



# C2 GOA Groundfish Harvest Specifications December 2018 Council Meeting

## Action Memo

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### Action Required:

1. Review the 2018 Ecosystem Status Report for the Gulf of Alaska.
2. Approve the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report.
3. Recommend final GOA groundfish harvest specifications for 2019 and 2020, including:
  - Overfishing Level (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for all stocks. **[SSC]**
  - Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for all stocks, taking into account the State waters Pacific cod and pollock fisheries.
  - Pacific halibut Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits and its seasonal apportionments.
  - Pacific halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs).

## BACKGROUND

At this meeting, the Council will review the Ecosystem Status Report for the Gulf of Alaska, adopt the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Groundfish SAFE Report, and make final recommendations on groundfish harvest specifications, PSC limits, and halibut DMRs to manage the 2019 and 2020 GOA groundfish fisheries. Upon publication in the *Federal Register*, the 2019/2020 final harvest specifications will replace harvest specifications adopted last year for the start of the 2019 fisheries.

## GOA SAFE Report and Ecosystem Status Report

The GOA Groundfish Plan Team met in Seattle on November 13-16, 2018 to prepare the GOA Groundfish SAFE report. The SAFE report forms the basis for GOA groundfish harvest specifications for the next two fishing years. The SAFE report introduction summarizes the Plan Team recommendations for each stock/complex. Hyperlinks to the full report, and the Gulf of Alaska Ecosystem Status Report (previously referred to as the Ecosystem Considerations Report, and which was reviewed by the Plan Team in September) are posted. The Council will review and adopt the full SAFE report at this meeting.

The November 2018 GOA Groundfish Plan Team minutes are [attached as C2b](#) (GOA Groundfish Plan Team Report). The Joint Groundfish Plan Team minutes are included under the Agenda Item C3.

## OFLs, ABCs, TACs and Apportionments

The Plan Team's recommendations for final harvest specifications for 2019 and 2020 are in the SAFE report introduction and also [attached as C2a](#) (Table 1 OFLs-ABCs). In October 2018, the Council adopted proposed harvest specifications for OFL and ABC for 2019 and 2020 which were based on last year's stock assessments. In this 2018 SAFE report, the Plan Team has revised those projections due to the development of new models; collection of new catch, survey, age composition, or size composition

data; or use of new methodology for recommending OFLs and ABCs. The SSC and AP recommendations will be provided to the Council during the meeting.

The Plan Team's summed recommended ABCs for 2019 and 2020 are 509,507 t and 487,218 t, respectively, which are reductions compared to the 2018 (536,921 t) and 2017 (667,877 t) aggregate ABCs. The reductions are driven by decreases in the recommended pollock ABC (about 15%). The Plan Team has recommended maximum permissible ABCs for all stocks, except for pollock, sablefish, and demersal shelf rockfish in 2019 and 2020, and Pacific cod in 2019 only. As illustrated in Figure 2 of the GOA SAFE introduction, other than Pacific cod and sablefish, all stocks are above BMSY or the BMSY proxy (B35%). The total biomass estimates for GOA groundfish in 2019 (5,005,262 t) represents a 1% decline from 2018 (5,053,276 t).

## **TAC Considerations for State waters fisheries**

### State waters Pacific cod fishery

Established area apportionments for 2019 and 2020 adjust the amount of Pacific cod ABC available for the Federal TAC in each area; the adjustments are [attached as C2c](#).

### State waters pollock fishery

The ABC available for area-specific Federal GOA pollock TACs is first reduced by 2.5% to provides for the Prince William Sound (PWS) State GHL. The ABC/TAC/GHL reflect this accommodation.

## **Prohibited Species Catch Limits**

In the GOA, PSC limits for halibut are specified annually by fishery, gear, and season. The 2019 and 2020 PSC limits are [attached as C2d](#) (Tables 14-16).

### PSC limits by gear type

The Pacific halibut PSC limits apply only to trawl vessels and vessels fishing with hook-and-line gear for species other than IFQ sablefish. The FMP authorizes the Council to exempt specific gear from the halibut PSC limits. Pot gear, jig gear, and the sablefish IFQ hook-and-line gear fishery categories have been exempted from the halibut PSC limit since 1995. The Council recommended the 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)).

### CV-CP Hook-and-Line Split

The hook-and-line halibut PSC limit is divided between the catcher vessel (CV) and catcher processor (CP) sectors according to the "GOA Pacific cod split formula" that is prescribed in regulation. Based on this formula, the hook-and-line CV sector would fish under a 120 mt halibut PSC limit and the hook-and-line CP sector PSC limit would fish under a 137 mt PSC limit in 2019 and 2020. The demersal shelf rockfish fishery halibut PSC limit would be 9 mt.

### Procedure for changing Pacific halibut PSC limit apportionments

The GOA Groundfish FMP (Section 3.6.2.1) sets out the procedure for modifying halibut PSC limits during the annual harvest specifications process. To adjust the PSC limit, the Council and NMFS must consider biological and socioeconomic factors about the halibut stock and groundfish fisheries that

intercept halibut as bycatch<sup>1</sup>. To accommodate these considerations, the FMP identifies a time-specific procedure for adjusting PSC apportionments to target fishery categories in the GOA, and seasonal allocations thereof, which requires this information to be provided for Council review in October, so the Council can set different apportionments in December. No additional information pertaining to GOA halibut PSC apportionments was requested by the Council for review in October 2018.

### **Halibut Discard Mortality Rates**

Halibut DMRs were reviewed by the SSC and Council at the October 2018 Council meeting. The table [attached as C2e](#) provides DMRs by gear and operation type for final specifications in 2019 and 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> The required information includes 1) estimated change in halibut biomass and stock condition; 2) potential impacts on halibut stocks and fisheries; 3) potential impacts on groundfish fisheries; 4) estimated PSC during prior years; 5) expected halibut PSC; 6) methods available to reduce halibut PSC; 7) the cost of reducing halibut PSC; and 8) other biological and socioeconomic factors that affect the appropriateness of a specific PSC limit in terms of FMP objectives.