



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:BYC 15-001

Agenda Date2/2/2015

Agenda Number:C5

Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Bering Sea Halibut PSC: Halibut deck sorting EFP consultation, Industry sector reports, and Initial Draft analysis to reduce PSC limits

ESTIMATED TIME:

18 hours

ACTION REQUIRED:

Receive reports, and take action as necessary

BACKGROUND

- (a) Halibut deck sorting EFP consultation
- (b)(1) Industry sector reports on BSAI halibut bycatch reduction efforts in 2014, and
- (b)(2) Analysis to Revise BSAI halibut PSC Limits: Initial Review

(a) Halibut deck sorting EFP

An exempted fishing permit (EFP) application has been submitted by the Alaska Seafood Cooperative (AKSC) to allow on-deck sorting of Pacific halibut on non-pelagic trawl catcher processor vessels, as a means of reducing halibut bycatch mortalities on Amendment 80 vessels. The EFP would allow Amendment 80 vessels to sort halibut removed from a codend on the deck, rather than routing halibut over the flow scale and below deck, and release those fish back into the water after sampling halibut for length and condition, using IPHC halibut mortality assessment methods. All groundfish and halibut harvested would be within the AKSC's allocation for groundfish and halibut mortality. A packet including the letter to the Council chairman from Dr. Jim Balsiger (NMFS AKR) regarding receipt of this application, the EFP application itself, and AFSC's approval of the experimental design, is posted as an attachment under this agenda item.

The applicant's intention is for deck sorting under the EFP to begin as soon as the permit is approved, and to continue through the end of 2015. A representative of the applicant, Mr. John Gauvin, will be available to present a description of the experiment.

(b)(1) Industry sector reports on BSAI halibut bycatch and discard reduction efforts in 2014

In June 2014, the Council requested all BSAI industry sectors to undertake voluntary efforts to effect a 10% reduction in halibut mortalities in the BSAI resulting from halibut PSC use, as well as discards in the directed halibut fishery, from the current 5-year average levels (2009 to 2013), through the 2014-2015 fishing seasons.

To evaluate progress with those efforts, the Council asked the sectors to report back to the Council in conjunction with initial review on the Council's analysis to reduce BSAI PSC limits. The Council requested a

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report on measures that are being implemented and developed, and, to the extent possible, the effectiveness of those measures in terms of absolute reductions in halibut mortalities. Verbal reports have been scheduled from representatives of the five rationalized groundfish sectors:

- American Fisheries Act Catcher Processors
- American Fisheries Act Catcher Vessels
- Amendment 80 Catcher Processors
- Freezer Longliners
- CDQ sector

(b)(2) Analysis to Revise BSAI halibut PSC Limits: Initial Review

Also in June 2014, the Council initiated an analysis to reduce Pacific halibut PSC limits in the BSAI groundfish fisheries. PSC limit reductions are considered for various sectors, including the BSAI trawl limited access sector, the Amendment 80 sector, longline catcher vessels, longline catcher processors, and the CDQ sector (i.e., a reduction to the CDQ's allocated prohibited species quota reserve). The initial review draft analysis was distributed in mid-January, and the executive summary is attached.

Additional information of relevance may become available following the IPHC annual meeting (January 26-30, 2015), or as a result of the joint Council-IPHC meeting on February 5, 2015. Supplemental materials will be posted when they are available.