



Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT) Gulf of Alaska Salmon and Halibut Committee Wednesday, September 7, 2022, meeting minutes

Committee members: Brian Gabriel (Chair), Kevin Delaney, Duncan Fields, Mike Flores, Raymond May, Linda Kozak

1. Call to order at 9:00 AM
2. Roll call: introduction of committee and ABRT members. Brian Gabriel (Chair), Kevin Delaney, Duncan Fields, Mike Flores, Raymond May, Linda Kozak. Other ABRT members: John Jensen, Tommy Sheridan, and Stephanie Madsen.
3. Approve agenda: September 7, 2022. Added agenda item to 5 b) Mike Flores – GOA fishing/closure figures. Motion to amend and approve by Fields, seconded by Delaney.
4. Approve minutes: August 31, 2022. Motion to approve by May, seconded by Kozak.
5. Old business:
 - a) Review and consider committee recommended management measures. Action items from the Aug. 31 meeting were reviewed. Committee member provided comment regarding the three-year time period on full observer coverage recommendation for non-pelagic GOA trawl vessels and supported coverage levels necessary for management and increased precision of catch estimates. Member commented that requiring full coverage for three-years would make it less economically viable for vessels to manipulate the observer system as may be the case if the recommendation were for one or two years. Members supported keeping the three-year time period in place to ground-truth bycatch estimates currently calculated from the partial coverage program. This recommendation should not be predicated on whether the fisheries are rationalized.
 - b) Consider management issues unresolved from previous meeting
 1. Gear modifications to effectively reduce bycatch (regulatory). Committee member commented that this could be removed as a stand-alone management recommendation since it is included as a research recommendation by all the ABRT committees.
 2. Bycatch utilization – recommendation to require 100% retention of dead bycatch. Committee member Fields made a motion to withdraw the recommendation as written and the second (May) concurred, no objection from committee. Fields made a motion “The committee believes that improved utilization of halibut bycatch may provide opportunities for halibut bycatch reductions, consequently we recommend the state of Alaska pursue the increased utilization of halibut bycatch.” Allowing bycatch to be sold may reduce the total amount of halibut bycatch as it would offset the reductions in target species catch. Support was provided by committee member noting that full utilization of halibut has been an important discussion in the past. Motion passed with one objection.

3. Mike Flores – GOA fishing/closure figures. Member Flores provided some information on areas closed to nonpelagic trawling in the GOA overlaid with information on where halibut bycatch occurs and the footprint of where all trawling (pelagic and non-pelagic) occurs.

Motion from Mr. Fields, “the committee recommends that the state review spatial trawl patterns and halibut bycatch intensity as a basis to consider areas that should be considered to spatially reduce halibut bycatch”, seconded by Flores.

Committee member noted that there was a research recommendation regarding open and closed areas that already captures this idea. Maker of the motion thinks that as a management recommendation it is responsive to public comment that the committee has received. Committee members support the state taking the lead on examining areas where high bycatch of halibut occur. Committee member commented that we need additional information to understand the tradeoffs between moving the trawl fleets into other areas where bycatch of halibut (or salmon/other species) may be higher. Suggestion to table this motion and discuss further at the September 20 meeting of the full Task Force, which was supported by several members. Maker of the motion withdrew the motion with concurrence of his second; the committee recommended adding this to the Sept. 20 ABRT agenda. Member Flores will provide the draft recommendation to ABRT vice-chair Sheridan.

6. New business:

a) Address state engagement options. Recommendations from the public included:

- Create a process for providing bycatch-related information and resources for Alaskans in a way (or format) that is understandable and easily accessible. Motion from Fields to approve, seconded by Kozak to move this forward as a committee recommendation. Motion carried unopposed with one member absent.
- Establish a permanent bycatch advisory committee. Motion from Fields to approve, seconded by Kozak. Motion carried unopposed with one member absent.
- Appoint a bycatch policy advisor to the governor. Motion from Fields to approve, seconded by Kozak. Committee members felt it was important for the governor to have an advisor, such as a ‘fish’ advisor that constituents could communicate with on bycatch issues. Motion fails with two members absent.

7. Public comment: three-minute (3) limit to individual comments

Jon Warrenchuk, Oceana, provided information on the average (2015-2019) levels of discards by trawl fisheries in Alaska and how trawl nets operate. Recommendation to ‘freeze’ the bottom trawl footprint in the GOA, protect priority habitats within the existing trawl footprint, and establish 100% observer coverage in GOA trawl fisheries.

Patrick ODonnell, Alaska Whitefish Trawlers, owner/operator of F/V Caravelle. Several areas closed to trawling were not included in the figures that were presented by Mr. Warrenchuk today, notably the areas closed due to Steller Sea Lion measures. The areas where you have the highest concentration of trawling also have the highest concentration of crab whereas areas that have been closed to trawling have low concentrations of crab. Need to study why that is and whether removing crab predators has the effect of increasing crab concentrations. Further limiting the area that is open to trawling may not reduce bycatch.

Rebecca Skinner, Alaska Whitefish Trawlers. Concerned that there isn’t a GOA trawl representative on the committee to provide a balanced perspective. There is no Essential Fish Habitat for halibut since that

stock is managed by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) and the EFH process covers species managed under Federal Management Plans. It makes sense that the areas where halibut bycatch occurs are the same areas where the trawl fisheries operate. Need to look at bycatch rates in relation to how much of the target species are being caught. Fixed closure areas make it difficult to respond to changing conditions and decrease flexibility. Appreciate comments by some committee members that they are not trying to close down the trawl fisheries, not sure that is the perspective of all committee members. When looking at visual representations of data it's important to consider several different time periods as conditions and fishing patterns change over time. Committee member commented that they are interested in providing a larger buffer around Kodiak from non-pelagic trawl fishing and not to close the fisheries entirely.

John Gauvin, Alaska Seafood Cooperative. Recommend a deep-dive into the issues surrounding EFH and the models that are used to understand the effects of fishing on EFH. Figures provided by Mr. Warrenchuk don't accurately describe the trawl sweep devices that are required on non-pelagic trawl gear; 90% of the gear is elevated off the seafloor. Universally in Alaska, though not required, pelagic doors are used on non-pelagic trawl gear which further reduces bottom contact of the gear. Establishing fixed closure areas based on where most of the halibut bycatch occurs doesn't account for how much groundfish is caught in those areas.

8. Committee and Task Force comments.

This is the final meeting for this committee. Final reports will be posted ~2 weeks before the in-person ABRT meeting on October 12.

9. Next Meeting Date: Full Task Force meets on September 20.

10. Adjournment at 11:54 am