

Charter Management Implementation Committee Report

February 22, 2012

Anchorage Alaska

Attendance The meeting convened at approximately 10 am. Council members Dan Hull and Sam Cotton attended part of the meeting. Three members of the public also attended.

Committee: Chair Ed Dersham, Gary Ault, Seth Bone, Ken Dole, Tim Evers, Kent Huff, Stan Malcom, Andy Mezirow, Richard Yamada

NPFMC Staff: Jane DiCosimo, Chris Oliver (part of the meeting)

NOAA: Jason Gasper

ADF&G: Scott Meyer, Bob Clark, Barbi Failor, Bob Powers, Nicole Kimball

Opening Remarks

Chair Ed Dersham opened the meeting with introductions and invited committee members to make comments. New committee member Gary Ault introduced a motion to state for the record:

“The Charter Management Implementation Committee, representing the Alaskan halibut charter industry to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, unanimously opposes the Halibut Catch Sharing Plan (CSP) as written. The proposed CSP allocations need to be adjusted to closely approximate the Guideline Harvest Levels allocation in Areas 2C and 3A that floats with abundance. The committee recognizes that management alternatives in times of low abundance need to be explored further, and in this spirit, the committee will continue to explore these alternatives-this participation should not be interpreted as acceptance of the CSP. The committee appreciates the Council’s recognition of the importance to modify the plan to minimize economic hardships in times of low abundance.”

Andy Mezirow and Ed Dersham acknowledged that the motion captured comments made by committee members at a previous committee meeting, that is, participation in the committee process does not indicate endorsement of the halibut CSP. The committee did not vote on this motion.

The committee and Council staff discussed the public process regarding the December 2011 Council motion and pending March/April 2012 Council action on the CSP. In addition to other analyses requested on CSP preferred alternative and analysis, the Council also adopted the following language as part of its motion on revising the CSP in December 2011.¹

Given the myriad of components involved in commercial and charter halibut management, the Council recognizes that there are management options available that were not included as part of the original Halibut CSP action. It is not the wish of the Council to delay implementation of the Halibut CSP any further than necessary. As such, the Council is asking for initiation of a discussion paper analyzing the following for potential use in future halibut management:

- *The use of ADF&G logbooks for official harvest reporting*
- *Annual limits allowing for the retention of at least one fish of any size*
- *Restricting captain and crew retention of fish*
- *Trip limits, reverse slot limits, and two fish of a maximum size*
- *The use of a common pool purchase of QS by the charter sector*
- *Long-term management measures under Tier 1 of the CSP as identified in the Charter Halibut Implementation Committee Report*

¹ The entire motion can be found at: <http://www.alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/npfmc/PDFdocuments/halibut/HalCSPmotion1211.pdf>

It is intended for this discussion paper to be reviewed by the Council following its review of the modified Halibut CSP. New and revised information received from review of the modified CSP will serve to refine the above discussion paper recognizing that full development of this discussion paper may be difficult until such information is received. At the time of review, the Council could determine whether to fold any of these new elements into the modified CSP and let others follow as a trailing amendment.

The committee was tasked with reviewing the initial ADF&G analysis of three of the above bullets. Additional analysis of restricting captain and crew retention of fish was not pursued as it is part of the CSP preferred alternative, and additional committee work on the last two bullets will continue before analysis of those alternate management tools will be tasked to staff. The results of the revised analysis will be incorporated into a Council requested discussion paper or review in March 2012.

Committee Discussion of Draft Analysis of Halibut Accounting and Management Measures

Mr. Dersham requested that Scott Meyer answer questions from the committee on his analysis of a range of proposed management measures under consideration by the Council.

1. ADF&G Charter Logbooks for Harvest Reporting.

The committee asked whether ADF&G planned improvements to the Statewide Harvest Survey (SWHS). Scott and Dr. Bob Clark responded that the only real change was to implement a new questionnaire. A single booklet will be mailed, which will include the question as to whether catches were charter or non-charter. The use of electronic logbooks was discussed. He only has assumed values for discard mortality rates (DMRs) (charter DMRs were approximately 6% in Area 2C and 5% in Area 3A). IPHC has estimated about a 3.5% DMR for halibut released in excellent condition.

The committee discussed how the Council would deal with the discrepancy between using the logbook survey which estimates higher yields than the SWHS by an average of 5.6 % for Area 2C and 15.9 % for Area 3A. Ed Dersham responded that the Council could set a policy by recommending that ADF&G estimate charter halibut harvest using the logbook program.

Committee discussion noted that there are clear advantages to the logbook program as noted in the paper, however, using those estimates would come at a cost to the sector's allocation due to the higher logbook harvest estimates. The committee recommended that the Council account for the discrepancy between the method (SWHS) used to determine the allocation and the method (logbooks) used to account for the allocations.

2. Annual Limit of One Large Fish.

Kent Huff observed that after reviewing Scott's paper the reverse slot limit may be a better method for meeting client's needs than an annual limit; other members agreed. The annual limit if a large fish might result in targeting of very large fish, which might exceed the need of clients that may not have existed without the measure. One advantage of it over the reverse slot limit is that perhaps only one very large fish would be retained. Another advantage is its simplicity compared with the reverse slot limit.

It may still be a viable management tool because some areas do not have fish of much larger sizes but it might result in higher total harvest. There is not enough data to analyze the potential effects of this measure. Scott will try to provide estimates of the savings in numbers of fish, but only if the annual limit is not an exception to a size limit. He could not project the size of fish based on other tools implemented at the same time because no data would be available to do so. Angler behavior and data from which to predict possible effects are unknown (e.g., we don't know sizes of fish under other measures). The analysis will explain the difficulty of determining effects of measures in combination. Ken Dole suggested analyzing a maximum size limit with the annual limit instead of a reverse slot limit. Scott noted that each tool (size of fish) can be combined with an annual limit (numbers of fish).

The committee recommended that the next draft should include a maximum size limit with the annual limit and a reverse slot with the annual limit.

Richard Yamada suggested that the data could show the unique numbers of anglers who caught one fish and asked if the analysis could demonstrate what other size fish would you add to that to make up the difference to the allocation. The committee discussed adding in a highgrading adjustment and that trophy halibut varies by port. Because the committee maintained interest in a second fish opportunity

Scott confirmed that this analysis above will be for annual limits of 1, 2, 3, etc. alone and in combination with maximum size limit and reverse slot limit.

Jason Gasper commented that a reporting tool might not be implemented in time if this measure were to be added to the matrix because it would not be decided until perhaps December or January prior to the charter season. Jason will take the issue back to AKRO for further clarification on whether an annual limit (in combination with size limits or not) is enforceable and provide additional information for the discussion paper.

3. *Trip Limits.*

Committee members noted that setting a one trip limit in Southeast Alaska would have minimal effect because that business model is not widely used there. They also noted that while it would have a minimal effect overall, it would have disproportionate impacts on those businesses that do use that model. Jane DiCosimo noted that the small benefits and the disproportionate costs were the reasons why the Council had not selected this option in previous actions. Tim Evers identified trip limits as a very contentious issue in Southcentral Alaska because different ports have changed their reliance on multiple trips per day over time (e.g., Ninilchik used to rely heavily on multiple trips/day years ago now mostly does single daily trips, while Homer has the reverse pattern, with perhaps 2/3 of charter businesses offering half day trips). He expressed concern that the reliance on multiple trips per day could increase if management restrictions included a one-fish bag limit. He predicted that some businesses might expand to more multiple trips under declining abundance and 1 fish limits. The increase in half day trip could offset any poundage or number of fish savings. He spoke in favor of enhancing captain and crew professionalism to prevent small take home fish. He felt that the size of halibut caught by clients would be about double that of half day charter under longer fishing hours.

Gary Ault supported multiple trips per day as providing businesses more flexibility to meet market demand and increasing new clientele at cheaper price points (e.g., \$100 for 4-5 hours). He felt that the effect of a limit on trips per day might be neutral if businesses were required to convert from two half day trips with smaller fish to one full day trip with larger fish. Committee members noted that fuel costs were not a reason why some fleets transitioned to half day trips.

Jane DiCosimo asked if there was merit in either 1) capping the number of trips per day to two, so that 3 or 4 trips/day would be prohibited (there was ADF&G data indicating such trips occurred but were rare) or 2) capping the number of trips per day at one and grandfathering those businesses that practice 2 (or more) trips per day, so that the practice could not expand. The committee made no recommendations to add these options to the discussion paper.

Scott recapped committee recommendations for further analysis of this proposed measure. He would add a table of the number of businesses and vessels that reported more than one trip per day by subarea over time. The committee asked for mean weight of halibut from half day trips but Barbi Failor reported that such data was not available.

4. *Reverse slot limit.*

Scott Meyer presented additional information to his discussion paper regarding how the estimates of average weight (and yield) *decreases* when the lower limit of the reverse slot limit is increased due to the shape of the weight distribution and the average weight of fish. The effect of the reverse slot limit

is to shift the fish in the middle of the distribution to the ends of the distribution proportionally to the original distribution. This shift results in more fish under the lower end (rather than the middle) because there are fewer large fish, which lowers the average weight!

Scott noted that two of the three variables (lower limit, upper limit, or highgrading factor) need to be fixed in order to make reverse slot limits meet the requirement that the management measure be prescriptive. He noted that committee guidance is needed to identify either 1) the lower slot limit and the high grading percentage or 2) the upper slot limit and the high grading percentage to consider it for inclusion in the CSP management measure matrix. After some consideration of the pros and cons of fixing either the upper limit or the lower limit, the committee discussion split on which end of the reverse slot limit should be fixed. The committee noted that there is insufficient information in order to identify an appropriate lower (or upper) limit.

Jane reported that unless two of the three variables could be fixed in regulation via an algorithm with which a member of the public could calculate the resultant reverse slot limit under set tiers of combined catch limits in the CSP matrix, this measure could not be implemented. The committee as a whole suggested that sufficient information may be available as a result of the 2012 IPHC U45O68 reverse slot limit that it may be able to provide guidance towards the end of the fishing season on appropriate fixed lower or upper variable.

Fixing the upper limit could be preferred because there are fewer large fish. Fixing the lower limit may have the biggest effect because large fish cumulatively contribute much more to the poundage. Scott confirmed that you get wider range of flexibility by fixing the lower number than the upper number. Discussion of discard mortality led to a conclusion that highgrading data may already be inherently conservative. Scott recommended that for the paper, you get wider range of flexibility by fixing the lower number than the upper number.

Richard Yamada suggested that the discussion paper should address management measures that could be preset to be in effect during different portions of the season. Andy Mezirow suggested 1-2 days of the week closure for Area 3A. Seth Bone asked if annual limits could be combined with size limits. The committee dropped these ideas after it was reminded that new management measures was outside the scope of the Council motion for this discussion paper, but could be raised again under long term solutions. Scott will attempt to provide this information in the future.

Several members of the committee reiterated their interest in seeing the combined effects of annual limits and reverse slot limits in the next draft analysis.

5. *Two fish bag limit with maximum size on both fish*

The committee agreed that over all other discussions, two fish (of whatever size) is better than one fish in Area 3A and is imperative for the future of the charter fisheries. Operators in Area 2C feel one fish of a greater size rather than two fish of a maximum size is preferred. Scott offered to add a table that compares the same yield for either 2 fish of maximum size or a 1 fish limit.

Next Meeting

The committee's next meeting is scheduled for March 27 in the Council's Anchorage offices, 2nd Floor Conference Room (#205), 4 pm to 8 pm.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:30 pm.