Allocation of PSC Limits for Crab, Halibut, and Herring

PSC limits of red king crab and *C. bairdi* Tanner crab in Bycatch Limitation Zones (50 CFR 675.2) of the BS subarea, and for Pacific halibut throughout the BSAI area are specified under § 675.21(a). At this time, the 1996 PSC limits are:

- 1. Zone 1 trawl fisheries, 200,000 red king crabs;
- 2. Zone 1 trawl fisheries, 1 million *C. bairdi* Tanner crabs;
- 3. Zone 2 trawl fisheries, 3 million *C. bairdi* Tanner crabs;
- 4. BSAI trawl fisheries, 3,775 mt mortality of Pacific halibut;
- 5. BSÅI nontrawl fisheries, 900 mt mortality of Pacific halibut; and
- BSÅI trawl fisheries, 1,861 mt Pacific herring.

The PSC limit of Pacific herring caught while conducting any trawl operation for groundfish in the BSAI is 1 percent of the annual eastern Bering Sea herring biomass. At this time, the best estimate of 1996 herring biomass is 186,000 mt. This amount was derived using 1994 survey data and an agestructured biomass projection model developed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). Therefore, the proposed herring PSC limit for 1996 is 1,861 mt. This value is subject to change, pending an updated forecast analysis of 1995 herring survey data that will be presented to the Council by the ADF&G during the Council's December 1995 meeting.

Regulations under § 675.21(b) authorize the apportionment of each PSC limit into PSC allowances for specified fishery categories. Regulations

at § 675.21(b)(1)(iii) specify seven fishery categories (midwater pollock. Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/ sablefish, rock sole/flathead sole/other flatfish, yellowfin sole, rockfish, Pacific cod, and bottom pollock/Atka mackerel/ "other species"). Regulations at § 675.21(b)(2) authorize the apportionment of the nontrawl halibut PSC limit among three fishery categories (Pacific cod hook-and-line fishery, groundfish pot gear fishery, and other nontrawl fisheries). The PSC allowances for trawl and nontrawl are listed in Table 5. In general, the preliminary 1996 fishery bycatch allowances listed in Table 5 reflect the recommendations made to the Council by its Advisory Panel. These recommendations are unchanged from 1995, except for halibut in the Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/sablefish category. A halibut bycatch allowance equal to zero is proposed for this fishery category in 1996. This means that directed fisheries for these species by vessels using trawl gear would be prohibited. This action is proposed for the following reasons.

First, the management of the halibut bycatch allowance specified for the Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/sablefish fishery category in past years has proved very difficult. In 1995, NMFS had provided for only a 3-day fishery for Greenland turbot to maintain halibut bycatch mortality within the specified allowance of 120 mt. After the fishery had closed, NMFS determined that the halibut bycatch mortality experienced during this 3-day fishery totaled 282 mt, or 235 percent of the specified allowance.

Second, existing regulations allow Greenland turbot, sablefish, or arrowtooth to be retained as bycatch in other trawl fisheries provided that retained amounts do not exceed maximum retainable bycatch amounts as calculated under § 675.20(h). Last, the halibut bycatch mortality that had been apportioned to this fishery category in 1995 (120 mt) is proposed to be equally redistributed among the yellowfin sole, rock sole/flathead sole/ other flatfish and the Pacific cod fishery categories. The intent of this action is to better optimize the amount of total groundfish catch harvested under the halibut PSC limit established for the trawl gear fisheries.

The proposed apportionments of the PSC limits among specified trawl and nontrawl fisheries were based on last year's final recommendations that incorporated 1993 and 1994 bycatch amounts, anticipated 1996 harvest of groundfish by trawl gear and fixed gear, and assumed halibut mortality rates in the different groundfish fisheries based on analyses of 1993–1994 observer data.

Regulations at § 675.21(b)(2) authorize exemption of specified nontrawl fisheries from the halibut PSC limit. As in 1995, the Council proposes to exempt pot gear and the hook-and-line sablefish fishery from the nontrawl halibut limit for 1996. The Council proposed this exemption because of the low halibut bycatch mortality experienced in the pot gear fisheries (7 mt in 1995) and because of the 1995 implementation of the sablefish and halibut IFQ program, which would allow legal-sized halibut to be retained in the sablefish fishery.

TABLE 5.—PRELIMINARY 1996 PROHIBITED SPECIES BYCATCH ALLOWANCES FOR THE BSAI TRAWL AND NONTRAWL FISHERIES

Trawl fisheries	Zone 1	Zone 2	BSAI-wide
Red king crab, number of animals:			
yellowfin sole	50,000		
rcksol/otherflat/flathead sole	10.000		
rockfish	0		
turb/arrow/sab/rockfish 1	0		
Pacific cod	10,000		
plck/Atka/other ²	30,000		
plot/ that other	00,000		
Total	200,000		
C. bairdi Tanner crab, number of animals:			
yellowfin sole	225,000	1,525,000	
rcksol/oth.flat/flathead sole	475,000	510,000	
turb/arrow/sabl	0	5,000	
rockfish	0	10,000	
Pacific cod	225,000	260,000	
plck/Atka/other	75,000	690,000	
Total	1,000,000	3,000,000	
Pacific halibut, mortality (mt):	1,200,000	2,200,000	
yellowfin sole			79
rcksol/oth.flat			73
turb/arrow/sabl			