Dan Hull
Chairman
Chris Oliver
Executive Director

605 W 4th, Ste 306
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 271-2809
(907) 271-2817

www.npfmc.org

News & Notes
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
December 2015


Photo: Karla Bush

Council Appointments

The Council made two new appointments to serve three-year terms on the Advisory Panel: Angel Drobnika, Renewable Energy and Fisheries Liaison with Aleutian Pribilof Islands Community Development Association, and Ben Stevens, Director of the Hunting and Fishing Task Force for Tanana Chiefs Conference. Other members reappointed to serve three-year terms on the Panel are: Art Nelson, Paddy O'Donnell (one-year term), Daniel Donich, John Gruver, Craig Lowenberg, and Joel Peterson. The Council appointed Jason Gasper of NMFS to fill a seat on the SSC vacated by retiring Lew Queirolo. The Council noted Lew's 9 years on the SSC, and over 40 years managing Alaska's fisheries, and wished him well in his new venture.

The Council presented Lew with a plaque thanking him for his service.

Charter Halibut Recreational Quota Entity

The Council approved a motion for the continued consideration of the development of a Recreational Quota Entity (RQE) program by requesting a second Initial Review at a subsequent meeting. The Council amended the purpose and need statement of action, as well as some of the alternative and options in response to input from its advisory bodies and public comments.

In this proposed action, the Council is considering allowing for a qualified non-profit entity to purchase and hold commercial QS for use by the guided angler sector as a whole. An RQE(s) QS holdings as of October 1 each year would be the basis to estimate IFQ pounds to add to the estimated guided recreational allocation under the catch sharing plan for the upcoming year. This amount would be used to set the halibut charter management measures for the subsequent year and would be maintained for the duration of the fishing year. An RQE could transfer QS back to qualified individuals in the commercial sector, with QS retaining its area, class, and block designations.

The alternative to allow for the development of an RQE includes a number of options restricting the amount of QS that could be transferred to an RQE to be used on behalf of guided anglers. Proposed restrictions include annual transfer limits, total transfer limits, and restrictions on the purchase of certain QS vessel classes and/or blocked QS. Responding to public testimony requesting the Council focus around the ranges of transfer restrictions set in the Guided Angler Fish (GAF) program, the Council amendment the motion to consider total transfer restrictions of between 5 to 20% of commercial QS (or each QS vessel class of QS) based on the total QS pool in 2015 (rather than 10 to 40%). The Council also tasked staff to consider the mechanics of a concept by which the GAF transfer restrictions are reduced in accordance with RQE quota holdings to meet a cumulative limit.

Future analysis was directed to evaluate the use of RQE QS holdings in the event that the charter sector had reached the recreational bag limits of the unguided halibut sport fishery in either area. The motion listed several options for moving QS in the event of "surplus QS" in the halibut charter sector.

The motion also listed several detailed elements of consideration for the formation of an RQE. Implications of allowing such an entity, in part depend on the structure of that entity. The Council's motion begins to detail the type of organizational structure this program would require. The Council does not have justification over the avenues of funding that may be considered by this entity; however, the Council specifies some limits on the use of funds acquired by the non-profit. The Council directed the analysis to evaluate the effects of transferring commercial IFQ shares to the charter sector on observer fee revenues, IFQ administrative fees, and other related expenses.

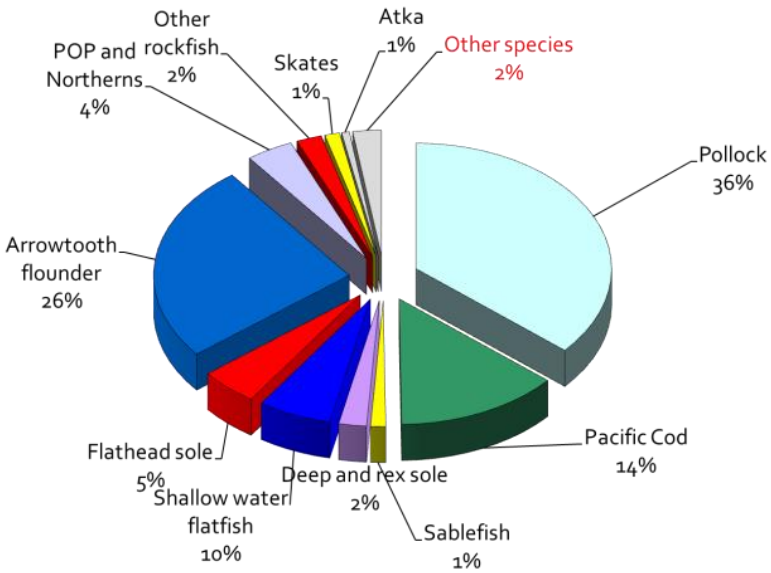
The Council changed the third alternative, originally focused on the retirement of latent Charter Halibut Permits. In future iterations of the analysis, Alternative 3 will consider allowing an RQE to purchase and hold a percentage of the Charter Halibut Permits in each area. This alternative would be able to respond to the variation of halibut abundance and angler demand more directly than an action to retire permits with no option of reissuance. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

GOA Groundfish Specifications

The Council approved the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report and also recommended final GOA groundfish catch specifications for the 2016 and 2017 fishing years. The updated Ecosystem Considerations portion of the SAFE included an Ecosystem Report Card for the GOA for the first time. As part of the Council's specification process, detailed stock assessment results including model performance and estimated OFL and ABC for 2016-2017 were reviewed by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee. The sum of all of the Council's recommended GOA ABCs increased by 6% compared with 2015. The increase was primarily driven by increases in the pollock ABC (+30%). Biomass declines were indicated for the northern rockfish (-20%), rex sole (-18%), and sablefish (-14%) stocks.

Where estimable, abundances of all GOA groundfish species except sablefish are above target stock size. The abundances of Atka mackerel, squids, sharks, and octopuses are unknown.

For most stocks the Council set TACs equal to ABCs. Exceptions included Pacific cod where area TACs consist of ABC reduced by 25% (EGOA and CGOA) or 30% (WGOA) to account for harvest designated from the state-managed fishery. Similarly, the pollock TAC in W/C/WYAK was reduced by 2.5% to account for the GHL in Prince William Sound. Additional instances where TAC was set less than ABC include shallow-water flatfish (WGOA), arrowtooth flounder (GOA wide), flathead sole (W and C GOA), other rockfish (EYAK/SEO), and Atka mackerel. All of the GOA specifications for 2016-2017 are posted on the Council's website.



Percentage breakouts of 2016 ABCs by species and stock complexes.

Source Dr. Jim Ianelli.

Prohibited Species Catch Limits:

In accordance with established reductions, the Council also adopted halibut PSC limit apportionments by season and gear for 2016-2017. Amendment 95 to the GOA Groundfish FMP initiated reductions in 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 now complete, and so 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.

The Council-recommended OFLs, ABCs and TACs for 2016 and 2017, as well as the SAFE report for GOA groundfish, the Ecosystem Considerations Chapter and the Economic SAFE report are on the Council's website. Staff contact is Jim Armstrong.

Halibut DMRs

As part of the specification process, the Council also established halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs) for use by NMFS in-season management for the 2016-2017 fishing years. These DMRs are applied to halibut discards that occur in the groundfish fisheries for both the BSAI and GOA regions and reflect the estimated percentage of halibut discards that die for each target fishery. Importantly, a halibut DMR working group will investigate improved methods for estimating DMRs in 2016 and the current DMRs are expected to be replaced for the 2017 fishing year. A discussion paper explaining new DMR estimation methods is planned for the Council's April 2016 meeting.

BSAI Harvest Specifications

The Council adopted the BSAI Groundfish SAFE report and annual catch limits based on recommendations from its advisory committees. The sum of the total allowable catches (TACs) or quotas for all BSAI groundfish is 2 million t for 2016 and 2017. The TACs were set below the sum of the recommended ABCs. The sum of the recommended ABCs for 2016 and 2017 are 3,236,662 t and 3,143,135 t, respectively. The primary increase from previous years is due to EBS pollock. The abundances of EBS pollock, EBS Pacific cod, all rockfishes managed under Tier 3, and all flatfishes except Greenland turbot managed under Tiers 1 or 3 are projected to be above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy of $B_{35\%}$ in 2016. The abundances of three stocks are projected to be below $B_{35\%}$ for 2016: AI pollock by about 2 percent, sablefish by about 4 percent, and Greenland turbot by about 30 percent. Overall, the status of the stocks continues to appear favorable. Nearly all stocks are above their target biomass size (B_{MSY}). The sum of the biomasses for 2016 represents an 11% increase from 2015.

The Council established the annual ABC reserve for three flatfish species, northern rock sole, flathead sole and yellowfin sole. The

Council established the entire ABC surplus as the ABC reserve. This ABC surplus is used to allow for more efficiency in the harvest of these flatfish species. The Council also adopted revised PSC limits for crab stocks, Pacific halibut, and herring including apportionments where applicable.

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In conjunction with specifications, the Council had extensive discussions regarding halibut bycatch in various fisheries. The Council moved to explicitly state that it will continue to take into consideration groundfish species halibut bycatch rates, the potential effects of groundfish harvest on directed halibut fisheries, and the health of the halibut resource, recognizing a shared responsibility with the IPHC to maintain the viability of halibut commercial, sport, and personal use fisheries, and the communities dependent upon them. The Council continues to consider bycatch of other species as well such as salmon, crab and herring.

The Council moved to request that the Plan Team and AFSC, in conjunction with the IPHC develop ecosystem indicators for BSAI and GOA halibut for inclusion in the Ecosystem Considerations chapter of the annual SAFE report. A draft ecosystem report card for halibut will be prepared for review by the Plan Teams in September 2016.

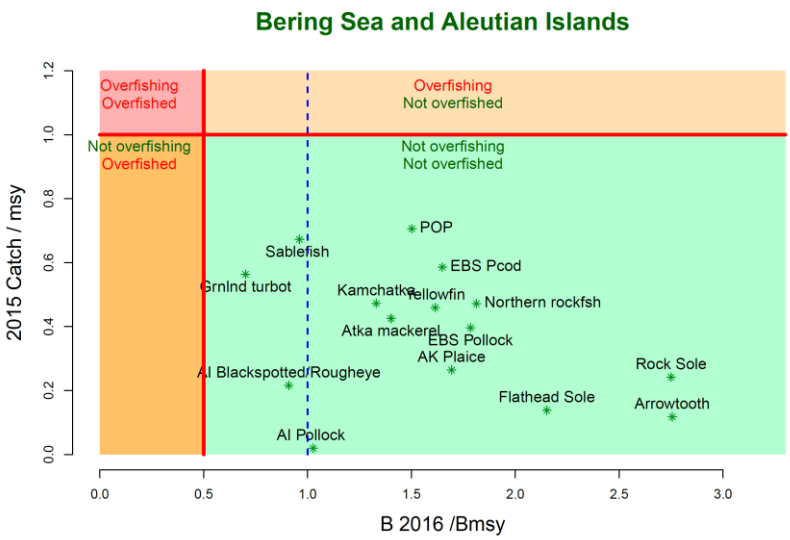

Figure 2 Summary of Bering Sea stock status next year (spawning biomass relative to Bmsy; horizontal axis) and current year catch relative to fishing at Fmsy (vertical axis).

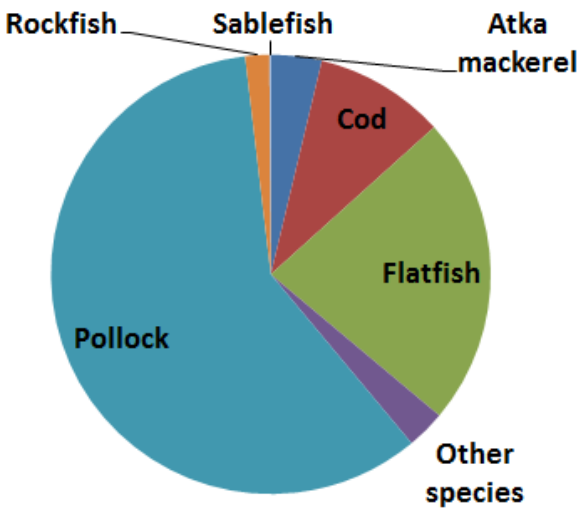

Figure 1 Relative breakouts of biomass of major species groups in the BSAI

The final BSAI groundfish harvest specifications will be published as a final rule in the Federal Register by late February/early March 2016. They will replace the current 2016 harvest specifications that were adopted by the Council in December 2014. Groundfish specifications for 2016-2017 as well as additional motions related to halibut indicators and consideration in TAC-setting are available on the Council's website. Staff Contact is Diana Stram.

Spatial and Stock Structure Management

The Council received a report from an internal workgroup of Plan Team, SSC and NMFS RO members regarding issues of clarification on the Council's Spatial Management and Stock Structure Policy as well as recommendation for application of this policy to BSAI Blackspotted/Rougheye rockfish in 2016. The Council moved to clarify several issues per

request of the Joint Plan Teams and the workgroup. For BSAI BS/RE management, the Council supports use of the maximum subarea species catch (MSSC) for WAI BS/RE in 2016. The Council requests the workgroup describe the exploitation rate of WAI BS/RE, and other appropriate metrics to describe the impact of fisheries on WAI BS/RE. A public meeting will be convened by April 2016 to solicit public input on those or other options for consideration in the 2017 specifications with a report evaluating these tools prepared for Plan Team review in September and Council consideration in October. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

Enforcement Considerations

At this meeting, the Council was presented an updated paper providing guidance on enforcement considerations for management of North Pacific fisheries. At the December 2014 meeting, the Council tasked the Enforcement Committee to review its April 2005 "Enforcement Considerations for NOAA Fisheries and North Pacific Fishery Management Council" document to include advance VMS features, where appropriate, in the matrix of different management measures noted in the paper. In addition, the Council also tasked the Enforcement Committee to review other enforcement considerations in other regions to determine if there are other enforcement tools that might be of use for the North Pacific. Since December 2014, the Enforcement Committee has worked to update the enforcement consideration document to include the VMS advance features and other enforcement considerations from other regions. In addition, the document has been revised to reflect an updated Alaska regional enforcement perspective.

Fisheries are in a continual state of change and require the Council and NMFS to respond to these changes through development of and modifications to Fishery Management Plans and their implementing regulations. Involving enforcement personnel in the rulemaking process is essential, but sometimes it is difficult to include enforcement on every conference call and at every meeting. With that in mind, the law enforcement considerations document, which is based on the collective experience from NOAA Fisheries Enforcement, U.S. Coast Guard, and State of Alaska is a resource for the Council and Agency staff. Staff contact is Jon McCracken.

GOA Trawl Chinook PSC Reapportionment

The Council took final action, recommending a preferred alternative that allows NMFS inseason managers to reapportion Chinook salmon PSC between the GOA pollock and non-pollock trawl sectors. Reapportionments would be made in small incremental amounts, and managers would carefully consider projected effort, PSC rates, and fleet behavior in each affected sector. The objective of this action is to provide managers with flexibility to keep groundfish fisheries open in some cases where they would otherwise have closed due to the attainment of a PSC hard cap. In aggregate, the recommended alternative would not allow the number of Chinook salmon intercepted by GOA trawl vessels to exceed the limits established under Amendments 93 and 97. Furthermore, the action would not allow for annual GOA salmon PSC to exceed the current allowable maximum of 32,500 fish, which is set below the amount that triggers reconsultation on how the GOA groundfish fisheries affect salmon and other species that are protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The Council selected three options under the action alternative. The first option prohibits reapportionment of Chinook PSC from the CV sector to the CP sector. The Council noted that most GOA CPs already fish under a cooperative structure (Amendment 80 sector), and thus have additional self-management tools to minimize PSC. The CP sector would still have some performance-based flexibility in its annual PSC limit through the "uncertainty buffer" provision in Amendment 97. The second option limits the amount of reapportioned PSC that each of the three CV sectors could receive; in effect, no sector could fish under an annual hard cap that is greater than 150% of the limit established for it in Amendment 93 (pollock) or 97 (non-pollock). This option reflects the Council's intent that reapportionments are made to keep a sector open in the event of unexpectedly high salmon encounter, and not to allow for PSC usage up to the maximum allowable amount of 32,500 fish. The third option provides additional flexibility to inseason managers in the timing and amount of the existing rollover provision that moves PSC from the Rockfish Program CV sector to the non-pollock CV sector. Currently, that rollover must occur on October 1, and the amount is predetermined. This action allows managers to account for contingencies in the timing of Rockfish Program effort and the amount of Chinook PSC that the sector has encountered in a particular year. Staff contact is Sam Cunningham.

Halibut Management Framework

In June 2015 the Council initiated development of a halibut management Framework, as a strategic planning document to help organize and facilitate halibut related research, improve coordination with IPHC activities, and generally guide the Council's achievement of management objectives related to the halibut fisheries, particularly halibut bycatch. A first draft was reviewed by the Council in October 2015, and a second draft (based on Council direction in October) was reviewed at the December 2015 meeting in Anchorage. Following input from stakeholders, and initial comments from the IPHC, the Council passed a motion providing additional direction for development of the Framework, which includes identification of five primary management objectives, six (initial) priority research issues, and a number of actions intended to strengthen communication and coordination with the IPHC.

Among the action items was formation of a Halibut Management Committee comprised of the three U.S. IPHC Commissioners and three Council members (TBD) designed to facilitate formation of domestic positions regarding halibut. This Committee may meet prior to the IPHC annual meeting, which begins on January 25, 2015. The Council also will pursue formation of a Joint Council/IPHC Committee, which could include Canadian as well as U.S. Commissioners, to provide more direct and formal communication between the Council and the Commission. The full text of the Council's motion is attached. Staff contact for this item is Chris Oliver.

Call for Nominations

The Council is soliciting nominations to fill vacancies in three committees: the Recreational Quota Entity Committee (a charter representative of Area 2C); the Charter Halibut Committee (a representative of Area 2C); and the IFQ Committee (a processor representative). If you are interested in one of these vacancies, please submit a letter of interest by January 22 to npfmc.comments@noaa.gov .

Amendment 80 Halibut Avoidance

At this meeting, the Council reviewed the Amendment 80 halibut avoidance program for the 2016 fishing year. In June 2015, the Council requested the program be designed to not just accommodate the revised PSC mortality limit, but to bring savings to levels below the hard cap.

To facilitate the success of the Amendment 80 halibut avoidance program and to ensure sectorwide accountability, both Amendment 80 cooperatives work cooperatively to develop a single program for all Amendment 80 vessels adopted as inter-cooperative agreement. As noted in the 2016 halibut avoidance plan, the overarching goal is to ensure that the Amendment 80 fleet uses the best available operational practices to avoid halibut and reduce halibut mortality. Key elements in the avoidance program include establishing performance standards to identify outlier vessels, and financial penalties and halibut PSC forfeiture provisions to improve accountability at the vessel level. The avoidance program is intended to ensure all Amendment 80 vessels and companies meet similar performance standards, have strong incentives to reduce halibut mortality, and adhere to the best practices for halibut avoidance. Ultimately, the halibut avoidance program is designed not just to accommodate the revised hard caps, but to bring savings to levels below the hard cap. The halibut avoidance program also addresses specific requests from the Council during the June 2015 meeting:

1. Define halibut avoidance practices on the grounds
2. Increase communication between participating harvesters
3. Provide for sharing of data for performance tracking
4. Provides for use and development of excluders
5. Develop deck sorting program
6. Measures and assess performance at the boat and company level
7. Provide incentives for continuous efforts to minimize bycatch
8. Define consequences for substandard performance

Staff contact is Jon McCracken.

AFA Program Review Work Plan

The MSA requires a formal and detailed review of Limited Access Privilege Programs 5 years after the implementation of the program, and thereafter to coincide with scheduled Council review of the relevant fishery management plan (but no less frequently than once every 7 years). In addition, during passage of AFA, Congress anticipated that the Act would result in substantial changes to the businesses and communities that rely on fishing, as well as the natural resources that support those fisheries. To provide a better understanding of the impacts resulting from the Act, Congress required the Council develop a report focused on specific changes brought about by the AFA. Addressing Congress's request, a report on AFA impacts was completed in 2002. Since completion of that report, there has not been a new AFA program review.

At the December meeting, the Council received a work plan to prepare a new AFA program review. The work plan included a brief summary of AFA, information concerning program review requirements, and an annotated table of contents. The purpose of this AFA program review is to provide a history of what has happened in the different fisheries by AFA sectors since 2000. Staff contact is Jon McCracken.

Amendment 80 Halibut Usage and Limit

Amendment 80 cooperative	2015 halibut PSC *	2016 halibut PSC limit
Alaska Seafood Cooperative	1,056 mt	1,271 mt
Alaska Groundfish Cooperative	455 mt	474 mt

*Through November 30

BSAI Abundance Based Halibut PSC limits

Per request, the Council received a report on BSAI abundance based halibut PSC limits from IPHC staff. Following this, the Council moved to initiate an interagency staff workgroup with Council, NMFS, and IPHC staff to identify and evaluate alternative methods to index halibut PSC limits based on halibut abundance. The Council requested that the workgroup describe potential data and management advantages and challenges provided by alternative methods to index halibut PSC limits based on halibut abundance and to evaluate the effects of various assumptions on an abundance based approach, such as those related to natural mortality (by size and age), growth rates, size composition of PSC by sector, and the long-term potential spawning capital of juvenile halibut. The workgroup is to provide recommendations to the Council on abundance-based halibut PSC approaches as soon as possible. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

Bering Sea FEP

The Council has initiated work on a Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP). The Council's concept, proposed in a discussion paper prepared with input from the Ecosystem Committee, is to develop a core FEP strategic document identifying Council goals and policies, and forming a structured framework to regularly evaluate and initiate specific analyses or tasks, identified as action modules, to address Council priorities. The FEP framework will provide an opportunity for the Council to develop information and tools that are consistent with ecosystem-based fishery management (EBFM), and will help the Council be able to respond to environmental changes. The Council reiterated their intention for the FEP to be action-informing rather than action-forcing, and anticipates that the FEP will identify incremental improvements to fishery management, rather than a need for complete overhaul. Developing the Bering Sea FEP is consistent with the implementation strategy for the Council's ecosystem vision policy statement, adopted last year.

The motion, which is posted online, simultaneously initiates work both on the core FEP as well as a first action module, an assessment and gap analysis of the Council's current EBFM approach against EBFM best practices. The process for identifying and prioritizing other action modules will be developed as part of the core FEP. Staff will begin work on these documents, including developing recommendations for the constituency of a Bering Sea FEP team and its terms of reference, and an outreach and public involvement plan, to be reviewed by the Ecosystem Committee and the Council. Staff contact is Diana Evans.

IFQ Program Review Scoping Outline

The Halibut/ Sablefish IFQ Program was implemented in 1995, and has yet to be evaluated in a comprehensive program review, as required of all Limited Access Privilege Programs under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. At the December meeting, staff presented a document to the Council and the Council's IFQ Implementation Committee describing a proposed annotated outline for a comprehensive halibut/ sablefish IFQ program review.

The proposed outline relies on a number of guidance documents for establishing the program review scope. Most notably, the workplan is built around the 10 objectives of the IFQ program as identified in the original Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. The review proposes using quantitative and qualitative analyses to focus on the present status of the fisheries in relation to the 10 objectives and to changes since the implementation of the program. There are potentially numerous ways of organizing the presentation of the important components and issues of the IFQ program. This scoping document suggests the analysts' intent; balancing the task of covering the program in a comprehensive way with the desire to focus on and weave in a discussion of the program objectives in relevant sections.

The Council did not make a motion, but supported the direction of the analytical scope. It mentioned a few recommendations for focus made in the IFQ Implementation Committee that are not necessarily outside of the purview of this review document, but may be better suited for a different type of NMFS or Council analytical document. The Council supported the intent to consider entry-level opportunity as a common discussion point in the analysis, despite it not being an explicit goal laid out in the program objectives.

This outline is the first step in a process to establish direction for a program review. In a subsequent Council meeting, NFMS and Council staff will return with a more detailed workplan, highlighting the type of methods and data that are intended to be used in this review. Additional comment will be solicited from the SSC, AP, Council, to guide the review. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

GOA Trawl Bycatch Management

Staff provided the Council with the requested work plan that maps out a path to the EIS initial review stage, including a timeline of analytical projects and opportunities for public comment. The Council will next review work related to the GOA Trawl Bycatch Management package at its meetings in February (Portland, Oregon) and June (Kodiak, Alaska). In February, the Council will primarily focus on the most recently added alternative (PSC allocations to cooperatives) and issues pertaining to how cooperatives are formed. In June, the Council will discuss the impacts of the various action alternatives on communities, as well as observer issues. The scope of what is discussed in June is not strictly limited, and might evolve after more public discussion of the proposed program in February. Nevertheless, the Council wished to convey its schedule to interested stakeholders so that they may plan to participate in the review process. The work produced for each of these meetings will then be folded into a more comprehensive analysis of the proposed program's impacts, which is likely to be completed in late 2016.

The Council acknowledged the challenge of attending these specific meetings for stakeholders in Western GOA communities, particularly in regards to their planned fishing activity. To be responsive, the Council has scheduled two outreach meetings to take place in Sand Point, Alaska. The first meeting is scheduled for mid-January 2016 (contact NPFMC staff for time/date information). That meeting will allow stakeholders to convey their feedback on the agenda for the February Council meeting. The second meeting will take place in mid-May 2016, serving a similar purpose in preparation for the June Council meeting.

Staff contact is Sam Cunningham.

Bristol Bay Red King Crab EFP

The SSC received a report on an application for an exempted fishing permit (EFP) to allow operators of up to five Alaska Seafood Cooperative (AKSC) non-pelagic trawl catcher/processors to test fish in two subareas of the Bering Sea that are closed to trawl directed fisheries: Reporting Area 516 of Zone 1 closed to all trawl gear and the Red King Crab Savings Area (RKCSA) closed to non-pelagic trawl gear. The purpose of the EFP is to collect data on crab bycatch rates during commercial fishing operations targeting primarily flatfish inside these closed areas as well as adjacent areas that are open to non-pelagic trawling. The objective of the EFP is to evaluate whether flatfish and other groundfish trawling in these closed areas under the existing PSC limits for crab would result in reductions in PSC rates for crab and other species, or a change in overall catch of target species compared with status quo. Following review, the applicants elected to withdraw their EFP from consideration at this time in order to revise the study to address comments from the SSC. The EFP will be revised and resubmitted for review in October 2016. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

IFQ Leasing by CDQ Groups

The Council initiated an analysis to consider allowing CDQ groups to lease halibut IFQ in areas that they currently hold CDQ (i.e., IPHC regulatory Areas 4B and 4CD) in times of low halibut catch limits. In effect, this proposal would allow CDQ groups to lease IFQ for use by residents with a halibut CDQ permit and a CDQ hired master permit, subject to the group's internal halibut management. In this proposed action, no vessel over 51 ft LOA would be eligible to harvest leased IFQ, and vessels would need to comply with IFQ vessel cap restrictions. The forthcoming analysis will consider several levels of "low catch limits" in which this flexibility would be triggered. It will also consider whether QS vessel classes would need to apply for leased IFQ, any concerns that may arise from leased Area 4D IFQ being fished by the CDQ small vessel fleet in Area 4E (similar to the transferability of Area 4D CDQ to Area 4E), and the importance of setting a control date on the acquisition of IFQ that could be leased. This proposed action would be intended for benefiting CDQ residents in times of low halibut abundance, while taking into account the goals of the halibut IFQ program. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

Charter Halibut Management

The Charter Halibut Management Implementation Committee met in October 2015, and again in December 2015 to consider management measures designed to keep the charter halibut harvest within each area's (2C and 3A) 2016 allocation. Management measures recommended by the committee were evaluated by Scott Meyer (ADF&G) to determine their likelihood to keep the charter harvest within the IPHC FCEY identified at the 2015 interim IPHC meeting, 0.847 million pounds in Area 2C and 1.771 million pounds in Area 3A. After receiving the report, recommendations from the Charter Halibut Management Implementation Committee, and members of the public, the Council approved the following charter halibut management measures for recommendation to the International Pacific Halibut Commission for implementation in 2016:

For Area 2c:

- One-fish daily bag limit
- Reverse slot limit of U42" – O80" (must be ≤42" or ≥80")

If the final Area 2C charter allocation is sufficiently higher than the "blue line" to accommodate a change in the reverse slot limit, adjust the size of the lower limit upward to meet the allocation. If the final charter allocation is below the "blue line", the first restriction added would be a 5-fish annual limit, and if further restrictions are needed, adjust the size of the lower limit downward to meet the allocation.

For Area 3A:

- Two-fish daily bag limit
- Maximum size of one of the two fish is 28"
- One trip per day (Use of each charter halibut permit is limited to one charter halibut fishing trip per calendar day. Also limit each vessel to one charter halibut fishing trip per calendar day).
- 4-fish annual limit
- Prohibition on halibut charter fishing on Wednesdays, all year.

If the final Area 3A FCEY is halfway between the 2015 FCEY and the 2016 "blue line", it would equate to a charter allocation of 1.84 million pounds. In this case, the annual limit would increase to 5 fish. If the Area 3A charter allocation is the same as 2015 (1.89 million pounds), the maximum size of one of the two fish would increase to 29" and the annual limit would increase to 5 fish. For both areas, a requirement to would be included to record halibut on the back of the license or harvest record card as an enforcement mechanism for the annual limit. The regulations for GAF remain the same. Staff contact is Steve MacLean.

Upcoming Meetings

EM Workgroup: January 11th (12:30-5p) and 12th (8a-5p), 2015, Hilton Hotel, Anchorage

Crab Plan Team meeting: January 12-13, 2016. Hilton, Anchorage. Agenda posted on Council website.

Crab Modeling Workshop: January 13-15, 2016. Hilton Anchorage. Agenda posted on Council website.

Halibut Management Committee: January 22, TBD

Staff Tasking

In addition to discussing the relative priority of previously tasked projects, the Council initiated several new projects and clarified direction and tasking for its various committees. The Council also took the following actions:

- Recommended that the Secretary take emergency action to waive the 30% Individual Processing Quota use caps for custom processing of crab delivered under the 2015/2016 Eastern and Western Bering Sea Tanner crab catcher vessel owner (a-share) Individual Fishing Quota.
- Initiated preparation of a regulatory amendment to the crab rationalization program to add Tanner crab (C. bairdi) to the list of species for which custom processing arrangements do not count against the IPQ use cap.
- Directed staff to prepare a discussion paper on feasible measures to limit the use of Charter Halibut Permits (CHPs) by persons who are not the permit holder ("leasing"), including a potential requirement for annual permit renewal.

C-8 Halibut Management Framework
Council motion December 14, 2015

The Council's halibut management framework is a strategic planning document intended to inform and guide the Council in achieving halibut management objectives. As with other strategic planning documents, the halibut management framework can be revised in the future as needed to help guide the Council. The Council requests the following revisions to the halibut management framework.

1. Halibut Framework Objectives

The Council requests that staff incorporate the following objectives in the framework and as appropriate in ongoing BSAI and GOA management actions considered by the Council.

- Manage halibut bycatch in the groundfish fisheries and harvests in the commercial, guided and non-guided recreational, and subsistence fisheries consistent with the Council's MSA conservation objectives.
- Manage halibut bycatch to balance the objectives of directed users and bycatch users in both the BSAI and the GOA.
- Pursue an abundance based approach to managing halibut bycatch and directed harvests in coordination with the IPHC.
- Provide for the sustained participation of historic participants and fishery dependent communities.
- Maintain monitoring and catch accounting programs for halibut users in the BSAI and GOA in order to provide the data necessary for management needs.

2. Research issues

The Council requests the SSC review research topics identified in the research section of the halibut framework in order for the Council to identify priorities. The Council identifies the following research as preliminary priorities:

- Development of the technical methods to index PSC limits to halibut abundance.
- Natural mortality variability with age/size/density to understand the effects of bycatch, wastage, and discards on the spawning biomass.
- Migration of halibut between areas and associated implications for management decisions.
- Discard mortality rates in all fisheries, as well as overall bycatch estimation in all fisheries.
- An integrated decision-making framework that addresses biological, economic, and social issues.
- Evaluation of potential ecosystem-level impacts of alternative methods to index halibut PSC limits based on yield or spawning potential.

3. Coordination and communication with the IPHC

The Council identifies the following actions as important steps to strengthen communications and coordination with the IPHC, to be incorporated into the halibut framework.

- Identify a dedicated staff member to coordinate halibut management issues and liaise with the IPHC.
- Identify Council meetings when updates from the IPHC are the most appropriate and necessary.
- Periodically review the halibut framework at the Council (e.g., target annually).
- Form a Council committee comprised of the three US Commissioners and three Council members, for the purpose described in the December 2015 draft framework.
- The Council requests the IPHC make a presentation to the Council on the Commission's MSE process and progress to date.
- Pursue formation of a joint Council/IPHC committee comprised of IPHC Commissioners and Council members to pursue issues raised in the framework.

DRAFT NPFMC THREE-MEETING OUTLOOK - updated 12/21/2015

February 1-9, 2016 Portland, OR	April 4-12, 2016 Anchorage, AK	June 6-14, 2016 Kodiak, AK
NEPA Training for SSC, AP, and Council		
Climate Vulnerability Assessment		
Stock Assessment Prioritization Report	Fishery overlap with Pribilof corals: NMFS Report (T)	
Redesignation of SSL CH: Agency progress report (T)	EFH 5-year Review: ***Review Draft Report (T)***	
GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: ***Discussion paper***		GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: ***Discussion paper***
Biomass-based BSAI halibut PSC limits: ***SSC Review (T)***		
Halibut Management Framework: ***SSC/Council Review***	Halibut Management Framework: ***Action as necessary (T)***	
	BSAI Halibut Abundance-based PSC: Interagency staff workgroup report	
Halibut Deck Sorting Scales 2016 EFP: ***Review***	Halibut DMRs methodology: ***Discussion paper***	Tanner Crab Custom Processing Cap: ***Initial Review (T)***
Deck Sorting Implementation Industry Workgroup Report (T)		
BS TLAS YFS Fishery Limited Entry: ***Discussion Paper***	Charter Halibut RQE Program: ***Initial Review (T)***	BSAI Crab: ***Plan team report, OFL/ABC for 3 stocks***
	Salmon Genetics: Report on recent data	
Halibut/Sablefish IFQ program review: ***Review Workplan***	Salmon genetics spatial/temporal refinement: ***Disc Paper***	Area 4 Halibut IFQ Leasing: ***Initial Review (T)***
	Pollock ICA Reports/ IPA Reports	
	Co-op Reports (AFA, Am 80, GOA Rockfish, BSAI Crab)	BSAI Crab 10-year Review: ***Review Report***
Observer coverage on BSAI trawl CVs: ***Final Action***	AI groundfish offshore sector limited access, and	Observer Program Annual Report
EM Analysis: ***Review Alternatives and Methods***	AI Pcod A/B season split: ***Discussion paper (T)***	
GOA tendering activity: ***Annual Review***		
Observer Tendering: ***Review Alternatives***		Observer Tendering: ***Initial Review (T)***
BSAI snow crab bycatch data evaluation: ***Disc paper (T)***	Scallop SAFE and catch specifications: ***Approve, PT report***	Research Priorities: ***Determine priorities***
Remove WAI RKC Stocks from FMP: ***Discussion paper***		
Crab Plan Team Report	Squid to Ecosystem Component Category: ***Initial Review (T)***	ITEMS BELOW NOT YET SCHEDULED
Crab Modeling Workshop Report (SSC Only)		EM Integration: Initial Review (October 2016)
NS RKC OFL/ABC Catch Specifications: ***Approve***		Charter Halibut permit leasing: Discussion paper
		Stock Assessment 101 Training (Oct)
		Bering Sea FEP: Review Draft FEP
Groundfish Policy and Workplan: ***Eco Cttee Report; Review***		Stock Structure Workgroup Report (October)
		Observer Lead Level 2: ***Discussion paper***
		Observer Insurance Requirements: ***Disc paper for Reg Am***

AI - Aleutian Islands
AFA - American Fisheries Act
BiOp - Biological Opinion
BSAI - Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands
BKC - Blue King Crab
BOF - Board of Fisheries
CQE - Community Quota Entity
CDQ - Community Development Quota
EM - Electronic monitoring
EFH - Essential Fish Habitat
EFP - Exempted Fishing Permit
EIS - Environmental Impact Statement
FEP - Fishery Ecosystem Plan
FLL - Freezer longliners
GOA - Gulf of Alaska
GKC - Golden King Crab
GHL - Guideline Harvest Level

HAPC - Habitat Areas of Particular Concern
IFQ - Individual Fishing Quota
ICA - Inter-cooperative Agreements
IPA - Incentive Program Agreements
LLP - Limited License Plan
MRA - Maximum Retainable Allowance
PSC - Prohibited Species Catch
RKC - Red King Crab
RQE - Recreational Quota Entity
SIR - Supplemental Information Report
SSC - Scientific and Statistical Committee
SAFE - Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation
SSL - Steller Sea Lion
TAC - Total Allowable Catch
TLAS - Trawl Limited Access Sector
YFS - Yellowfin sole
VMS - Vessel Monitoring System

Future Meeting Dates and Locations

February 1-9, 2016, Portland
April 4 - 12, 2016, Anchorage
June 6-14 , 2016, Kodiak
October 3 -11, 2016 Anchorage
December 5-13, 2016, Anchorage
January 28 – February 7, 2017, Seattle
April 3-11, 2017, Anchorage
June 5-13, 2017, Juneau
October 2-10, 2017, Anchorage
December 4-12, 2017, Anchorage

(T) = Tentative

Attachment 1

Species	Area	2015 OFL	2015 ABC	2015 TAC	Catch 11/28/2015	2016 OFL	2016 ABC	2016 TAC	2017 OFL	2017 ABC	2017 TAC
Pollock	BS	3,330,000	1,637,000	1,310,000	1,320,371	3,910,000	2,090,000	1,340,000	3,540,000	2,019,000	1,340,643
	AI	36,005	29,659	19,000	915	39,075	32,227	19,000	44,455	36,664	19,000
	Bogoslof	21,200	15,900	100	755	31,800	23,850	500	31,800	23,850	500
Pacific cod	BS	346,000	255,000	240,000	212,871	390,000	255,000	238,680	412,000	270,000	238,680
	AI	23,400	17,600	9,422	9,064	23,400	17,600	12,839	23,400	17,600	12,839
Sablefish	BS	1,575	1,333	1,333	209	1,304	1,151	1,151	1,241	1,052	1,052
	AI	2,128	1,802	1,802	431	1,766	1,557	1,557	1,681	1,423	1,423
Yellowfin sole	BSAI	266,400	248,800	149,000	126,120	228,100	211,700	144,000	219,200	203,500	144,000
Greenland turbot	BSAI	3,903	3,172	2,648	2,201	4,194	3,462	2,873	7,416	6,132	2,873
	BS	n/a	2,448	2,448	2,090	n/a	2,673	2,673	n/a	4,734	2,673
	AI	n/a	724	200	113	n/a	789	200	n/a	1,398	200
Arrowtooth flounder	BSAI	93,856	80,547	22,000	11,141	94,035	80,701	14,000	84,156	72,216	14,000
Kamchatka flounder	BSAI	10,500	9,000	6,500	4,987	11,100	9,500	5,000	11,700	10,000	5,000
Rock sole	BSAI	187,600	181,700	69,250	45,442	165,900	161,000	57,100	149,400	145,000	57,100
Flathead sole	BSAI	79,419	66,130	24,250	11,139	79,562	66,250	21,000	77,544	64,580	21,000
Alaska plaice	BSAI	54,000	44,900	18,500	14,536	49,000	41,000	14,500	46,800	39,100	14,500
Other flatfish	BSAI	17,700	13,250	3,620	2,397	17,414	13,061	2,500	17,414	13,061	2,500
Pacific ocean perch	BSAI	42,558	34,988	32,021	31,361	40,529	33,320	31,900	38,589	31,724	31,490
	BS	n/a	8,771	8,021	7,917	n/a	8,353	8,000	n/a	7,953	7,953
	EAI	n/a	8,312	8,000	7,861	n/a	7,916	7,900	n/a	7,537	7,537
	CAI	n/a	7,723	7,000	6,775	n/a	7,355	7,000	n/a	7,002	7,000
	WAI	n/a	10,182	9,000	8,808	n/a	9,696	9,000	n/a	9,232	9,000
Northern rockfish	BSAI	15,337	12,488	3,250	7,251	14,689	11,960	4,500	14,085	11,468	4,500
Blackspotted/ Rougheye	BSAI	560	453	349	178	693	561	300	855	694	300
	EBS/EAI	n/a	149	149	63	n/a	179	100	n/a	216	100
	CAI/WAI	n/a	304	200	115	n/a	382	200	n/a	478	200
Shortraker rockfish	BSAI	690	518	250	153	690	518	200	690	518	200
Other rockfish	BSAI	1,667	1,250	880	677	1,667	1,250	875	1,667	1,250	875
	BS	n/a	695	325	178	n/a	695	325	n/a	695	325
	AI	n/a	555	555	499	n/a	555	550	n/a	555	550
Atka mackerel	BSAI	125,297	106,000	54,500	53,268	104,749	90,340	55,000	99,490	85,840	55,000
	EAI/BS	n/a	38,492	27,000	26,343	n/a	30,832	28,500	n/a	29,296	28,500
	CAI	n/a	33,108	17,000	16,672	n/a	27,216	16,000	n/a	25,860	16,000
	WAI	n/a	34,400	10,500	10,253	n/a	32,292	10,500	n/a	30,684	10,500
Skates	BSAI	49,575	41,658	25,700	26,421	50,215	42,134	26,000	47,674	39,943	26,000
Sculpins	BSAI	52,365	39,725	4,700	4,744	52,365	39,725	4,500	52,365	39,725	4,500
Sharks	BSAI	1,363	1,022	125	100	1,363	1,022	125	1,363	1,022	125
Squids	BSAI	2,624	1,970	400	2,364	6,912	5,184	1,500	6,912	5,184	1,500
Octopuses	BSAI	3,452	2,589	400	419	3,452	2,589	400	3,452	2,589	400
TOTAL		**4,769,174**	**2,848,454**	**2,000,000**	**1,889,515**	**5,323,974**	**3,236,662**	**2,000,000**	**4,935,349**	**3,143,135**	**2,000,000**

Attachment 1 - TAC Recommendations for OFL and ABC (metric tons) for 2016 and 2017

Species	Area	2016 OFL	2016 ABC	2016 TAC	2017 OFL	2017 ABC	2017 TAC
Pollock	W (61)	n/a	56,494	56,494	n/a	55,657	55,657
	C (62)	n/a	124,927	124,927	n/a	123,078	123,078
	C (63)	n/a	57,183	57,183	n/a	56,336	56,336
	WYAK	n/a	9,348	9,348	n/a	9,209	9,209
	Subtotal	322,858	254,310	247,952	289,937	250,544	244,280
	EYAK/SEO	13,226	9,920	9,920	13,226	9,920	9,920
	Total	336,084	264,230	257,872	303,163	260,464	254,200
Pacific Cod	W	n/a	40,503	28,352	n/a	34,998	24,499
	C	n/a	49,312	36,984	n/a	42,610	31,958
	E	n/a	8,785	6,589	n/a	7,592	5,693
	Total	116,700	98,600	71,925	100,800	85,200	62,150
Sablefish	W	n/a	1,272	1,272	n/a	1,163	1,163
	C	n/a	4,023	4,023	n/a	3,678	3,678
	WYAK	n/a	1,475	1,475	n/a	1,348	1,348
	SEO	n/a	2,317	2,317	n/a	2,118	2,118
	Total	10,326	9,087	9,087	9,825	8,307	8,307
Shallow-Water Flatfish	W	n/a	20,851	13,250	n/a	19,159	13,250
	C	n/a	19,242	19,242	n/a	17,680	17,680
	WYAK	n/a	3,177	3,177	n/a	2,919	2,919
	EYAK/SEO	n/a	1,094	1,094	n/a	1,006	1,006
	Total	54,520	44,364	36,763	50,220	40,764	34,855
Deep-Water Flatfish	W	n/a	186	186	n/a	187	187
	C	n/a	3,495	3,495	n/a	3,516	3,516
	WYAK	n/a	2,997	2,997	n/a	3,015	3,015
	EYAK/SEO	n/a	2,548	2,548	n/a	2,563	2,563
	Total	11,102	9,226	9,226	11,168	9,281	9,281
Rex Sole	W	n/a	1,315	1,315	n/a	1,318	1,318
	C	n/a	4,445	4,445	n/a	4,453	4,453
	WYAK	n/a	766	766	n/a	767	767
	EYAK/SEO	n/a	967	967	n/a	969	969
	Total	9,791	7,493	7,493	9,810	7,507	7,507
Arrowtooth Flounder	W	n/a	28,183	14,500	n/a	28,659	14,500
	C	n/a	107,981	75,000	n/a	109,804	75,000
	WYAK	n/a	37,368	6,900	n/a	37,999	6,900
	EYAK/SEO	n/a	12,656	6,900	n/a	12,870	6,900
	Total	219,430	186,188	103,300	196,714	189,332	103,300
Flathead Sole	W	n/a	11,027	8,650	n/a	11,080	8,650
	C	n/a	20,211	15,400	n/a	20,307	15,400
	WYAK	n/a	2,930	2,930	n/a	2,944	2,944
	EYAK/SEO	n/a	852	852	n/a	856	856
	Total	42,840	35,020	27,832	43,060	35,187	27,850

Sources: 2015 OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are from harvest specifications adopted by the Council in December 2014; 2016 OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are from the havest specifications adopted by the Council in December 2015, 2014 catches through December 31, 2014 and 2015 catches through November 7, 2015 from AKR Catch Accounting.

Attachment 1 - TAC Recommendations for OFL and ABC (metric tons) for 2016 and 2017

Species	Area	2016 OFL	2016 ABC	2016 TAC	2017 OFL	2017 ABC	2017 TAC
Pacific Ocean Perch	W	n/a	2,737	2,737	n/a	2,709	2,709
	C	n/a	17,033	17,033	n/a	16,860	16,860
	WYAK	n/a	2,847	2,847	n/a	2,818	2,818
	W/C/WYAK	26,313	22,617	22,617	26,045	22,387	22,387
	SEO	2,118	1,820	1,820	2,096	1,802	1,802
	Total	28,431	24,437	24,437	28,141	24,189	24,189
Northern Rockfish	W	n/a	457	457	n/a	430	430
	C	n/a	3,547	3,547	n/a	3,338	3,338
	E	n/a	4	-	n/a	4	-
	Total	4,783	4,004	4,004	4,501	3,768	3,768
Shortraker Rockfish	W	n/a	38	38	n/a	38	38
	C	n/a	301	301	n/a	301	301
	E	n/a	947	947	n/a	947	947
	Total	1,715	1,286	1,286	1,715	1,286	1,286
Dusky Rockfish	W	n/a	173	173	n/a	159	159
	C	n/a	4,147	4,147	n/a	3,791	3,791
	WYAK	n/a	275	275	n/a	251	251
	EYAK/SEO	n/a	91	91	n/a	83	83
	Total	5,733	4,686	4,686	5,253	4,284	4,284
Rougheye and Blackspotted Rockfish	W	n/a	105	105	n/a	105	105
	C	n/a	707	707	n/a	705	705
	E	n/a	516	516	n/a	515	515
	Total	1,596	1,328	1,328	1,592	1,325	1,325
Demersal shelf rockfish	Total	364	231	231	364	231	231
Thornyhead Rockfish	W	n/a	291	291	n/a	291	291
	C	n/a	988	988	n/a	988	988
	E	n/a	682	682	n/a	682	682
	Total	2,615	1,961	1,961	2,615	1,961	1,961
Other Rockfish	W/C	n/a	1,534	1,534	n/a	1,534	1,534
	WYAK	n/a	574	574	n/a	574	574
	EYAK/SEO	n/a	3,665	200	n/a	3,665	200
	Total	7,424	5,773	2,308	7,424	5,773	2,308
Atka mackerel	Total	6,200	4,700	2,000	6,200	4,700	2,000
Big Skate	W	n/a	908	908	n/a	908	908
	C	n/a	1,850	1,850	n/a	1,850	1,850
	E	n/a	1,056	1,056	n/a	1,056	1,056
	Total	5,086	3,814	3,814	5,086	3,814	3,814
Longnose Skate	W	n/a	61	61	n/a	61	61
	C	n/a	2,513	2,513	n/a	2,513	2,513
	E	n/a	632	632	n/a	632	632
	Total	4,274	3,206	3,206	4,274	3,206	3,206
Other Skates	GOA-wide	2,558	1,919	1,919	2,558	1,919	1,919
Sculpins	GOA-wide	7,338	5,591	5,591	7,338	5,591	5,591
Sharks	GOA-wide	6,020	4,514	4,514	6,020	4,514	4,514
Squids	GOA-wide	1,530	1,148	1,148	1,530	1,148	1,148
Octopuses	GOA-wide	6,504	4,878	4,878	6,504	4,878	4,878
Total		892,962	727,684	590,809	815,875	708,629	573,872

Sources: 2014 OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are from harvest specifications adopted by the Council in December 2013; 2015 OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are from the havest specifications adopted by the Council in December 2014, 2014 catches through December 31, 2014 and 2015 catches through November 7, 2015 from AKR Catch Accounting.