

Motion -- C-6 Agenda Item
Abundance-based BSAI Halibut Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits

Draft Purpose and Need

The current fixed yield based halibut PSC caps are inconsistent with management of the directed halibut fisheries and Council management of groundfish fisheries, which are managed based on abundance. When halibut abundance declines, PSC becomes a larger proportion of total halibut removals and thereby further reduces the proportion and amount of halibut available for harvest in directed halibut fisheries. Conversely, if halibut abundance increases, halibut PSC limits could be unnecessarily constraining. The Council is considering linking PSC limits to halibut abundance to provide a responsive management approach at varying levels of halibut abundance. The Council is considering abundance-based PSC limits to control total halibut mortality and protect the halibut spawning stock biomass, particularly at low levels of abundance. The Council recognizes that abundance-based halibut PSC limits would increase and decrease with changes in halibut abundance.

The Council directs the Workgroup to continue meeting and address the following issues in the next discussion paper:

- Consider and incorporate SSC comments as appropriate.
- Focus on efforts that describe halibut PSC abundance based on both weight and numbers, with DMRs applied to set PSC limits.
- Coordinate with ongoing efforts to review and revise halibut DMRs (Agenda Item C-7) to ensure consistent approaches are being used.
- Focus analysis on the use of the NMFS eastern Bering Sea shelf trawl survey and the biomass estimate from the IPHC stock assessment as potentially appropriate indices and explore a variety of assumptions on the appropriate weighting of indices, including using each index as a bookend. If time is available, focus on potential advantages and challenges of incorporating additional surveys (e.g., the Bering Sea shelf, Aleutian Islands, NMFS Sablefish longline survey, and Gulf of Alaska trawl surveys to develop an Alaska-wide index of abundance), and the Integrated Model-based index approach outlined in Section 3.4 of the paper.
- Describe the potential implications of abundance-based halibut PSC allocations using the proportional allocations to the four sectors defined under Amendment 111 as the basis for structure and comparison.
- Provide further discussion on the potential management and operational implications of control rules that change on an annual basis. (e.g., How would NMFS implement such changes? When are data available to establish a revised limit? How would annual changes impact groundfish operations?)

Provide an opportunity for the public to participate in the workgroup beginning in August 2016.

Provide a revised discussion paper for the October 2016 Council meeting.