Jim Armstrong

ACTION REQUIRED:

Review and approve the GOA SAFE report (including Ecosystem and Economic SAFEs) and approve the final GOA Harvest Specifications for 2017-2018 including:

1. Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), and annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC).
2. TAC considerations based on the State Pacific cod fishery and the Prince William Sound Pollock fishery.
3. Prohibited Species Catch Limits

Review and approve Halibut DMRs for in-season management in 2017-2018.

BACKGROUND:

In order to manage the 2017 and 2018 Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries, the Council must make final recommendations on harvest and PSC limits. A number of resources are provided to facilitate that action. **All GOA groundfish and Halibut DMR items are under C7 on this agenda.** Additionally, presentations to the SSC, AP, and Council at the meeting will provide an overview of the Plan Team Meeting and the GOA SAFE.

- The GOA SAFE consists of chapters contributed by assessment authors and an *Introduction* assembled by the GOA Plan Team (Item 1). This document provides the analytical basis for the 2017 and 2018 GOA groundfish harvest specifications.
- The GOA and Joint Plan Team Minutes (Item 2) provide summaries of the issues raised during the November Plan Team meeting as well as recommendations for subsequent work by assessment authors.

ABCs, TACs, and Apportionments

ABC increased or remained unchanged for 15 stocks (Item 1; Table 1) and decreased for 8 stocks. Overall, the 2017 ABCs represent a net decrease of 8% (-59,807 t) compared to 2016. Most of the contribution to the net decrease was from lowered ABCs for pollock (-50,541 t) and Pacific cod (-10,258 t).

Where estimable, the biomasses of all stocks except sablefish are above target stock size (B_{MSY}). Biomass is unknown for Tier 5 and 6 species, however, overfishing did not occur for any of those stocks (Item 1).

TAC Considerations for State Pacific Cod Fishery

Using the area apportionments for the 2017 and 2018 Pacific cod ABC recommended by the Plan Team, the Federal TAC for P. cod would be adjusted as listed in the GOA P cod GHL Tables included under C7 as Item

3.

TAC Considerations based on State Pollock Fishery

The federal GOA Pollock TACs include reductions to accommodate the State waters GHL in Prince William Sound (PWS). The PWS GHL is computed as 2.5% of the total W/C/WYAK ABC. If TAC = ABC for 2017 and 2018, the values corresponding to the PWS GHL are reflected in the GOA pollock GHL tables included under C7 as Item 3.

Prohibited Species Catch Limits

In the GOA, Chinook salmon Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits (Pollock fishery only) are allocated by area based on a fixed total of 25,000 fish. PSC limits for halibut are specified by fishery, gear, and season. For 2017 and 2018 PSC limits, see the Halibut PSC tables included under C7as Item 4.

Exemptions

The FMP authorizes the Council to exempt specific gear from the halibut PSC limits. NMFS, after consultation with the Council, has exempted pot gear, jig gear, and the sablefish IFQ hook-and-line gear fishery categories from the halibut limit since 1995. The Council recommended these exemptions because:

1. Pot gear fisheries have low halibut bycatch mortality;
2. NMFS estimates negligible halibut mortality for the jig gear fisheries; and
3. IFQ regulations prohibit halibut discards if any halibut IFQ permit holder on board a catcher vessel holds unused halibut IFQ (§ 679.7(f)(11)).

CV-CP Hook-and-Line Split

The hook-and-line halibut PSC limit is divided between the CV and CP sectors according to the “GOA Pacific cod split formula” that is proscribed in regulation. Based on these splits, the hook-and-line CV sector would fish under a 129 mt halibut PSC limit and the hook-and-line CP sector PSC limit would fish under a 128 mt PSC limit in 2017 and 2018. The demersal shelf rockfish fishery halibut bycatch limit would be 9 mt.

Halibut DMRs

Updated DMR estimates were provided by the Interagency Halibut DMR Working Group to the Plan Teams (Item 5). The recommended DMRs reflect changes in estimation methodology that were reviewed through the September and November Plan Team process, as well as the AP, and Council at the October Council meeting (Item 6). Pending Council approval, the DMRs will be applied to operational groupings rather than target fisheries. Although DMRs have been specified in the past for three-year periods, the Plan Teams recommended that DMRs be applied to a single two-year harvest specification period with the potential for further adjustment prior to final harvest specifications for 2018.