



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:BYC 18-001

Agenda Date2/5/2018

Agenda Number:C3

Dan Hull, Chairman
David Witherell, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

GOA Catcher Vessel Chinook PSC Limit Adjustments - Initial Review

STAFF CONTACT: Sam Cunningham (NPFMC)

ACTION REQUIRED:

- Review and approve/modify Purpose and Need
- Review initial analysis; consider release for public review and/or identification of a preliminary preferred alternative

BACKGROUND:

The Council is considering an action that would modify the Chinook salmon prohibited species catch (PSC) limits for the non-pollock catcher vessel (CV) groundfish trawl fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). Alternative 2 would increase the annual Chinook PSC limit for the non-pollock non-Rockfish Program CV sector from 2,700 fish by 1,000, 2,000, or 3,000 fish. Alternative 3 would increase the Chinook PSC limit for the Rockfish Program CV sector from 1,200 fish by 300, 600, or 900 fish. When the Council initiated this analysis in April 2017 it directed staff to draft a description of the Purpose and Need for action (Section 1.1); the Council should review this section in particular and specify any needed modification.

The draft Purpose and Need section notes that Chinook salmon PSC levels in the GOA trawl fisheries have continued to display wide variation from year-to-year since the implementation of non-pollock PSC limits in 2015. Moreover, the expansion of observer coverage onto vessels of less than 60' LOA and the continued collection of genetic data from trawl-caught Chinook salmon has provided new information and context to the issue that was not available when the Council took action on PSC limits in 2013. Finally, the Council has not moved forward with action that could have established a cooperative structure to manage the fishery, so continued uncertainty regarding the likelihood and timing of trawl closures might be contributing to a race for fish under certain conditions in the limited access sector. For these reasons, the Council is considering higher PSC limits that account for the best available information about the fishery and for expected variability in annual Chinook encounter levels, while remaining within the overall GOA trawl PSC bounds that minimize the probability of the fishery jeopardizing the Chinook salmon resource.

As action alternatives are refined, the Council should specify whether any increase to the existing Chinook salmon PSC limits would affect the application of incentive and flexibility measures that are currently in place. Current regulations include a bycatch avoidance incentive for the non-Rockfish Program CV sector, in which successful Chinook avoidance in one year can lead to a slightly higher limit in the following year. The level of the performance standard and the size of that earned "incentive buffer" are linked to the sector's base PSC limit (2,700 Chinook). Regulations also allow NMFS to make inseason reallocations of Chinook PSC to the

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non-Rockfish Program and Rockfish Program CV sectors; the maximum reallocation that a sector can receive in one year is linked to that sector's base PSC limit (2,700 or 1,200 Chinook, respectively). The Council could choose to leave maximum incentive buffers and inseason reallocation caps at their current levels or allow them to increase in proportion to any change to base PSC limits.