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News & Notes

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

June 2015

Dersham Retires

The Council acknowledged Council member Ed Dersham's 8 years on the Council, and his service on various committees and commitment to sustainably managing the resources. Good luck in your future endeavors, Ed.



Alaska Lt. Governor Mallott Addresses Council

The Lt. Governor of Alaska, Byron Mallott, spoke to the Council the first day of its meeting. He spoke of the rich resources in the North Pacific ocean, as well as the cultural heritage that has evolved around those resources. He urged the Council members to find common ground and work together to solve the difficult issues.



Halibut Bycatch

The Council took final action to reduce halibut PSC mortality limits in the BSAI groundfish fisheries overall from 4,426 mt to 3,515 mt, a 21% reduction. PSC limits in the BSAI groundfish fisheries are apportioned among sectors and gear types (currently to all trawl fisheries and longline fisheries for all targets except IFQ sablefish), and a different reduction was applied to each.

The PSC reduction for the Amendment 80 sector will result in the greatest impact, both in terms of halibut PSC savings and costs to the sector. The Amendment 80 sector is responsible for about 60% of halibut PSC mortality in the BSAI groundfish fisheries, based on average PSC usage from 2008 through 2014. Vessels fishing as part of an Amendment 80 cooperative (all Amendment 80 vessels since 2011) will have their halibut PSC limit reduced by 25%. As the sector has consistently used less than the halibut PSC apportioned to it since 2008, the new limit represents a 15% reduction from average PSC usage in 2008 through 2014. In order to encourage Amendment 80 vessels to stay in cooperatives, where they have more tools available to control their PSC, the Council chose a steeper PSC limit reduction of 40% from current levels to be applied to the Amendment 80 limited access sector.

For the Bering Sea trawl limited access fisheries and the longline fisheries, the Council chose PSC reduction levels of 15% each. For trawl limited access fisheries, this places the PSC limit at approximately the level of average PSC usage from 2008 through 2014. With the exception of the pollock fishery, which is not constrained inseason by the PSC limit, the trawl limited access fisheries are not rationalized, and have fewer tools available to institute behavioral changes to meet lower PSC

limits. For the longline fisheries, their halibut mortality rate is currently the lowest of any of the groundfish fisheries, and they have contributed only 12-15% to average PSC usage from 2008 through 2014. Finally, the Council also reduced the CDQ PSC limit by 20%. This limit is used by the CDQ groups to harvest their groundfish quotas in all their trawl and longline fisheries. The CDQ sector is the only one where PSC usage has been steadily increasing in recent years, because the CDQ sector is trying to harvest more of their allocated groundfish. Even with the 20% PSC limit reduction, there will still be some room for growth in the sector.

The Council's decision was contentious, with some members considering that steeper reductions were warranted. In support of the recommended PSC limit reductions, the Council spoke to the need to institute reductions that are practicable in the groundfish sectors, their expectation that the reduced PSC limits will result in mortality savings in excess of the limits, and the importance of taking action at this meeting in order to effect PSC mortality reductions in 2016. There was general agreement about the continuing importance of maintaining a directed halibut fishery in the Bering Sea, and it was reiterated that this action represents only a first step in addressing BSAI halibut needs among the different user groups.

	Current PSC limit	PSC limit reduction	New PSC limit
Amendment 80 cooperatives	2,325 mt	-25%	1,745 mt
BSAI trawl limited access fisheries	875 mt	-15%	745 mt
Longline fisheries	833 mt	-15%	710 mt
CDQ fisheries	393 mt	-20%	315 mt
TOTAL	4,426 mt	-21%	3,515 mt

Upcoming meetings:

CIE review of General Model for Alaskan Crabs Stocks (GMACs) and its implementation for Bristol Bay Red King Assessment (BBRKC): June 29 – July 1, 2015, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. AFSC

EM Workgroup: July 30-31, 2015; Coast International Hotel, Anchorage, AK

Ecosystem Committee: August 6-7, 2015; TSMRI, Auke Bay, Juneau, AK

Legislative Committee: First week in August, TBA

EM Workgroup: September 8, 2015; TBD

Observer Advisory Committee: September 17-18, 2015; Seattle, AK

Observer Program Small CPs

The Council took final action to revise the exceptions allowing small catcher processors to be in the partial observer coverage category rather than automatically being placed in the full coverage category. Under the Council's preferred alternative, the exceptions would be revised such that a fixed gear catcher processor vessel that is not participating in a catch share program would be eligible for partial coverage if their production is below an average weekly level of 79,000 pounds (35.8 metric tons). As described in the analysis, the three vessels that qualify for the current exceptions could continue in partial coverage if their fishing patterns remain unchanged, and potentially five to seven more vessels may qualify in future. The motion is available online, and staff contact is Diana Evans.

Next steps for BSAI Halibut

During staff tasking, the Council outlined next steps for addressing BSAI halibut. The Council has already tasked a discussion paper exploring ways to index BSAI halibut PSC limits to a metric of halibut biomass, which is scheduled for October. In addition, the Council also initiated three new actions:

- The Chair and the Executive Director will evaluate ways to integrate the variety of halibut management and research activities currently underway, and develop a framework for improving coordination between the Council and IPHC. Council and agency staff, including the IPHC, and State agency representatives on the Council, will be consulted. Both Council members and the public highlighted a need for better alignment of the two management bodies when dealing with halibut needs among the various directed fishery and bycatch user groups. The intention is to outline a process to ensure progress continues on issues both that were raised at this meeting, and were outcomes of the joint Council-IPHC meeting in February. These include, among others, a discussion of the Council's management objectives with respect to the tension between the needs of the directed halibut fishery and halibut bycatch needs in the groundfish fishery; the role of stakeholder working groups to develop a more surgical resolution to halibut use conflicts; and a common understanding of available data and the science of various halibut stock and life history issues, such as growth and migration. The Chair and Executive Director will bring back recommendations for the Council in October, which may be followed by a public scoping session, and the consideration of specific actions by the Council in December.
- The Council requested both Amendment 80 cooperatives to provide halibut bycatch management plans for 2016 to the Council in December. The plans should be designed not just to accommodate the revised PSC mortality limit, but to bring savings to levels below the hard cap. These are to include: halibut avoidance practices on the grounds, increased communication between participating harvesters, sharing data for performance tracking, use and development of excluders, deck sorting, performance measurement and assessment at the boat and company level, incentives for continuous efforts to minimize bycatch, and consequences for substandard performance.
- In order to assess mechanisms to increase halibut harvest opportunities for Bering Sea community residents, the Council also initiated a discussion paper to examine options to allow

CDQ entities to lease IFQ halibut without the IFQ owner on board in 4B and 4CDE, in years with low directed halibut harvest.

Observer Program

2014 Annual Report and Supplemental EA

The Council received the 2014 Observer Annual Report, and made recommendations for improving the program in 2016, and the report in future years. Most significantly, the Council requested that the 2016 Annual Deployment Plan define additional strata to deploy observers by gear and FMP area, and provide sufficient information for the Council to combine strata as appropriate in October. The Council also recommended the agency pursue improvements to ODDS, addressing the potential for temporal bias, and the ability to link deployed trips with e-Landings. The agency, perhaps with the help of the OAC or some subgroup, was also requested to assess ways to achieve cost efficiencies in partial coverage within the existing 5-year contract.

The Council appreciated the development of performance metrics, and encouraged NMFS to continue to develop tools to evaluate both the reliability of the data, and deployment performance. Future reports should also incorporate quantitative measures of program compliance, and the Council supports continued outreach by enforcement personnel regarding observer issues, especially to vessels where captains are under increasing pressure to monitor PSC.

The Council authorized sending a letter to NMFS expressing concern about the lack of predictability in the timing of observer fee funds released from Treasury to the Office of Management and Budget to NMFS for use in funding the partial coverage category observer program.

While the Council did not hear a staff presentation on the Supplemental EA, they received various Committee reports on the document, and noted its conclusion that data is improved under the new program, despite lower than anticipated coverage rates. The Council encouraged NMFS to consider SSC, AP, OAC, and public comments when finalizing the analysis. Staff contact is Diana Evans.

BSAI Trawl CV Observers

The Council adopted a Purpose & Need Statement and developed alternatives for an action that could change observer coverage requirements for catcher vessels using trawl gear in the BSAI. Since 2013, NMFS has accommodated AFA trawl CVs in the partial coverage category to carry full coverage on a voluntary basis. Those vessel owners have been responsible for both the 1.25% ex-vessel partial coverage fee, and the daily cost of full coverage. Volunteers accepted that additional cost because doing so allowed their AFA cooperatives to better manage halibut PSC at the vessel level, and because their vessels would no longer be affected by the extrapolation of fleet wide PSC rates from observed vessels.

The Council defined the scope of the potential action. In consideration of recommendations by the Observer Advisory Committee and the Advisory Panel, the Council selected a narrowly focused range of alternatives. The action alternatives pertain only to AFA trawl CVs. Any full coverage requirement would apply only during BSAI fishing. The movement of AFA CVs from partial to full coverage could be either mandatory (Alternative 2) or voluntary (Alternative 3). If the Council selects a voluntary structure, the choice could be framed as either a one-time permanent decision, or an annual choice. If vessel owners are permitted to select full or partial coverage on an annual basis, that choice would need to be made by July 1 of the preceding calendar year. Neither of the action alternatives would require full coverage for trawl CVs delivering unsorted codends to motherships, which is consistent with status quo management. The next step for this action is an initial review analysis. Staff contact is Sam Cunningham.

Tendering

The Council heard testimony citing the importance both of addressing perceived bias issues with respect to vessels delivering to tenders, and also providing more opportunities for observer data to be collected within the western GOA trawl fleet delivering to tenders. In response, the Council raised the priority of its existing amendment package to revise Observer Program regulations to change the definition of a trip to end with at the offload or transfer of all fish from the vessel, rather than ending at the return to port. As part of this amendment package, the analysis will consider the

changes required to deploy observers directly from tender vessels. The problem statement and alternative for this proposed amendment, which was last revisited by the Council in June 2014, is posted online. Staff contact is Jon McCracken

The Council also initiated a discussion paper on a regulatory amendment to revise observer provider insurance requirements. NMFS wrote a letter responding to the Council's request for guidance on this matter, and recommended that several types of currently required insurance coverage are unnecessary and could be removed from regulation, and other elements merit further analysis. The discussion paper will examine the scope of the proposed regulatory changes, and will also get input from the national discussion on changes to observer provider insurance requirements. Staff contact is Diana Evans.

Electronic Monitoring

The Council received a report from the fixed gear EM Workgroup about progress towards developing an EM pre-implementation plan for 2016, which will be presented to the Council in October. The Workgroup discussed a process for fixed gear vessels under 58 ft to opt in to the 2016 EM program, with preference given to vessels meeting specified criteria and that express their interest to NMFS by July 27, 2015. The Workgroup are still finalizing a recommendation on criteria, which will also depend on the size of the EM pool and deployment options for 2016. The current working draft is posted on the Council's website. Two more workgroup meetings are scheduled over the summer. Staff contact is Diana Evans.

Call for Nominations

The Council is soliciting nominations for an Amendment 80 representative for the Observer Advisory Committee. Additionally, nominations are being taken for a Ecosystem Committee seat that has subsistence and rural Alaska interests. Nominations for both these seats **are due June 25**. Additionally, Duncan Fields was appointed Chair of the IFQ committee, which will meet prior to the February 2016 Council meeting. Simon Kinneen will chair the Rural Outreach Committee which will meet following Council discussion this fall of the role and scope of the committee.

National Standard Revisions

On January 20, 2015 NMFS published a proposed rule for the revisions to the guidelines for National Standards 1, 3, and 7 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The proposed rule has a June 30, 2015 comment deadline. The revisions are described by NMFS as a product of lessons learned since the implementation of annual catch limits and accountability measures. Shortly after the proposed rule was published, the Council formed a special working group to develop comments on the proposed revisions. The working group worked with the Council's SSC to develop detailed comments that will accompany the Council's comments on the proposed changes. The Council's major concerns with the proposed revisions center on whether the changes will be interpreted as requiring amendments to all of the Council's FMPs. Although the revisions are characterized by NMFS as improving flexibility for the Councils, and some needed improvements are made, the new language could set the stage for very different expectations from NMFS about which species to include in FMPs, how OY is calculated and characterized, and how often formal review and revision of FMP objectives is done. These concerns are reflected in the comment letter drafted by the Council. Staff contact is Jim Armstrong.

Research Priorities

At the June meeting, the Council adopted its research priorities for 2016-2020. This is the first year in which the Council identified research priorities under revised priority categories: "critical on-going monitoring", "urgent", "important (near term)", and "strategic (future needs)". These categories place less emphasis on the relative value of research topics and more emphasis on the correspondence of research to the Council's time horizon of management concerns. The Council clarified that the critical on-going monitoring and urgent categories reflect research that is needed to address immediate needs and could significantly hinder the Council's ability to fulfill its management obligations. These categories differ in that urgent research needs include projects that would have a limited duration while critical on-going monitoring applies to projects that generate time-series of data and for which interruption of the time series would significantly diminish the value of the data. The important and strategic categories include research topics that represent less pressing management issues and also differ from each other in the timeframe for which the data generated will likely meet management needs. The Council continues to highlight the importance of research addressing integrated ecosystem-based management, salmon bycatch issues and stellar sea lion interactions. A web-based interface for organizing and cataloguing research priorities is publically accessible and is linked to from the Council's website. The Council's revised research plan for is posted on the website. Staff contact is Jim Armstrong.

Crab Management

The Council reviewed final stock assessments and set specifications for three crab stocks in the BSAI: Pribilof Islands golden king crab (PIGKC), Western Aleutian Islands (Adak) red king crab (WAIRKC), and Aleutian Islands golden king crab (AIGKC). OFL and ABC were established based on a Tier 5 formulation (average catch); biomass estimates are not available at this time to determine stock status for these stocks. For all three stocks, the Council adopted a buffer for the ABC consistent with the SSC recommendations, and consistent with the previous fishing season for that stock.

The SSC also commented on presentations for EBS snow and Tanner crab, Bristol Bay red king crab, Pribilof Island red king crab, and St. Matthew Island blue king crab, and made recommendations on a variety of other crab relevant issues identified by the Crab Plan Team. The SSC was glad to see a workshop on data poor stocks is planned for fall 2015.

Additionally, due to public testimony, the Council tasked staff with a discussion paper to consider removing the WAIRKC in Area O, east of 179° W from the BSAI king and Tanner crab FMP, and allowing the State of Alaska to take full management responsibility. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

At the end of this month, there will be a CIE review of General Model for Alaskan Crabs Stocks (GMACs) and its implementation for Bristol Bay Red King Assessment (BBRKC): June 29 – July 1, 2015, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. AFSC

Staff Tasking

In addition to discussing the timing and relative priority of previously tasked projects, and tasking for various workgroups and committees, the Council provided clarifications on several important issues. Additionally, the Council tasked the following be prepared by staff:

- Letter to NMFS commenting on the proposed changes to National Standard 1 guidelines.
- Request for emergency action to allocate an additional 1,600 Chinook salmon to the GOA non-pollock, non-rockfish program catcher vessels for the remainder of 2015.
- Regulatory Amendment to allow reapportionment of GOA Chinook PSC cap among sectors.
- Prepare a discussion paper that examines options for leasing halibut in Area 4BCDE in years with low quota for harvest by CDQ residents.

WAG Crab Exemption

The Council moved an analysis forward for Public Review that considers a regulatory exemption that would allow vessels participating in the Western Aleutian golden king crab (WAG) fishery to continue fishing after offloading a portion of their retained catch. Under current Federal regulations, a vessel participating in a crab rationalization fishery is not permitted to deliver a portion of their retained harvest to a processor and resume fishing for additional crab, prior to delivering the remainder of the catch. The Council established the action alternative of creating an exemption from this regulation for the WAG fishery as a preliminary preferred alternative.

The issue was first raised in February of 2015, when stakeholders of the WAG fishery provided public testimony to the Council. Stakeholders indicated that the processing company operating in Adak has taken advantage of the live market for WAG, but the amount of crab they can receive is constrained by the capacity of the commercial airliner that lands twice weekly in Adak. Therefore this live crab market opportunity is possible for small deliveries at a time. Relaxing the full offload regulation for this specific fishery could allow vessels harvesting in the WAG fishery to make partial deliveries and continue harvesting crab before fully offloading at a processor that could accommodate the full volume of crab onboard these catcher vessels.

The Council is considering this action due to 1) the remote and economically challenging characteristics of the fishery, 2) the possibility of mutual benefits to harvesters, the local processor, and the community, and 3) consistency with previous Council action that intended to encourage entrepreneurial activity related to fisheries in the Western Aleutian Islands. Final action is scheduled for October. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

DRAFT NPFMC THREE-MEETING OUTLOOK - updated 6/15/2015

October 5-13, 2015 Anchorage, AK	December 7-15, 2015 Anchorage, AK	February 1-9, 2016 Portland, OR
North Pacific Climate Vulnerability Assessment: Review (T) Halibut Management Framework: Report GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Review Paper	Enforcement Precepts: Review Paper Halibut Management Framework: Next Steps GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Action as necessary (T)	GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Action as necessary (T)
Charter Halibut RQE Program: Preliminary Review (T)	Charter Halibut RQE Program: Initial Review (T) Charter Halibut Measures for 2016	Charter Halibut RQE Program: Final Action (T)
AI Pcod A/B Seasonal Apportionment: Discussion paper AI Pcod Allocation: Final Action AFA program review: Review Workplan	Halibut/Sablefish IFQ program review: Review outline (T)	Halibut/Sablefish IFQ program review: Cttee Rep/Workplan (T)
Observer Program 2016 Annual Deployment Plan: Review EM Workgroup recommendation for 2016 Pre-implementation		
Observer coverage on BSAI trawl CVs: Initial Review 100% Observer coverage for GOA Trawl: Discussion paper	Observer coverage on BSAI trawl CVs: Final Action (T)	Observer Tendering: Initial Review (T)
Biomass based BSAI Halibut PSC Limits: Discussion paper Halibut Deck Sorting Scales 2016 EFP: Review GOA Salmon PSC Reapportionment: Preliminary Review BS FEP: Discussion paper, Ecosystem Cttee Report (T) Groundfish Policy and Workplan: Review (T) Proposed groundfish harvest specs: Approve; PT report WAI GKC Partial Offloads: Final Action	Am 80 Coop Reports on 2016 Halibut PSC Management Plans Area 4 Halibut Leasing Options for CDQ Vessels: Disc paper GOA Salmon PSC Reapportionment: Initial/Final Review (T)	BSAI Crab 10-year Review: Review Report (T)
BSAI Crab SAFE/ specs for 6 stocks: Approve; PT report	AI RKC Stocks in FMP: Discussion paper (T)	
Pribilof Canyon Corals: Receive Report/Next Steps		
Enforcement Precepts: Enforcement Cttee Review		
		ITEMS BELOW NOT YET SCHEDULED
		Salmon genetics spatial/temporal refinement: Disc Paper EM Integration: Initial Review (October 2016) EFH 5-year Review: Review Draft Report (April 2016) BSAI Crab bycatch limits/area closure evaluation: Disc paper Observer Lead Level 2: Discussion paper for Reg Am 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
MPA - Marine Protected Area
MRA - Maximum Retainable Allowance
PSC - Prohibited Species Catch
RKC - Red King Crab
ROFR - Right of First Refusal
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
VMS - Vessel Monitoring System

Future Meeting Dates and Locations

October 5-13, 2015 Anchorage
December 7-15, 2015, Anchorage
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

(T) = Tentative