



2019 Board of Fisheries Work Session
North Pacific Fishery Management Council Update
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This report reflects actions taken by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) since the 2018 Board of Fisheries Work Session and Council actions currently under development. Information in this report is referenced from Council documents available at: www.npfmc.org

Crab

St. Matthew Island blue king crab rebuilding: The St. Matthew Island blue king crab stock was declared overfished in October 2018, because the estimated spawning biomass was below the minimum stock size threshold specified in the crab Fishery Management Plan (FMP). In order to comply with provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, a rebuilding plan must be implemented prior to the start of the 2020/2021 fishing season.

The St. Matthew Island blue king crab directed fishery has been closed since the 2016/2017 season. The St. Matthew Island Habitat Conservation Area (SMIHCA) was created in 2008 and expanded in 2010 to protect blue king crab habitat; vessels fishing with nonpelagic trawl gear are prohibited from fishing in the SMIHCA. Other groundfish fishery closure areas include a 20nm Steller sealion closure around the southern tip of Hall Island (just north of St. Matthew Island); this area is closed to trawling, hook-and-line, and pot fisheries for pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel. In addition, state regulations close all state waters surrounding St. Matthew, Hall, and Pinnacle Islands to king crab fishing and to commercial groundfish fishing. Bycatch of St. Matthew blue king crab in the groundfish fisheries is low and the levels of bycatch do not affect the projected timelines for stock rebuilding. Keeping the directed fishery closed until the stock is rebuilt has the greatest impact on the projected timeline for rebuilding the St. Matthew blue king crab stock. The Council is scheduled to take final action on the rebuilding plan in April 2020.

Bering Sea Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Crab Partial Deliveries: The Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee requested the Council consider removing a regulation that prohibits vessels in the crab rationalization program from resuming fishing after delivering a portion of the crab. Current federal regulations implemented at the time of crab rationalization prohibit vessels from returning to fishing activity unless all crab from a fishing trip has been fully offloaded. The Western Aleutian Island golden king crab fishery received an exemption to this regulation in 2016 and members of the crab industry requested that the Council remove the prohibition on partial deliveries for all rationalized crab fisheries.

The flexibility afforded under this amendment is not expected to be used often, due to the harvesters' economic incentives of limiting crab deadloss and conducting efficient deliveries. The intent is to provide operational flexibility for vessel operators to conduct their business in a safe and economically efficient manner, especially when emergencies or special circumstances arise. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this in December.

Groundfish

Rockfish retention: The Council took final action in April to require full retention of federally managed rockfish species for fixed gear (hook-and-line, pot, and jig gear) catcher vessels (CVs) in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) and Gulf of Alaska (GOA). The full retention requirement is expected to improve species identification and catch accounting because all rockfish will be sorted and weighed at the dock. This action reduces incentives to discard rockfish as vessels will no longer be required to try and estimate where they are relative to maximum retainable amounts during a fishing trip and this action provides consistency in regulations across federal management areas and in most cases between state and federal waters.

BSAI parallel waters: In October the Council received an initial review analysis of a proposed amendment to require federally permitted catcher vessels (CVs) participating in the BSAI Pacific cod parallel state waters fishery to adhere to the same rules and regulations as the federal fishery. There is a concern that some vessels are continuing to fish in parallel waters after their sector's federal allocation has been caught and this could circumvent previous Council decisions on sector allocations and creates a problem for catch accounting.

The BSAI CV Pacific cod parallel fishery is opened by the state, in state waters, through an emergency order and this action specifically applies to federal vessels who fish in state waters. A federal permit is not required for vessels to participate in the parallel fishery and vessels that do not have a federal permit are not impacted by this action. This action would make the management of federally permitted vessels in parallel fisheries consistent across all areas.

BSAI Pacific cod catcher vessel management: In October the Council initiated analysis for a proposed BSAI Pacific cod trawl CV cooperative style-rationalization program. The Council included provisions to promote sustained participation of Aleutian Islands processors and communities, including management options to set-aside a portion of the BSAI trawl catcher vessel A season harvest amount for delivery to a shore plant in the AI management region (this would benefit shore based processors Adak and possibly Atka). In anticipation of improved bycatch management under a rationalization program, the Council included an option to reduce halibut and crab bycatch limits to the BSAI trawl CV Pacific cod sector by 10% to 25%.

The Council also included options to limit spillover effects from the BSAI Pacific cod trawl CV rationalization program on other BSAI and GOA fisheries. The Council noted that in the GOA, it is critical to develop meaningful sideboards or other measures to ensure that Gulf-dependent fishery participants and communities are not negatively impacted by the BSAI rationalization program.

Halibut

BSAI Halibut Abundance Based Management of bycatch limits: In October the Council reviewed a preliminary draft analysis for linking BSAI halibut bycatch limits to the abundance of halibut (also described as halibut abundance-based management). Currently, halibut bycatch limits for federal groundfish fisheries are fixed limits based on biomass. The IPHC method to allocate halibut between the directed fishery and the groundfish fishery first deducts halibut bycatch 'off the top' (based on the current years' bycatch) prior to setting limits for the directed

commercial and charter halibut fisheries for the following year. The Council is considering modifying current static bycatch limits to fulfill multiple objectives: to index bycatch limits to halibut abundance, which may achieve different goals of providing flexibility to the groundfish fisheries in times of high halibut abundance, protecting spawning biomass of halibut especially at low levels of abundance, and stabilizing the inter-annual variability of bycatch limits, all of which may provide additional harvest opportunities in the commercial halibut fishery. This particularly affects residents and communities in the Pribilof Islands who are dependent on the halibut fishery.

Recreational Quota Entity (RQE) funding mechanism: The Council took final action in 2016 that allowed the formation of a non-profit charter halibut RQE to purchase and hold commercial halibut quota share, to augment the charter catch limits in International Pacific Halibut Commission Regulatory Area 2C and Area 3A. An RQE has now been established and funding the entity appears to be presenting a challenge to the group. Therefore, the Council has authorized a discussion paper to explore establishing a halibut stamp for the RQE to sell to charter boat operators. Allowing an RQE to collect halibut stamp fees requires authorization from Congress and this legislation is currently being pursued.

Salmon

Cook Inlet Salmon Committee: The Council has formed a Cook Inlet Salmon Committee, which is a stakeholder committee that was created to assist in the development of an amendment that will incorporate the federal waters of Cook Inlet into the Federal Salmon Fishery Management Plan. The Committee's primary functions are to (1) review and provide comments on specific, Council-identified issues; (2) develop options for fishery management measures, and (3) provide perspectives on potential social and economic impacts of proposed fishery management measures.

The committee has met four times with the goal of providing comments on the two alternative management approaches currently being considered by the Council: Alternative 2 – cooperative management with the State of Alaska, and Alternative 3 – fully Federal management. There is broad support for the cooperative management alternative and the committee is still working through the details of their recommendations. The next committee meeting has not been scheduled, though April of next year seems the most likely. The Council has not yet moved to the analysis phase for this action; given the current timelines it's possible that the first full analysis will be presented to the Council in October 2020.

Salmon bycatch: In June geneticists from the Auke Bay lab provided reports on the stock of origin of Chinook and chum salmon bycatch for the 2017 Bering Sea (BS) and GOA trawl fisheries.

From 2011-2016, the greatest contribution of Chinook salmon bycatch samples in the BS pollock catch were from Coastal Western Alaska stocks. The percentage of samples from Coastal Western Alaska has been steadily decreasing from a high of 68% in 2011 to 24% in 2017. Over this same time period, the percentage of Chinook salmon bycatch samples from British Columbia and the US West Coast has been steadily increasing and now represent the

highest proportion of the bycatch samples. Chum bycatch in the Bering Sea continues to be dominated by Asian origin fish.

In 2017, the Chinook salmon genetic samples in the GOA pollock fishery were mostly from British Columbia (43%) and US West Coast (38%), followed by Coastal SE Alaska (13%), and NW GOA (5%). These contributions were similar to previous years.

Since 2013, the Alaska Groundfish Data Bank has implemented a census approach to sample every Chinook salmon encountered in the CV rockfish trawl fishery. Genetic samples from bycatch were collected by industry on a voluntary basis. In 2017, based on the analysis of 280 Chinook salmon samples (down from the 495 encountered in 2016), US West Coast stocks represented the largest stock grouping (56%), followed by contributions from BC (28%) and Coastal SE AK (11%).