

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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February 2017 Newsletter

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Thank you, Seattle!

The Council members and public enjoyed a spectacular seafood reception at the Renaissance Marriott Hotel in downtown Seattle following the first day of the Council meeting. Many thanks to the fishing industry businesses and groups involved in the North Pacific for hosting the event – a good time was had by all.

Nominations open for Charter Halibut Committee

The Council is seeking nominations for seats to be filled on the Charter Halibut Committee to include a 3A representative from a community that is not on the road system, and a 2C representative from one of the smaller communities to complement representation from Juneau and Sitka. Nominations are open until March 31. Representatives will be named at the April Council meeting. Please send a letter of interest to steve.maclean@noaa.gov.

BSAI Halibut Abundance-based PSC Management Workshop

In conjunction with the February Council meeting, the Council held a public stakeholder workshop to solicit input to identify measurable objectives and appropriate metrics for the development of alternative management measures for BSAI halibut PSC limits. Per Council request, the inter-agency Abundance-Based Management (ABM) workgroup translated the confirmed Council objectives into draft overarching goals to gather stakeholder input on these goals and associated measurable objectives and related performance metrics. The ABM workgroup is continuing to develop a range of alternative control rules along with a range of indices to further the process of developing alternatives for this action. This

discussion paper will be presented at the April Council meeting, and will also include the results of the stakeholder feedback from the February workshop. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

C1 CDQ Ownership Caps

The Council made an initial review of an amendment package that would revise the American Fisheries Act (AFA) Program and the Crab Rationalization (CR) Program ownership attribution regulations and the Crab Fisheries Management Plan to provide for the different requirements for the CDQ groups, as distinguished from other program participants, which is mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Act (as amended by the Coast Guard Act). Specifically, this action would remove the application of the “10-percent” rule for the CDQ groups and replace it with the proportional “individual and collective” rule. Since the 2006 amendment to the Magnuson-Stevens Act mandating the use of the individual and collective rule for CDQ groups, NMFS implemented this modification in practice by using the individual and collective rule but has not revised the AFA or CR Program regulations or the Crab FMP. This action would revise the regulations and the Crab FMP to make them consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and current practice. Final action is scheduled for April. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

C2 Mixing of Guided and Unguided Halibut

At the June 2016 meeting, the Council tasked staff to prepare a discussion paper on the mixing of guided and unguided halibut on the same vessel. Different regulations apply to guided and unguided (i.e., chartered and non-chartered) halibut fishing trips. Unguided sport fishermen may harvest two halibut of any size and they are not subject to an annual catch limit. Charter vessel anglers, or guided fishermen, on the other hand, are subject to regulations developed annually, that may include restrictions on daily bag limit, size, daily closures, and an annual catch limit.

Once guided and unguided halibut are mixed aboard a vessel, determining which halibut were harvested under the guided regulations and which halibut were harvested under the unguided regulations becomes difficult for purpose of accountability and enforcement. Compliance can be maximized and the duration of an at-sea vessel boarding can be minimized when regulations are concise, unambiguous, and require no interpretation by guides, anglers, and authorized officers in the field.

To address the Council’s request, the Enforcement Committee assisted in development of a discussion paper, which was presented at this meeting. After reviewing the discussion paper, the Council initiate an analysis for limiting the mixing of guided and unguided halibut on the same vessel. Alternatives for consideration include: 1) no action; 2) prohibit the possession of guided and unguided halibut simultaneously on any vessel; and 3) if halibut harvested using sport fishing guide services is possessed with halibut harvested not using sport fishing guide services on Convention waters in Area 2C or 3A, the IPHC annual management measures for guided sport fishing for the area that the halibut was harvested apply to all halibut onboard the fishing vessel. A suboption to Alternative 3 would include “other fishing facility” as well as fishing vessel. Staff contact is Jon McCracken.

C3 IFQ Leasing by CDQ Groups

The Council made an initial review of a regulatory amendment package that would allow CDQ groups to lease halibut IFQ in Areas 4B, 4C and 4D in years of low halibut catch limits in IPHC regulatory Areas 4B and 4CDE. In effect, this proposal would allow CDQ groups to lease halibut IFQ for use by residents on vessels less than or equal to 51 ft LOA, subject to IFQ use regulations and the groups’ internal management.

The Council has established this action alternative as their preliminary preferred alternative (PPA), setting a threshold of a 1 million pound catch limit for Area 4B and a 1.5 million pound catch limit for Area 4CDE under which this flexibility would be available to the groups. The preliminary preferred alternative would also allow Area 4D IFQ that is leased to CDQ groups be fished in Area 4E. The Council added in the consideration of whether this harvest flexibility would also apply to A Class QS in years where the catch limit is set lower than the threshold.

While the action alternative would allow leasing of Area 4B, 4C, and 4D IFQ under specific circumstances, three options are included in the Council's PPA which limit leasing eligibility among QS holders, and mitigate a QS holder's reliance on leasing as a viable business opportunity. Specifically, one option in the Council's PPA would establish a "cooling off" period of five years, during which newly acquired QS could not be leased to a CDQ group. Another option under the Council's PPA would prohibit any QS holder from leasing IFQ to a CDQ group for more than two consecutive years. A third option under the Council's PPA would require that IFQ leasing in Area 4B be restricted to those QS holders that hold less than 7,500 pounds.

This action is intended to bring additional halibut harvesting opportunities into the CDQ communities in times of low halibut catch limits, with the intended beneficiaries being resident of the communities that traditionally rely on halibut CDQ for employment and income. Therefore, the Council added the consideration of a reporting requirement in which CDQ group using this flexibility would specify the criteria used to select IFQ holders leasing to a CDQ group as well as the criteria used to determine who can receive leased IFQ.

Final action on the analysis is scheduled for June. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

C4 IFQ Committee

The newly reconstituted IFQ Committee held its first meeting on Monday, January 30; the minutes from that meeting were subsequently reviewed by the Advisory Panel and the Council. The Committee provided comment on the initial review draft of the Area 4 halibut CDQ leasing action, and then addressed a list of items that the Council had previously tasked to the Committee during its deliberation on the IFQ Program 20-Year Review in October 2016. Those items included sweep-ups of small blocked QS units, medical transfers, survivorship QS leasing provisions, use of hired masters, and rural participation/QS ownership in the IFQ fisheries. On the last topic, the Committee received a presentation from Dr. Courtney Carothers of University of Fairbanks (UAF).

The Committee emerged from the meeting with recommendations for two discussion papers on NMFS regulatory items and specific data requests. The discussion papers will draft Purpose & Need statements and alternatives for action that could address medical leasing and survivorship beneficiary designation provisions in the program. The data requests, which will be reported to the Committee, will include a report on small amounts of QS that have been unused and unfished for an extended period of time and could be swept into blocks for viable use.

The Committee identified areas of key interest that will drive the group's agenda as it plans to meet via teleconference in June 2017 and in person during October 2017. The thematic focus of the October meeting will be rural participation and entry level opportunity in the IFQ fisheries. The Committee will consider information gathered by its members and staff regarding the migration of QS via sale or individual relocation. Staff will also provide information on the itemization of the IFQ Program's cost recovery fees relative to other North Pacific catch share fisheries. Staff contact is Sam Cunningham.

C5 Norton Sound Red King Crab

The final Norton Sound red king crab assessment was reviewed by the SSC, AP and Council in order to set catch specifications for the 2017 fishery. This stock has a separate specifications timing in order to accommodate the CDQ fishery which can open in early May. The stock is healthy, with an estimated mature male biomass for this stock above it's target level ($B_{MSY\ proxy} = 4.62$ million lb) with an OFL calculated by the Tier4a control rule. The SSC recommended an OFL of 0.71 million lb and an ABC of 0.54 million lb which used a 20% buffer from the OFL. The stock is not overfished nor is overfishing occurring on this stock. Staff contact is Diana Stram

C6 BSAI YFS TLA Limited Entry

At this meeting, the Council made an initial review of an analysis of management measures to limit access for trawl catcher vessels targeting Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) trawl limited access (TLA) yellowfin sole for delivery of the catch to a mothership or catcher processor. The management measures under consideration also include an option to remove the limited access provisions for all trawl catcher vessels during period of high total allowable catch assigned to the BSAI TLA yellowfin sole fishery.

Since the implementation of the TLA yellowfin sole fishery in 2008, American Fisheries Act (AFA) and non-AFA catcher vessels, AFA catcher processors, floating processors, and Amendment 80 motherships have participated in the TLA yellowfin sole fishery. In 2015, vessels entered the TLA yellowfin sole fishery that had no previous participation. Historic participants are concerned about the impact of these new participants of their access to the TLA yellowfin sole fishery.

At the February 2016 meeting, the Council indicated that limiting access for catcher vessels in the offshore portion of the BSAI TLA yellowfin sole fishery could have three primary benefits: 1) ensure that the limited access fishery continues to provide benefits to historic participants, 2) mitigate the risk that a "race for fish" could develop; and 3) maintain the consistently low rates of halibut bycatch in this fishery. After reviewing the initial review draft and listening to public testimony, the Council provided some clarification in the proposed management measure and added two new options for consideration. The Council clarified that eligibility to participate in the offshore BSAI TLA yellowfin sole fishery for catcher vessels will be attached to the license limitation program (LLP) license assigned to the vessel that made at least one trip target in the fishery. If the catcher vessels have more than one LLP assigned to the vessel, the vessel owner must specify which license to attached the eligibility.

The first option the Council added expanded the years for eligibility consideration to include 2016. The Council also adjusted the existing threshold option by adding 30,000 mt for consideration. Finally, the Council added a new threshold option that allows non-qualified catcher vessels to target TLA yellowfin sole and deliver to a mothership or catcher processor only for the portion of the yellowfin sole TAC assigned to the BSAI TLA fishery that is greater than or equal to the threshold amount selected by the Council (see final motion for specific threshold suboptions). In addition, the non-qualified catcher vessels would be limited on the amount of halibut PSC assigned to the BSAI TLA yellowfin sole fishery they could utilize. The amount of halibut PSC for the non-qualified catcher vessels would be based on the proportional share of BSAI TLA yellowfin sole that would be available for the non-qualified catcher vessels. Staff contact is Jon McCracken.

C7 AFA Program Review

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 December 2015, the Council reviewed a workplan for a program review of the American Fisheries Act (AFA) limited access privilege program. In February 2017, the Council reviewed and accepted the AFA program review as completed and final with the addition of an added section describing the amount of Alaska Fisheries Business tax and the Fisheries Resource Landing tax revenue collected by the State from AFA fishing activity and how those revenues may have changed over time and how its distributed to communities. The Council also noted that the program review should include corrections and clarifications raised during the staff presentation in the AP, to the extent practicable. The future program review will also include a section that summarizes key findings.

The Council also tasked staff to initiate a discussion paper for a management action that would prohibit directed fishing by regulation for those species listed in the review document where sideboard limits are insufficient to support a directed fishery and remove the sideboard for those species. Staff contact is Jon McCracken.

C8 Squid to Ecosystem Component Category

The Council reviewed an EA/RIR/IRFA to evaluate moving squid stocks in both the BSAI Groundfish FMP and the GOA Groundfish FMP into the Ecosystem Component (EC) category. Newly revised National Standard 1 guidelines include options to identify non-target species in FMPs (species caught incidentally during the pursuit of target stocks in a fishery) that do not require conservation and management as ecosystem components. Following review of the EA/RIR/IRFA, the Council modified its problem statement, added some clarifications to Alternative 2 (move squid to EC), and added a new alternative that would also designate squids in both BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPS as non-target species, but still requiring conservation and management. Under this new Alternative 3, a TAC for squids would not necessary, but unlike Alternative 2, this alternative would still require an OFL and ABC. The new alternative includes options for establishing a maximum retainable amount when directed fishing for other fisheries like those in Alternative 2. The Council also encouraged the Alaska Fisheries Science Center to continue to explore methods to estimate squid abundance and assess the squid stocks. Finally, the Council directed staff to explore whether the provisions in the statutory note to the section 303 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act that does not require the establishment of OFLs, ABCs, and TACs would apply to squid in the BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPs. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

C9 Gear and Sector Specific GOA Skate MRAs

The Council reviewed a discussion paper examining gear and sector specific Maximum Retainable Amounts (MRAs) for Gulf of Alaska skates. Action by the Council in 2014, and implemented in January 2016, revised the MRA for skate species in the GOA from 20% to 5% in order to reduce the likelihood that catch of skates would exceed the Allowable Biological Catch (ABC), resulting in skates being placed on prohibited retention status requiring regulatory discards of all skates caught incidental to other fisheries. Public testimony in April 2016 suggested that the MRA was too low for hook and line cod and IFQ fisheries, and the Council requested a discussion paper to examine available information. Data from 2012 to 2016 suggests that the intrinsic rate of skate catch for hook and line fisheries is near the 5% MRA established by the Council. NMFS in-season management expressed concern that raising the MRA for skates above 5% would result in an increase in retained skates, which would likely result in skates being placed on prohibited retention status earlier in the year. After review of the discussion paper, the Council chose to take no action at this time. As a result, the MRA for skates in all GOA fisheries will remain at 5%. Staff contact is Steve MacLean.

D1 BSAI Crab Bycatch

The Council reviewed a discussion paper on groundfish bycatch management measures for the Bristol Bay red king crab stock. The paper summarized existing measures for BBRKC prohibited species catch (PSC) in groundfish fisheries as well as what data is available on PSC levels, accrual toward current PSC limits, observed data and current or planned research to evaluate efficacy of existing management measures. The Council moved to request the Crab Plan Team evaluate effects of total red king crab bycatch in the groundfish fisheries on MSST, OFL, ABC, and TAC during the May Crab Plan Team meeting and report back to the Council in June. Staff contact for BSAI crab bycatch issues is Diana Stram.

D2 Stock Assessment Prioritization

The Council and SSC received reports from the Groundfish and Crab Plan Teams on their recommendations for applying the National Stock Assessment Prioritization Plan (SAPP). The SAPP, initiated by NMFS Headquarters, envisions the use a common approach by all regions to determine how often their stock assessments will be conducted. While some regions are unable to conduct stock assessments on a regular basis, the North Pacific Council has been fortunate to have stock assessments for all of its managed fisheries either fully or partially updated each year. Given this, application of the SAPP to our region would not increase the frequency of assessments, but instead could be a means to reduce the frequency of some assessments for which there is not a strong need for frequent updating. These assessments would be for stocks with consistently low catches relative to harvest limits and no ongoing management concerns. None of the high value fisheries (pollock, Pacific cod, sablefish, yellowfin sole, rock sole, etc.) were considered for reduced assessment frequency.

The benefits of reduced stock assessment frequency, as suggested by NMFS HQ, include increased opportunities for assessment analysts to address other analytical priorities. As such, the Council defined success for the amended assessment frequencies as follows [paraphrased]: "... increased opportunity for stock assessment authors to address analytical priorities [...] while avoiding any significant decrease in the precision of assessment based products such as OFL and ABC."

Of the 53 groundfish stocks for which harvest limits are specified each year (25 BSAI, 28 GOA) 17 stocks were proposed by the Groundfish Plan Teams for reduced assessment frequency. Similarly, of the 10 crab stocks specified annually, 5 were recommended for reduced frequency by the Crab Plan Team. These are listed in the tables below. The Plan Teams and SSC/Council were in agreement for most of these assessments; the tables indicate where there was disagreement.

The modifications to assessment schedules are expected to go into effect in 2017. NMFS HQ has repeatedly assured the Council that the SAPP is not linked to regional assessment funding. The Council, however, requested that NMFS provide information as to how it prioritizes funding for assessments as a condition for continuing with the revised assessment schedule. Additionally, the SSC and Council called for plan team development of a tool for measuring costs and benefits of reduced assessment frequency, as well as a framework for risk analysis. Finally, the Council recommended that a review be conducted after one complete cycle (4 years) of the revised assessment frequencies.

Table 1. Groundfish Assessment frequency changes – all other stocks (remain at status quo assessment frequency (see agenda item D2).

Groundfish Stock	Assessment Frequency (years)		
	Status Quo	Plan Team	SSC/Council
BSAI Greenland Turbot	1	2	2
BSAI Other Flatfish	2	4	4
GOA Shallow Flatfish	2	4	4
GOA Deep Flatfish	2	4	4
GOA Flathead Sole	2	4	4
BSAI/GOA Sculpins	2	4	4
BSAI/GOA Grenadiers	2	4	4
BSAI/GOA Capelin	2	4	4
AI Pollock	1	4	2
BSAI/GOA Squid	2	4	2
GOA BS/RE Rockfish	2	4	2
BSAI Shortraker Rockfish	2	4	2
BSAI Other Rockfish	2	4	2

The Crab Assessment frequency changes – all other stocks remain at status quo assessment frequency (see agenda item C5).

Crab Stock	Assessment Frequency (years)		
	Status Quo	Plan Team	SSC/Council
Pribilof RKC	1	2	2
Norton Sound RKC	1	2	2*
Pribilof BKC	1	3	3
Pribilof GKC	1	3	3
Western AI RKC	1	3	3

*Pending State cost/benefit analysis

E Staff Tasking

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

- Send a letter to the Alaskan Joint Command thanking them for the presentation on the planned 2017 military training exercise (Northern Edge) in the Gulf of Alaska, and requesting that they provide an update when completed.
- Send a letter to the IPHC requesting that Craig Cross replace Dan Hull as a Council representative on the Management Strategy Advisory Board.
- Request a report in April from NMFS on the status, trends, and plans for research and management of fur seals in the Pribilof Islands.
- Request that the BSAI crab plan team have input into the Alaska Board of Fisheries process as the BOF reviews the Tanner crab harvest strategy.
- Recommend conditional implementation of the stock assessment prioritization process, and requests NMFS report next year on how the funding was prioritized within and among regions, as well as a full review of the process after one full cycle (4 years).

Upcoming Meetings

Scallop Plan Team: Wednesday February 22, 2017, Fishermen's Hall, Kodiak

Joint Groundfish Plan Team EFH Sub-committee: March 6, 2017 1-3 pm
https://npfmc.adobeconnect.com/efh_jpt_2017-03-06/.

Crab Plan Team EFH Sub-Committee: March 7, 2017 1–3 pm
https://npfmc.adobeconnect.com/efh_jpt_2017-03-06/.

EM Workgroup: March 28-29, 2017 8 am – 5 pm, Best Western Kodiak Inn and Convention Center

BS FEP Team: April 24-26, 2017 TBD

Crab Plan Team: May 2-5, 2017 in Juneau, AK Federal Building

Observer Advisory Committee: May 23, 2017 8:30 am – 5 pm, May 24, 2017 8:30 am – 1 pm,
AFSC Bldg. 4, Seattle