



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

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Dan Hull, Chairman
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

GOA Groundfish SAFE Report and 2018/2019 Harvest Specifications

STAFF CONTACT: Jim Armstrong (NPFMC)

ACTION REQUIRED:

1. Review the 2017 Ecosystem Considerations report for the Gulf of Alaska.
2. Approve the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report.
3. Recommend final GOA groundfish harvest specifications for 2018 and 2019, including:
 - Overfishing Level (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for all stocks. **[SSC]**
 - Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for all stocks, taking into account the State waters Pacific cod and pollock fisheries.
 - Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits and seasonal apportionments of Pacific halibut.
 - Pacific halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs).

BACKGROUND:

At this meeting, the Council will review the Ecosystem Considerations report for the Gulf of Alaska, adopt the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report, and make final recommendations on groundfish harvest specifications, PSC limits, and halibut DMRs to manage the 2018 and 2019 GOA groundfish fisheries. Upon publication in the *Federal Register*, the 2018/2019 final harvest specifications will replace harvest specifications adopted last year for the start of the 2018 fisheries.

GOA SAFE and Ecosystem Considerations reports. The GOA Groundfish Plan Team met in Seattle on November 13-17, 2017 to prepare the GOA Groundfish SAFE report. The SAFE report forms the basis for GOA groundfish harvest specifications for the next two fishing years. The SAFE introduction summarizes the Plan Team recommendations for each stock/complex. The hyperlinks to the full report, and the Gulf of Alaska Ecosystem Considerations report (which was reviewed by the Plan Team in September) are posted. The Council will review and adopt the full report at this meeting.

The Plan Team's recommendations for final harvest specifications for 2018 and 2019 are in the SAFE report introduction and also **attached as C5a** (Table 1 OFLs-ABCs). In October, the Council adopted proposed harvest specifications of OFL and ABC that were based on last year's stock assessments. In this 2017 SAFE report, the Plan Team has revised those projections due to the development of new models; collection of new catch, survey, age composition, or size composition data; or use of new methodology for recommending OFLs and ABCs. The November 2017 GOA Groundfish Plan Team minutes are **attached as C5b** (GOA Groundfish Plan Team minutes). The Joint Groundfish Plan Team minutes are included under the Agenda Item **C4b**. The SSC and AP recommendations will be provided to the Council during the meeting.

OFLs, ABCs, TACs and Apportionments. The summed recommended ABCs for 2018 and 2019 are 536,921 t and 480,187 t, respectively, which are reductions compared to the 2017 (667,877 t) and 2016 (727,684 t) aggregate ABCs. The reductions result from a major decrease in Pacific cod ABC (by about 80%), and pollock

ABC (by about 20%). The Plan Team has recommended maximum permissible ABCs for all stocks, except for Pacific cod, Sablefish, and Demersal Shelf Rockfish in 2018 and 2019, and pollock in 2019 only. Other than Pacific cod and sablefish, all stocks are above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy ($B_{35\%}$). The summed biomass estimate for GOA groundfish in 2018 (5,053,276 t) represents a 16% decrease from 2017 (6,036,346 t).

TAC Considerations for State waters Pacific cod fishery. Established area apportionments for 2018 and 2019 adjust the amount of Pacific cod ABC available for the Federal TAC in each area; the adjustments are shown in **attachment C5c**.

TAC Considerations based on State waters pollock fishery. The ABC available for area-specific Federal GOA pollock TACs is first reduced by 2.5% to provides for the Prince William Sound (PWS) State GHL. The ABC/TAC/GHL in **attachment C5c** reflect this accommodation.

Prohibited Species Catch Limits. In the GOA, PSC limits for halibut are specified by fishery, gear, and season. The 2018 and 2019 PSC limits are provided in **attachment C5d**.

Exemptions: The FMP authorizes the Council to exempt specific gear from the halibut PSC limits. Pot gear, jig gear, and the sablefish IFQ hook-and-line gear fishery categories have been exempted from the halibut PSC limit since 1995. The Council recommended the 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 prescribed in regulation. Based on this formula, the hook-and-line CV sector would fish under a 120 mt halibut PSC limit and the hook-and-line CP sector PSC limit would fish under a 137 mt PSC limit in 2018 and 2019. The demersal shelf rockfish fishery halibut bycatch limit would be 9 mt.

Halibut DMRs: Halibut DMRs were reviewed by the SSC and Council at the October 2017 Council meeting. The table in **attachment C5e** provides DMRs by gear and operation type for final specifications in 2018 and 2019.