

the available halibut mortality bycatch limits, and possibly lower overall halibut bycatch mortality in groundfish fisheries.

The sablefish/halibut IFQ program (implemented in 1995) was intended, in part, to reduce the halibut discard mortality in the sablefish fishery.

Methods available for reducing halibut bycatch listed above will be reviewed by NMFS and the Council to determine their effectiveness. Changes will be initiated, as necessary, in response to this review or to public testimony and comment.

Consistent with the goals and objectives of the FMP to reduce halibut bycatches while providing an opportunity to harvest the groundfish OY, NMFS proposes the assignments of 2,000 mt and 300 mt of halibut PSC mortality limits to trawl and hook-and-line gear, respectively. While these limits would reduce the harvest quota for commercial halibut fishermen, NMFS has determined that they would not result in unfair allocation to any particular user group. NMFS recognizes that some halibut bycatch will occur in the groundfish fishery, but the Vessel Incentive Program, required modifications to gear, and implementation of the IFQ program are

intended to reduce adverse impacts on halibut fishermen while promoting the opportunity to achieve the OY from the groundfish fishery.

#### 7. Proposed Seasonal Allocations of the Halibut PSC Limits

Under § 672.20(f)(1)(iii), NMFS proposes to allocate seasonally the halibut PSC limits after receiving recommendations from the Council. The FMP requires that the following information be considered by the Council in recommending seasonal allocations of halibut: (1) Seasonal distribution of halibut, (2) seasonal distribution of target groundfish species relative to halibut distribution, (3) expected halibut bycatch needs on a seasonal basis relevant to changes in halibut biomass and expected catches of target groundfish species, (4) expected bycatch rates on a seasonal basis, (5) expected changes in directed groundfish fishing seasons, (6) expected actual start of fishing effort, and, (7) economic effects of establishing seasonal halibut allocations on segments of the target groundfish industry.

The Council recommended the same seasonal allocation of PSC limits for the 1996 fishing year as those in effect during the 1995 fishing year. The

publication of the final 1995 initial groundfish and PSC specifications (60 FR 8470, February 14, 1995) summarizes Council findings with respect to each of the FMP considerations set forth above. At this time, the Council's findings are unchanged from those set forth for 1995.

Pacific halibut PSC catch limits, and apportionments thereof, are presented in Table 5. The regulations specify that any overages or shortfalls in PSC catches will be accounted for within the 1996 season. The Council did not recommend changes in the seasonal apportionments for the hook-and-line gear fisheries from those specified in 1995.

Regulations at § 672.20(f)(1) authorize apportionments of the trawl halibut PSC limit allowance as bycatch allowances to a deep-water species fishery, comprised of sablefish, rockfish, deep-water flatfish, rex sole and arrowtooth flounder, and a shallow-water species fishery, comprising pollock, Pacific cod, shallow-water flatfish, flathead sole, Atka mackerel, and "other species." The proposed apportionment for these two fishery complexes is presented in Table 6 and is unchanged from 1995.

TABLE 6.—PROPOSED 1996 APPORTIONMENT OF PACIFIC HALIBUT PSC TRAWL LIMITS BETWEEN THE DEEP-WATER SPECIES FISHERY AND THE SHALLOW-WATER SPECIES FISHERY. VALUES ARE IN METRIC TONS.

Season	Shallow-water	Deep-water	Total
Jan. 20–Mar. 31 .....	500	100	600
Apr. 1–Jun. 30 .....	100	300	400
Jul. 1–Sep. 30 .....	200	400	600
Oct. 1–Dec. 31 .....	No apportionment between shallow and deep for the 4th quarter.		

Assumed halibut mortality rates for halibut PSC bycatch in 1996 are based on an average of mortality rates determined from NMFS-observer data collected during 1993 and 1994. Because the rates for 1993 were lacking for hook-and-line rockfish the average of 1991 and 1994 was used. Except as noted below, the Council proposed that halibut discard mortality rates recommended by the IPHC be adopted for purposes of monitoring halibut bycatch mortality limits established for the 1996 groundfish fisheries. In 1995, the Council established separate mortality rates for the GOA at-sea and shoreside bottom trawl pollock fisheries. However, NMFS notes that directed fishing for GOA pollock by the offshore component is prohibited under § 672.20(a)(2)(v). The IPHC did not propose a rate for the GOA bottom trawl pollock fishery for 1996. Until further

information is available, NMFS is proposing to use the actual observed 1994 rate for the bottom trawl fishery (with no separation for at-sea and shoreside), which is the most current information available for this fishery.

The IPHC determined that the careful release measures implemented for vessels using hook-and-line gear did not show appreciable improvements in mortality rates and has recommended one rate for both observed and unobserved vessels in the hook-and-line fisheries. This action was approved by the Council in 1995. NMFS is proposing this for 1996 as well. The halibut mortality rates are listed in Table 7.

TABLE 7.—1996 ASSUMED PACIFIC HALIBUT MORTALITY RATES FOR VESSELS FISHING IN THE GULF OF ALASKA. TABLE VALUES ARE PERCENT OF HALIBUT BYCATCH ASSUMED TO BE DEAD.

Gear and Target	
Hook-and-Line:	
Sablefish .....	24
Pacific cod .....	13
Rockfish .....	19
Trawl:	
Midwater pollock .....	68
Rockfish .....	58
Shallow-water flatfish .....	64
Pacific cod .....	57
Deep-water flatfish .....	56
Bottom pollock .....	57
Pot:	
Pacific cod .....	18

The analysis by the IPHC on the halibut discard mortality rates was