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News & Notes

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

April 2016

Davis Retires

Mr. Steven K. Davis, former Council staff Deputy Director and 35 year member of the 'Council family' is retiring from federal service this June. For the past 17 years Steve worked for NMFS Alaska Region, most recently as Supervisory Fisheries Biologist and Senior Policy Advisor. At this meeting the Council recognized Steve for his outstanding career in the management and conservation of North Pacific fisheries. Congratulations Steve!!!



Plan Team Appointment

Gretchen Harrington of NMFS in Juneau has been appointed to the Bering Sea Crab Plan Team to replace Dr. Jason Gasper who now sits on the SSC. Ms. Harrington has expertise in crab management, and has served on the Crab Plan Team from 1998 to 2012. Welcome back, Gretchen!



Charter Halibut RQE

At the April Council meeting, the Council released the analysis of the proposed Recreational Quota Entity (RQE) for Public Review. This initial review analysis looked at two action alternatives to reach the objective of allowing for an opportunity for the charter halibut sector to reduce the restrictiveness of annual management measures for the charter sector as a whole, in regulatory Area 2C and 3A, while considering impacts on other user groups. The Council's Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA) would allow for one non-profit RQE to purchase commercial halibut quota share (QS), to hold and use on behalf of the guided halibut anglers in Area 2C and 3A (separately). Any IFQ annually generated from an RQE's QS holdings would augment the pounds allocated to the sector through the charter catch limit, established by the catch share plan. The charter catch limit plus any pounds of IFQ holdings would be the basis on which halibut charter annual management measures are established (for example, size limits, annual limits, day of the week closure, etc.).

The Council's PPA includes a number of restrictions on QS transfer. The Public Review analysis will consider annual transfer limits of 0.5% through 5% of the 2015 QS pool. The PPA also includes a total cumulative limit on the amount of QS held by an RQE and leased under the Guided Angler Fish (GAF) program of 10% for area 2C and 15% for

Area 3A. Also included are restrictions on an RQE's ability to purchase D class QS and certain blocked QS.

If an RQE holdings become sufficient to provide an opportunity up to and greater than the established opportunity under the unguided halibut sport sector (2 halibut of any size in each regulatory Area 2C and Area 3A), under the Council's PPA any "surplus IFQ" would be reallocated at the start of the season, without charge, to the Community Quota Entities as well as all catcher vessel QS holders that hold a small amount of QS (options considered are no more than 1,500 through 3,000 pounds, in 2015 pounds).

The Council's PPA also includes elements that detail the structure of an RQE and the use of any funds acquired by such an entity.

The second action alternative, allowing an RQE to purchase between 10 to 30% of the Charter Halibut Permits (CHPs) in each area, was dropped from further analysis under this package. Given the significant latent and underutilized capacity, paired with current leasing patterns of CHP, the Council determined this alternative in its current state would be unlikely to achieve the purpose and need identified. Further examination of the leasing of CHPs and potential ways to restrict the leasing of non-transferable CHPs is scheduled for a future Council discussion paper. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

Halibut Management

The Council reviewed a number of halibut related items at this meeting, including a letter from the IPHC regarding the Council's halibut management Framework and a presentation from Dr. Leaman on the IPHC's management strategy evaluation (MSE) process. An organizational meeting of the Council's newly formed Halibut Management Committee was also held on April 4, and the Council reviewed a report from that Committee. There was no specific action at this meeting, recognizing that Chairman Hull will be providing a response to the letter from the IPHC, and that the Framework document will be updated to reflect Council discussions as well as the Council's specific motion from the February 2016 meeting. The Council's Halibut Management Committee will meet again this fall to review upcoming halibut related agenda items, and to further discuss its role in coordinating Council positions, and informing U.S. positions, on halibut issues in general. Council contact is Chris Oliver.

Salmon Bycatch

The Council received several reports related to bycatch performance within the EBS pollock industry IPAs, chum salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery ICA, a report from SeaShare on PSC donations and distributions of salmon and halibut PSC within the State of Alaska and nationwide and on the stock composition of Chinook and chum salmon caught as bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery, the GOA pollock fishery and the GOA arrowtooth and rockfish fisheries.

Chinook and chum salmon industry reports from the EBS pollock fishery:

Under regulations to implement the Amendment 91 Bering Sea Chinook salmon bycatch management program, annual reports are required of each IPA entity and provided to the Council at this meeting. IPA entities report annually on the efficacy of their bycatch reduction measures. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Incentive measures in effect in the previous year;
- How incentive measures affected individual vessels;
- How incentive measures affected salmon savings beyond current levels;
- Transfer information between vessels as well as entities

Reports from each of the 3 IPAs are posted on the Council's website.

In conjunction with requirements under Amendment 84, the Non-Chinook Inter-Cooperative Agreement (ICA) provides an annual report on the efficacy of Chum (Non-Chinook) salmon bycatch management measures under the rolling hot spot (RHS) program. The ICA report to the Council contains the number of salmon taken by species and season, an estimate of number of salmon avoided and a compliance/audit report on the closures.

SeaShare program update:

SeaShare provided an update to the Council on the participation and donations in the Prohibited Species Donation Program whereby bycaught salmon and halibut in BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries may be reclaimed and distributed to hunger-relief programs. This program has been in operation since 1993. In the last three years

SeaShare has donated over 630,000 pounds of fish in Alaska. The annual report from the program is available on the Council's website.

Salmon genetics:

Annual reports were provided to the Council on the results of the 2014 analysis of the stock of origin of Chinook and chum salmon from the EBS pollock fishery and the following fisheries in the GOA: pollock, rockfish, arrowtooth flounder. These reports are available as NOAA technical memos on the Council's website. An analysis of the coded-wire tag recoveries from the GOA rockfish fishery was also provided per Council request.

The Council previously requested a white paper to evaluate the feasibility of further temporal and spatial refinements of stock composition data, including identification of the minimum number of samples necessary to meet accuracy and precision standards. Staff from NMFS AFSC, ADF&G, NMFS AKRO and the Council met to prepare this discussion paper highlighting many issues relative to spatial and temporal evaluation of samples for stock of origin estimates. Following review the Council requests that staff conduct some exploratory analysis to depict spatial and/or temporal patterns of stock of origin likely to be of interest to the Council and industry as well as provide additional information on the benefits and capabilities of the new AKFIN analysis tool using ADF&G statistical areas. The Council also requested an update of the existing AEQ model used for Chinook salmon in the Bering Sea pollock fishery with updated data. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

Scallops

The Council reviewed the annual stock assessment and fishery evaluation (SAFE) report for Alaska weathervane scallops. The SSC set the acceptable biological catch (ABC) limit at 1.161 million pounds of shucked scallop meats, a level equivalent to 90% of the overfishing limit (OFL) per the ABC control rule for scallops. The ABC is specified statewide while guideline harvest levels (GHLs) are established by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game by registration area. The fishery has 100% observer coverage, except in Cook Inlet. Fishery CPUE is monitored and scallop beds are closed if catch rates fall below established minimum performance standards.

The Council was informed of plans to increase the extent of the state fishery-independent dredge survey. ADF&G scallop biologists will survey scallop beds north of Yakutat Bay, near Kayak Island and in Shelikof Strait in 2016, and will include areas not previously surveyed. The observer program for the scallop fishery is also being expanded. Observers are sampling scallops discarded in the shucking house in order to more accurately quantify and characterize total catch.

The Council was also informed of ongoing analyses of digital image data collected by CamSled (camera sled) surveys. The image analysis includes counts and measurements of scallops as well as data collection on habitat and other benthic community organisms. This work is being conducted by researchers at the Fishery, Aquatic Science, and Technology Lab at Alaska Pacific University. Staff contact is Jim Armstrong.

AI Groundfish Limited Access

At this meeting, the Council reviewed a discussion paper that examined participation and effort in the Aleutian Islands (AI) groundfish fisheries to determine the need to limit access in these fisheries. The Council, concerned with potential spillover effects from several recent changes in the AI groundfish fisheries, tasked staff during their October 2015 meeting to evaluate historical fishing behavior in the offshore sector of the trawl groundfish fisheries in the AI. In addition, the Council also reviewed a brief assessment of the conservation and management issues associated with establishing an A/B seasonal split for the AI Pacific cod fishery. The seasonal split issue was first brought to the Council's attention during the February 2015 meeting. At that meeting, members of the Freezer Longline Conservation Cooperative testified during the initial review of the AI Pacific cod shoreside processing stability action (Amendment 113) to add an option for an A/B seasonal AI Pacific cod split due to the steadily declining harvest opportunities in the AI Pacific cod fishery for their sector. Although the Council did not include the requested option in Amendment 113, the Council did task staff to prepare a discussion paper on the conservation and management issues associated with establishing a seasonal split of the AI Pacific

cod TAC. Since this discussion paper had not yet been presented to the Council and that discussion was germane to the discussion paper examining participation and effort in the AI groundfish fisheries, the Council combined the A/B seasonal split issue and examination of participation and effort in the AI offshore groundfish fishery into one discussion paper.

After reviewing the discussion paper and hearing public testimony, the Council elected to take no action at this time concerning limiting access in the AI groundfish fisheries. The Council did debate a motion to further explore an A/B AI Pacific cod split, but the Council voted against taking action at this time. The Council noted that the AI Pacific cod fishery is intertwined with Bering Sea (BS) Pacific cod fishery, and taking action in the AI would likely create spillover effects in the BS, and vice versa. To limit spillover effects, the Council is providing time for the offshore participants to develop alternatives for comprehensively managing the offshore BS and AI Pacific cod fisheries. Staff contact is Jon McCracken.

Upcoming Meetings

Crab Plan Team: May 9-13, Anchorage Hilton

EM Workgroup Meeting: May 11, Seattle and via teleconference; July 27- 28 and August 31

Observer Advisory Committee: May 12 -13, Seattle

Groundfish Plan Team: September 12-16, Seattle
November 14-18

EFH Review

The Council reviewed the report of the 2016 review of Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) in the Council's FMPs and reviewed the model-based definitions of EFH and the Fishery Effect model. The Council acknowledged that a great deal of work has been done to advance the definitions of EFH and directed staff to work with the stock assessment authors to review and select a representative map of EFH for each life stage of their respective FMP species. The authors' choices should be reviewed by the Plan Teams and SSC and presented to the Council at a future meeting. Stock assessment authors will review text and select maps in May. Those selections will be reviewed by the joint groundfish plan team and crab plan team in September. New definitions of EFH will be presented to the Council in October or December. After EFH definitions have been determined, the Council will choose whether a new analysis of the effects of fishing on EFH is necessary. If necessary, that analysis will be conducted on the new EFH definitions and presented to the Council at a later meeting. Staff contact is Steve MacLean.

Staff Tasking

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

- Requested additional information be included in the cooperative reports for next April, including use of standardized terminology that is used in federal regulations.
- Directed staff to prepare a discussion paper to evaluate gear specific MRAs for gear types and sectors for GOA skates. Longline sectors were defined as CVs <50', CVs >50', and CPs. Public testimony had suggested that the recent regulatory change in MRA rates may not reflect intrinsic rates for the longline fisheries and thus result in unnecessary regulatory discards.
- Finalized a letter with comments on the draft guidelines for standardized bycatch reporting methodology and descriptions in the FMPs, and submit comments by the April 25 deadline.

SAVE THE DATE

On December 8, 2016 at the Hotel Captain Cook, the NPFMC will host a black-tie celebration in conjunction with the December 2016 Council meeting. This event celebrates the fisheries and management programs we have today as well as highlighting some of the major events of the last decade. More information to follow.

Cooperative Reports

At the April meeting, the Council reviewed cooperative reports for the Amendment 80 Program, Central Gulf of Alaska Rockfish Program, American Fisheries Act Program, and BSAI Crab Rationalization Program. As part of the cooperative programs, cooperatives have provided annual written reports detailing the use of the cooperative quota or addressing other specific areas of Council interest. These reports create a dialogue between the Council and industry groups outside of what can be discerned from just available statistical data. The Council expressed their appreciation to the cooperative managers for work gone into the written reports and the initiative to provide oral presentations. The Council underscored the importance of participation to those cooperatives in the crab program that chose not to submit.

At this meeting, the Council made several minor requests regarding the presentation of information in different cooperative reports. Given the nature of this type of collection of information, requests may be subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act and approval under the Office of Management and Budget.

The Council noted that in general, presenters of cooperative reports should use regulatory terminology. There were a few examples of inconsistent terminology identified in presentations for the Central GOA rockfish and crab reports. Specifically, the Council requested crab cooperatives use terms in a manner that is consistent with their definition under the crab rationalization program regulations, and that the cooperatives provide a glossary of key terms in their reports. For example, when reporting on the types of quota share (QS) transfers to active participants and other categories of QS holders, definitions for 'crew members', 'active fishermen' and other QS holders should be provided that track with crab program regulatory definitions.

The Council also requested that Amendment 80 cooperative reports include more information on directed and bycatch species transfers. Specifically, the Council requested species, amount and date of transfer. The Council also requested monthly chinook bycatch by stock of origin for the Central GOA rockfish cooperatives which would be supplied by NMFS during their Inseason Management reports.

Copies of the cooperative reports are available on the Council website. Staff contact is Jon McCracken and Sarah Marrinan.

Groundfish Management Policy

The Council carried out a review of its Groundfish Management Policy, which, according to the BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPs, must be conducted annually. The Policy consists of a management approach statement, nine general priorities, and 45 management objectives. Each of these components was discussed as a part of the review, which has several purposes: First, it allows the Council to consider the adequacy of the Policy relative to current issues and concerns such that revisions, if necessary can be identified; second, it allows the Council to examine its numerous actions and statements, and whether those are adequately fulfilling the Policy; and third, it provides a framework for revision to the Council's workplan for the coming year.

The Council found that its Policy, though originally established in 2004, was crafted in a manner that continues to allow the Council to develop actions in an adaptive manner. In other words, the Council anticipated that it would confront an evolving set of fishery management issues and the current Policy adequately frames those issues, allowing the Council to emphasize specific issues as circumstances change. The Council also found numerous areas of Council activity relative to each of the 45 management objectives including actions outside of the groundfish FMPs that were developed using the framework established by the Groundfish Management Policy. These include the Arctic FMP and the Aleutian Islands FEP and new development of the Bering Sea FEP. Staff contact is Jim Armstrong.

BSAI Halibut PSC Limits

The Council reviewed a discussion paper on establishing abundance-based PSC limits for Pacific halibut in the BSAI groundfish fisheries. The Council had previously tasked an inter-agency workgroup of Council, NMFS (AFSC and Regional Office) and IPHC staff to consider a number of issues related to indexing halibut PSC to abundance. The discussion paper provides information on current usage of BSAI halibut PSC, data sources available to inform and abundance index, candidate indices and control rule considerations. The paper also provides a series of key decision points and a workplan to guide the process of development of alternatives, elements and options for the analysis.

As a starting point for developing the alternatives, the Council adopted the following purpose and need statement for this analysis:

The current fixed yield based halibut PSC caps are inconsistent with management of the directed halibut fisheries and Council management of groundfish fisheries, which are managed based on abundance. When halibut abundance declines, PSC becomes a larger proportion of total halibut removals and thereby further reduces the proportion and amount of halibut available for harvest in directed halibut fisheries. Conversely, if halibut abundance increases, halibut PSC limits could be unnecessarily constraining. The Council is considering linking PSC limits to halibut abundance to provide a responsive management approach at varying levels of halibut abundance. The Council is considering abundance-based PSC limits to control total halibut mortality, provide an opportunity for the directed halibut fishery, and protect the halibut spawning stock biomass, particularly at low levels of abundance. The Council recognizes that abundance-based halibut PSC limits may increase and decrease with changes in halibut abundance.

The Council requested that staff continue to explore appropriate measures of abundance of halibut that would meet the goals and objectives of the Council's action. Specifically staff was requested to focus analysis on the NMFS eastern Bering Sea shelf trawl survey and the biomass estimate from the IPHC stock assessment as potentially appropriate indices and explore a variety of assumptions on the appropriate weighting of indices, including using each index as a bookend. If time is available, staff is directed to also focus on potential advantages and challenges of incorporating additional surveys (e.g., the Bering Sea shelf, Aleutian Islands, NMFS Sablefish longline survey, and Gulf of Alaska trawl surveys to develop an Alaska-wide index of abundance), and the Integrated Model-based index approach outlined in the paper.

The Council requested that a workshop be convened in August 2016 to provide for review of the revised discussion paper prior to Council action in October. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

The Council reviewed a discussion paper on alternative methods for calculating discard mortality rates (DMRs) for halibut that occur as prohibited species catch (PSC) in the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries. DMRs are regularly updated and specified for groundfish target fisheries and are used by in-season management to estimate the mortalities of halibut PSC through the catch accounting system (CAS). Halibut mortalities are counted against specified PSC limits and a fishery is closed if it reaches the PSC limit.

A transfer of responsibility for calculating DMRs from IPHC to Council support staff occurred in 2015. As a part of that transfer the need to improve DMR estimation methods was identified. The discussion paper reviewed issues with existing observer data that serve as the basis for DMR calculations. Viability

sampling is conducted by observers to assess the condition of individual halibut just before they are discarded. Viability categories are associated with specific mortality probabilities and the aggregation of viability samples leads to an overall DMR for a given target fishery. Observer sampling of halibut viabilities declined in recent years, but beginning in 2016, the sampling protocol was modified so that halibut viability sampling is a major priority. Although DMRs have been specified for 2017, the estimation methods were based on data through 2014 and were not adapted to the decline in viability samples. Alternative methods are needed to re-specify DMRs for 2017.

A conceptual framework was described in the discussion paper for improving DMR estimation methods over time as the improved sampling protocol contributes increasingly to the underlying source data. Any of the alternative methods under consideration would be designed to improve accuracy, reduce bias, and incentivize DMR reductions by the fisheries. Near term modifications to the estimation methods will serve as a bridge to longer term improvements. Revised DMRs for 2017 and underlying methods will be presented to the Council in October. Besides DMRs for the groundfish fisheries, the Council directed staff to work on the steps needed to evaluate the DMRs used for the directed halibut fishery.

June in Kodiak

The Council will be meeting in Kodiak June 6-14. Alaska Airlines is offering a discount code for these dates; ECMJ118. If you need assistance with finding rooms, email Chasity McCarthy at the Visitor's Bureau at director@kodiak.org. The Agenda will be posted on our website as soon as it's available.

DRAFT NPFMC THREE-MEETING OUTLOOK - updated 4/15/2016

June 6-14, 2016 Kodiak, AK	October 3-11, 2016 Anchorage, AK	December 6-14, 2016 Anchorage, AK
<p>Electronic Monitoring: Review of analytical components (SSC only) Observer Program Annual Report, OAC report, and Variance estimation methodology (SSC Only) GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Review Discussion paper, action as necessary</p> <p>Tanner Crab Custom Processing Cap: Initial/Final Action</p> <p>BSAI Crab: Plan team report, OFL/ABC for 3 stocks</p> <p>BSAI Crab 10-year Review: Review Report</p> <p>Squid to Ecosystem Component Category: Initial Review</p> <p>Research Priorities: Determine priorities</p> <p>P. Cod assessment models (SSC only)</p>	<p>Stock Assessment 101 Training</p> <p>EM Integration: Initial Review Observer Program 2017 Annual Deployment Plan: Review; OAC rpt Observer Lead Level 2: Discussion paper</p> <p>Area 4 Halibut IFQ Leasing: Initial Review (T) Halibut/sablefish IFQ Program 10-year Review: Review Draft</p> <p>BSAI Crab: Plan team report, OFL/ABC for 6 stocks</p> <p>AFA 10-year Review: Review Draft (T)</p> <p>BSAI Halibut Abundance-based PSC: Discussion paper Halibut DMRs methodology: Discussion paper</p> <p>Stock Structure Report (T) Groundfish Harvest Specifications: Proposed specs</p> <p>EFH non-fishing effects report: Ecosystem Cttee Review</p> <p>BSAI Salmon genetics spatial/temporal distribution: Disc paper (T)</p>	<p>40 Year Anniversary Celebration Banquet - December 8</p> <p>GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Action as necessary (T)</p> <p>2017 Charter halibut management measures: Final action</p> <p>Charter Halibut RQE Program: Final Action</p> <p>Deck Sorting EFP: Report on preliminary results</p> <p>Groundfish Harvest Specifications: Final specifications</p> <p>BSAI YFS TLA Fishery limited entry: Initial Review (T)</p> <p>Squid to Ecosystem Component Category: Final Action</p> <p>EFH Descriptions: Review updated report; Identify EFH</p> <p>ITEMS BELOW NOT YET SCHEDULED</p> <p>GOA Gear Specific Skate MRAs: Discussion paper EFH fishing and non-fishing effects: Report on model results Charter Halibut permit leasing: Discussion paper Observer discharge location: Discussion paper Observer deployment trip determination and transfer: Disc paper Bering Sea FEP: Review Draft FEP Remove WAI Red King Crab from FMP: Initial Review Bristol Bay red king crab PSC: Discussion paper Bering Sea Snow Crab PSC Limits: Initial Review Observer Insurance Requirements: Disc paper for Reg Am</p>

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

June 6-14, 2016, Kodiak
October 3-11, 2016 Anchorage
December 6-14, 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