



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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

Action Memo

File Number:BYC 18-010

Agenda Date6/4/2018

Agenda Number:C5

Dan Hull, Chairman
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Halibut retention in BSAI pots - Initial review

STAFF CONTACT: Sara Cleaver, Sarah Marrinan (NPFMC) and Stephanie Warpinski (NMFS)

ACTION REQUIRED:

- Review Draft EA/RIR
- Consider selecting Preliminary Preferred Alternative & Elements

BACKGROUND:

The Council is considering a regulatory amendment to allow retention of legal-size halibut in pot gear used to fish IFQ/CDQ in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands, provided the operator also holds sufficient halibut IFQ/CDQ for the appropriate regulatory area. Any action taken could affect fishery participants that have sufficient halibut IFQ/CDQ by allowing them to use pot gear. However, this action would not allow for the retention of halibut IFQ/CDQ in other directed (non-sablefish) groundfish or shellfish pot fisheries.

Recently, the Council took action to allow harvest of sablefish and halibut in pot longline gear in the GOA. In January 2018, the IPHC made pot gear legal for halibut in all areas off Alaska; however, complementary NMFS/Council action would be needed for this action to take effect in the BSAI. In April 2018, the Council reviewed an earlier version of this analysis to allow halibut retention in sablefish pots in the BSAI and chose to expand the scope of the action in such a way that halibut retention would not need to be linked to possession of sablefish IFQ/CDQ. Currently in the BSAI, halibut may only be retained using hook-and-line gear.

The incentive for this proposal is primarily driven by the desire to improve the economic and resource efficiency associated with harvesting halibut IFQ/CDQ. Killer whale depredation of both hook-and-line gear as well as of regulatory discards of halibut in the sablefish IFQ/CDQ pot fishery has negative consequences for both the IFQ/CDQ fleet as well as the halibut resource. This action is proposed to allow for: (1) more efficient harvest of the halibut resource by decreasing the wastage of legal-size halibut discarded in the BSAI sablefish pot fishery, and (2) reduced whale depredation of halibut caught on hook-and-line gear by allowing operators that hold both halibut IFQ or CDQ the opportunity to retain halibut in pot gear.

This analysis highlights the possible environmental and socio-economic impacts of allowing for this harvest flexibility and provides a discussion of potential management measures that the Council wanted explored further prior to decision-making.

In addition, the analysis examines the Council's proposed action alternative, which includes five elements under which the Council will consider:

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- (1) adding gear retrieval requirements;
- (2) an exemption to 9-inch maximum tunnel opening in pot gear;
- (3) adding logbook and VMS requirements;
- (4) adding a requirement for an escape mechanism on pots used to fish halibut;
- (5) establishing regulations that would allow NMFS to close IFQ fishing for halibut if an overfishing limit for other species is approached.

The analysis includes an executive summary, EA, and RIR, which are posted as a single document.