



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File #: GF 17-054, Version: 1

Dan Hull, Chairman
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Groundfish Harvest Specifications - Proposed Specs

STAFF CONTACT: Jim Armstrong and Diana Stram

ACTION REQUIRED:

- A. Review Groundfish Plan Team Reports
- B. Recommend proposed BSAI and GOA groundfish harvest specifications for 2018-2019.

BACKGROUND:

A. Plan Team Reports

The BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Teams met during September 12-15, 2017, to review and recommend groundfish harvest specifications to be proposed for the upcoming 2018 and 2019 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. Minutes from the Joint BSAI/GOA Groundfish Plan Team and individual BSAI and GOA Groundfish Plan Team meetings are attached (**Item 1**).

B. 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 (2018 and 2019) which will notify the public of expected Council action to set final harvest specifications in December 2017. Existing 2018 harvest specifications were published as a final rule in the *Federal Register* in February 2017 and will be in place January 2018 when the groundfish fishing year begins. Proposed harvest specifications for the year after next (2019) are typically set equal to the proposed upcoming year (2018) harvest specifications. In addition to harvest specifications, the Council will recommend, for proposed rulemaking, gear and target fishery apportionments of prohibited species catch (PSC) limits for halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *opilio* crab, and herring. The Council will also recommend updated halibut discard mortality rates. 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 2017.

Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish

The BSAI Plan Team recommendations for proposed 2018 and 2019 BSAI groundfish annual harvest specifications are attached (**Item 2**). The Team adopted proposed 2018 and 2019 BSAI OFLs and ABCs which rollover the existing final 2018 harvest specifications that were published in the *Federal Register* last year.

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 2018 and 2019 CDQ ABC reserves have been provided by NMFS staff based on 2017 TAC levels and an assumption of the maximum ABC reserve (**Item 3**)

A report on flatfish exchanges by the Amendment 80 cooperatives will be provided to the Council by NMFS at the December meeting. Current exchanges are reported below. The December 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.

Current 2017 Changes in Flatfish TACs from Flatfish Exchanges

Group	Date	Flathead Sole		Rock Sole		Yellowfin Sole	
		TAC ²	Exchange	TAC	Exchange	TAC	Exchange
	26-Feb	14,500		47,100		154,000	
APICDA ¹	26-May	14,500	0	47,800	700	153,300	-700

¹ Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association

² Total Allowable Catch

BSAI Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) Limits

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 2018 and 2019 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 2018 are attached (**Item 4**).

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 3-system index of inriver adult Chinook salmon run sizes from the Unalakleet, 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. Both cap levels will remain the same in 2018.

Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

At their September meeting, the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams reviewed updated halibut DMRs for implementation in 2018. The Teams supported the Halibut DMR Working Group's recommendations, which are provided in Table 1 of **Item 8**.

Gulf of Alaska Groundfish

The GOA Plan Team's harvest recommendations for 2018 and 2019 are listed in the attached table (**Item 5**). The Team adopted proposed 2018 and 2019 GOA OFLs and ABCs which rollover the existing final 2018 harvest specifications that were published in the *Federal Register* last year.

Pacific cod TAC Adjustments

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 2018 and 2019.

GOA Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) Limits

Recommended 2018 and 2019 halibut PSC apportionments (**Item 7**) are based on the recommended 2018 apportionments for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. Salmon PSC limits are set in regulation.

Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

As in the Bering Sea, at their September meeting, the Joint Groundfish Plan Teams reviewed updated halibut DMRs for implementation in 2018. The Teams supported the Halibut DMR Working Group's recommendations, which are provided in Table 1 of **Item 8**.