

Project Title: Developing camera chute to enable halibut bycatch reduction by Gulf of Alaska groundfish trawl fisheries

Organization: FishNext Research; Alaska Groundfish Data Bank; AFSC EM Innovation Project;

Award Amount: (NOAA's Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program) \$169,014

Matching Contribution: \$0

Grant Period: 2015 - 2018

Project Abstract:

Background:

Halibut bycatch has been a highly important constraint on Gulf of Alaska groundfish trawl fisheries and a significant source of controversy for the NPFMC. Halibut bycatch estimates are extrapolated from on-deck observer samples from a sampling of trawl trips. In early 2015, the NPFMC was seriously considering establishing individual catch and bycatch allocations for these fisheries. Realizing that the variability in halibut bycatch estimates with current methods would limit management of such a system and being aware of camera chute developments at the AFSC, FishNext Research and the Alaska Groundfish Data Bank proposed and received funding for a research project to explore application of camera chutes for monitoring halibut bycatch of the Kodiak trawl fleet. The project's primary objective was to **'Demonstrate technology to routinely measure halibut as they are released after capture by GOA trawlers during commercial fishing operations.'**

Activities:

The project deployed camera chutes on eight Kodiak trawlers during 16 fishing trips, representing the bulk of the active fleet and the full range of groundfish trawl fisheries. Over the course of the project, valuable feedback on chute operations and needed improvements were received and many such improvements were implemented.

Accomplishments:

The project both demonstrated a good potential for using camera chutes to measure halibut bycatch on these vessels and identified what would be required for vessels to implement their use. Limiting halibut release to the chute opening requires additional work and sorting time, some of which could be eased by more permanent installations involving vessel modifications. Camera chute reliability, while improved considerably based on these and other deployments, is not yet sufficient to support year-round use without at least monthly maintenance. As the NPFMC did not implement the proposed vessel quota system, the rationale and fleet's motivation for camera chute implementation was greatly diminished.