



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:GF 15-154

Agenda Date12/7/2015

Agenda Number:C3

Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications and Halibut DMRs - Final Action

STAFF CONTACT: Jim Armstrong

ACTION REQUIRED:

Adopt final GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications and Halibut DMRs; receive Plan Team reports

Review and approve the GOA SAFE report (including Ecosystem and Economic SAFEs) and approve the final GOA Harvest Specifications for 2016-2017 including:

1. Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), and annual Total Allowable Catch (TAC).
2. TAC considerations for 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 2016-2017.

BACKGROUND:

In order to manage the 2016 and 2017 Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries, the Council needs to make final recommendations on the above. A number of resources are provided to facilitate that action. **All GOA items and Halibut DMR items are under C3 in the 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. This document provides the analytical basis for the GOA groundfish specifications for 2016 and 2017.
- The GOA and Joint Plan Team Minutes provide summaries of the issues raised during Plan Team meeting as well as recommendations made for subsequent assessments.

ABCs, TACs, and Apportionments

ABC increased or remained unchanged for 12 stocks (C3 Table 1) and decreased for 12 stocks. Overall, the 2016 ABCs represent an increase of 6% (+43,173 t) compared to 2015.

Where estimable, the biomasses of all stocks except sablefish are above target stock size. Biomass is unknown for Atka mackerel, squid, sharks, and octopuses.

TAC Considerations for State Pacific Cod Fishery

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Using the area apportionments for the 2016 and 2017 Pacific cod ABC recommended by the Plan Team, the Federal TAC for P. cod would be adjusted as listed in the GOA P cod GH L Tables included under C3. Note that because the same ABC is recommended for both years, the apportionment values are identical for both years.

TAC Considerations for State Pollock Fishery

The federal GOA Pollock TACs include reductions to accommodate the State waters GH L in Prince William Sound (PWS). The PWS GH L is computed as 2.5% of the total W/C/WYAK ABC. If TAC = ABC for 2016 and 2017, the values corresponding to the PWS GH L are reflected in the GOA pollock GH L Tables included under C3.

Prohibited Species Catch Limits

In the GOA, Chinook salmon Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits (Pollock fishery only) are allocated by area and season based on a fixed total of 25,000 fish. PSC limits for halibut are specified by fishery and gear. For 2016 and 2017 PSC limits, see *the Halibut PSC tables included under C3*.

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)) and sablefish IFQ fishermen typically hold halibut IFQ permits and are therefore required to retain the halibut they catch while fishing sablefish IFQ.

PSC Reductions from Amendment 95

Amendment 95 initiated reductions in GOA halibut PSC limits that were applied to certain sectors. According to the reduction schedule put in place by the Council, the phased in reductions are complete. For 2016 and 2017, the groundfish trawl sector and groundfish catcher vessel (CV) hook-and-line gear sector PSC limits reflect 15% reductions, and the catcher/processor (CP) hook-and-line gear sector PSC limit reflects a 7% reduction.

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 140 mt halibut PSC limit and the hook-and-line CP sector PSC limit would fish under a 116 mt PSC limit in 2016 and 2017. The demersal shelf rockfish fishery halibut bycatch limit would be 9 mt.

Halibut DMRs

Updated DMR estimates were provided by the IPHC to the Plan Teams (2015 IPHC DMR Report). Unlike previous updates, DMRs for years with less than 50 halibut sampled for viability (in the past three years) were deemed unreliable and were not recommended for use. The Plan Teams recommended extending this threshold to all years in the reference timeframe, and the resulting DMRs reflect the Plan Teams' recommendations (Halibut DMR Tables).