

Agenda Item D-1(b) GOA Halibut PSC Limits

Council Motion

In recent years, the directed halibut catch limits in the GOA regulatory areas 2C, 3A and 3B have declined steadily, and the recommended catch limits for 2011 are almost 30% lower than in 2010. Growth rates of halibut remain very low and size at age has been declining; much of the total biomass is made up of smaller fish that are more vulnerable than larger fish to trawl gear. In addition, evidence of west to east migration of halibut within a coast wide stock may have implications for the impacts of halibut bycatch on stock assessment, and directed fishing opportunities. These factors raise concerns about the current halibut PSC limits in the GOA, and the effect this bycatch has on the directed fishing opportunities, as well as the productivity of the stock.

At this time the Council has not selected a specific process for considering changes to the GOA halibut PSC limits. Although the Council believes that an evaluation of the current halibut PSC limits is warranted, additional information about the condition of halibut stocks, the effects of bycatch reduction, and other fishery factors is necessary. Therefore, the Council directs staff to provide information on the following topics:

1. The effect of reducing bycatch limits in the GOA on the exploitable biomass available to the directed fisheries, over an appropriate time period; this includes the effects of migration on downstream users. (i.e. what is the effect of a 100mt reduction in bycatch over a 5 year period?).
2. The recent changes in IPHC stock assessment methods, harvest policies, and catch limit setting on directed halibut fisheries.
3. Changes to Federal fishery management programs and halibut PSC apportionments that begin in 2012 that are relevant to the use of halibut PSC.
4. Possible causes of low growth rates and the effects on future exploitable biomass and spawning biomass.

The Council further requests the IPHC to provide the appropriate scientific expertise and information to assist the Council.