



## C6 Bering Sea Snow Crab PSC Limits

December 2018 Council Meeting

### Action Memo

Staff: Steve MacLean

Action Required: 

1. Review the Initial Review Draft
2. Review and consider whether to revise the Purpose and Need
3. Consider whether to identify a preliminary preferred alternative

### BACKGROUND

In February 2016, the Council requested an analysis of alternatives to calculate and apportion snow crab PSC limits for trawl fisheries operating in the *C. opilio* Bycatch Limitation Zone (COBLZ) in the Bering Sea. The current PSC limit is specified annually as a total of 0.1133% of the survey abundance estimate from the NMFS Standard Trawl Survey. Only snow crab PSC that occurs in the COBLZ accrues to the PSC limit, which is apportioned annually to the CDQ, Amendment 80, and BSAI trawl limited access sectors; the BSAI TLA PSC limit is further apportioned to specific target fisheries.

At this meeting, the Council is scheduled for initial review of an analysis to change the PSC limit for snow crab. The action alternatives would change the population estimate from which the PSC limits for snow crab are calculated from the NMFS survey estimate to the modeled estimate from the snow crab model used in harvest specifications. Alternative 2 would eliminate existing maximum and minimum PSC limits and reduce the multiplier that is applied to the abundance estimate to calculate overall PSC limits. Alternative 3 would retain the status quo multiplier, but apply it to the modeled abundance estimate, and reduce existing minimum and maximum PSC limits.

Staff notes that the purpose and need statement provided by the Council is very broad, encompassing all management measures intended to protect Bering Sea snow crab and their habitat, while the alternatives provided by the Council are very narrowly focused on mechanisms to calculate and assign PSC limits to groundfish fisheries in the COBLZ. It would benefit analysis if the Council considered revising the purpose and need statement to clarify the issue that they would like to address with this action and allow the alternatives to flow directly from the purpose and need statement.

The analysis notes that it has heretofore been a rare event for fisheries to exceed their snow crab PSC limits, the result of which is that the fishery is shut out of operating in the COBLZ for the remainder of the year. Only in 2010 did the BSAI TLA yellowfin sole fishery exceed its limit. None of the alternatives appear to significantly increase the likelihood that any fishery will exceed its PSC limit under recent levels of snow crab abundance. It is likely that under any alternative it would be a rare event for fisheries to exceed their snow crab PSC limit, although there may be some increased cost to fisheries if they must modify annual fishing plans to avoid areas of higher snow crab PSC usage.