



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

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Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Halibut Retention in Sablefish Pots - Discussion Paper

STAFF CONTACT: Sam Cunningham/Sarah Marrinan

ACTION REQUIRED:

Review information summary; Consider further communication with International Pacific Halibut Commission

BACKGROUND:

In 2015 the Council took action to allow the use of pot gear in the GOA sablefish fishery. One element of the Council's preferred alternative would allow sablefish pot vessels with sufficient halibut IFQ onboard to retain incidentally caught halibut of legal size. Implementing that aspect of the proposed rule would require complementary action by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) to make pots legal gear for the commercial catch of halibut in IPHC areas 2C, 3A, and 3B. The IPHC will consider whether or not to take such action at its Annual Meeting in January 2016. The Council has also considered management measures to allow retention of incidentally caught halibut in sablefish pots for the portions of the BSAI that overlap IPHC Area 4A. For the time being, the Council has elected not to pursue a BSAI amendment. Though it has not been requested, the IPHC could conceivably take this opportunity to amend gear regulations for all areas off Alaska where sablefish pot gear is deployed.

Council staff has prepared this discussion paper as a supporting document for the IPHC's consideration of amended gear regulations. The paper summarizes the Council's recent decision points on halibut retention, provides the best available information about the incidence of halibut in sablefish pot gear throughout Pacific and North Pacific fisheries, notes the issues that would arise if a management body tried to predict GOA incidental halibut rates based on data from other fisheries, and lays out the potential paths forward on halibut retention from the present point. To some extent, this paper was requested by IPHC staff, who communicated to the Council that the Commission would like to better understand why management measures that were considered for the BSAI are not necessarily, at the present moment, viable options for the GOA.

No specific action is required of the Council on this agenda item. The Council's Executive Director submitted a letter to the IPHC describing the contents of this paper, and apprising the Commissioners of the action that they are requested to consider in January. The Council may, if it chooses, draft an additional letter to the IPHC prior to the January IPHC meeting. After reviewing this document, the Council could also direct staff to prepare additional information that could be presented to the IPHC at their upcoming meeting, prior to making a decision on amending halibut gear regulations.