child interactions and classroom processes in three broad domains that support children's learning and development: Emotional Support, Classroom Organization, and Instructional Support.

Changes to CLASS Condition Under Consideration

Since HHS established the DRS, all grantees that had indefinite project periods have completed the DRS process. Based on CLASS data, observations collected throughout these cohorts, results of a recent evaluation, and feedback from the community, we are considering changes to the CLASS condition of the DRS in order to better improve implementation of the system. There are concerns about some aspects of the CLASS condition of the DRS that have been raised by Head Start grantees as well as in the recent evaluation. First, the requirement for grantees with the lowest 10 percent of scores on any of the three CLASS domains to compete may not be optimally targeting the grantees for competition with the lowest measures of classroom quality. For example, grantees have been required to compete due to an Emotional Support score of 5.69, which is very close to the Standard of Excellence (a 6—which developers of the CLASS deem the highest quality), while grantees very close to the minimum threshold in Instructional Support (*e.g.,* score of 2.3) do not have to compete. We are considering an approach to establish higher specific thresholds that demonstrate an established acceptable level of quality in Emotional Support and Classroom Organization and an adjustable threshold for the Instructional Support domain where there is the greatest potential and need for program improvement.

Second, we understand that the delay between completion of the CLASS review and grantees knowing their DRS designation status, due to the need to collect and analyze a full monitoring year's CLASS scores to determine the lowest 10 percent, creates uncertainty, stress, and concern among grantees, grantee staff, and families. Because classroom quality in Head Start programs is improving, as demonstrated by recent analysis of data from the 2006, 2009, and 2014 cohorts of the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES),[1] we are exploring options for the CLASS condition that would better balance an ability to drive quality improvement over time with an approach that would be more transparent, timely, and less burdensome for programs.

To inform our development of a notice of proposed rulemaking to change the DRS CLASS condition to meet the objectives described above, we are requesting public comments on several specific changes being considered. The changes under consideration are as follows:

1. Remove the ''lowest 10 percent'' provision of the CLASS condition described in 45 CFR 1304.11(c)(2).

2. Increase the minimum threshold described in 45 CFR 1304.11(c)(1)(i) for the Emotional Support domain from 4 to 5.

3. Increase the minimum threshold described in 45 CFR 1304.11(c)(1)(ii) for Classroom Organization from 3 to 5.

4. Remove the minimum threshold for the Instructional Support domain described in 45 CFR 1304.11(c)(1)(iii) and instead provide authority for the Secretary to set an absolute minimum threshold for the Instructional Support domain, considering the most recent CLASS data, by August 1 of each year to be used for CLASS Reviews conducted in the following fiscal year (October 1 through September 30).

Together, these changes would allow grantees to know by August 1, before CLASS Reviews are conducted for the coming fiscal year, the exact threshold of classroom quality in each of the three domains that will be used to determine which grantees will be subject to an open competition for funding and which grantees will receive renewed funding non-competitively. Grantees would no longer have to wait until several months following the conclusion of the CLASS reviews for the fiscal year (September 30) to learn the lowest 10 percent cutoff in each of the 3 domains. Setting minimum thresholds of 5 in the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains would set a clear and consistent expectation of quality for all Head Start programs. Allowing the Secretary to set the minimum threshold in the Instructional Support domain prior to the start of each program year and monitoring year would allow for consideration of the most recent CLASS data for Head Start grantees while still supporting continuous quality improvement across the program as a whole.

What We Are Looking for in Public Comments

We invite comments about the specific changes being considered for the DRS CLASS condition. We also invite comments about any unintended consequences of removing the lowest 10 percent condition and whether an absolute threshold could influence scores. We are particularly interested in recommendations related to how the Secretary would consider establishing the minimum threshold for Instructional Support each year. For example, the regulation could establish an initial Instructional Support threshold (*e.g.,* 2.3 or 2.5) that could be raised in increments of 0.1 based on certain criteria related to the available CLASS data from all prior years of Head Start monitoring, or the threshold could be set one standard deviation below the mean Instructional Support score over the 3 or 5 previous fiscal years. We are interested in other ideas of ways the Instructional Support threshold could be set and/or adjusted that would incentivize program improvement while acknowledging the current state of the field. We are also interested in feedback on another potential change to establish or maintain a minimum absolute threshold (such as a 2) that would require competition and a higher threshold (such as 2.5 or 3) and require grantees to focus on quality improvement before they were reevaluated to see if their Instructional Support score has improved. Only grantees without improvement or still below the threshold would then have to compete. We are interested in feedback on each of these possible approaches as well as others suggested by the field.

If commenters do not support the changes being considered, comments offering alternative proposals to the CLASS condition or to other conditions of the DRS would be particularly helpful.

Dated: December 5, 2017.

Ann Linehan,

Acting Director, Office of Head Start.

[FR Doc. 2017–26483 Filed 12–7–17; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4184–01–P

[1] Aikens, N., Bush, C., Gleason, P., Malone, L., & Tarullo, L. (2016). Tracking Quality in Head Start Classrooms: FACES 2006 to FACES 2014. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 170817779–7779–01]

RIN 0648–XF636

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands; 2018 and 2019 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications, apportionments, and prohibited species catch allowances for the groundfish fisheries of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) management area. This action is necessary to establish harvest limits for groundfish during the 2018 and 2019 fishing years, and to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area. The intended effect of this action is to conserve and manage the groundfish resources in the BSAI in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

DATES: Comments must be received by January 8, 2018.

ADDRESSES: Submit your comments, identified by NOAA–NMFS–2017–0108, by either of the following methods:

- *Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:* Go to *www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0108,* click the ''Comment Now!'' icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.
- *Mail:* Submit written comments to Glenn Merrill, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Mail comments to P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802–1668.

Instructions: NMFS may not consider comments if they are sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the comment period ends. All comments received are a part of the public record, and NMFS will post the comments for public viewing on *www.regulations.gov* without change. All personal identifying information (*e.g.*, name, address), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender is publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter ''N/A'' in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).

Electronic copies of the Alaska Groundfish Harvest Specifications Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS), Record of Decision (ROD), Supplementary Information Report (SIR) to the EIS, and the Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) prepared for this action may be obtained from *http://www.regulations.gov* or from the Alaska Region Web site at *http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov.* The final 2016 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report for the groundfish resources of the BSAI, dated November 2016, is available from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) at 605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501–2252, phone 907–271–2809, or from the Council's Web site at *http://www.npfmc.org/.* The draft 2017 SAFE report for the BSAI is available from the same source.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Steve Whitney, 907–586–7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Federal regulations at 50 CFR part 679 implement the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP) and govern the groundfish fisheries in the BSAI. The Council prepared the FMP, and NMFS approved it, under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). General regulations governing U.S. fisheries also appear at 50 CFR part 600.

The FMP and its implementing regulations require NMFS, after consultation with the Council, to specify annually the total allowable catch (TAC) for each target species category. The sum of TACs for all groundfish species in the BSAI must be within the optimum yield (OY) range of 1.4 million to 2.0 million metric tons (mt) (see § 679.20(a)(1)(i)(A)). Section 679.20(c)(1) further requires NMFS to publish proposed harvest specifications in the **Federal Register** and solicit public comments on proposed annual TACs and apportionments thereof, prohibited species catch (PSC) allowances, prohibited species quota (PSQ) reserves established by § 679.21, seasonal allowances of pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel TAC, American Fisheries Act allocations, Amendment 80 allocations, Community Development Quota (CDQ) reserve amounts established by § 679.20(b)(1)(ii), and acceptable biological catch (ABC) surpluses and reserves for CDQ groups and Amendment 80 cooperatives for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole. The proposed harvest specifications set forth in Tables 1 through 16 of this action satisfy these requirements.

Under § 679.20(c)(3), NMFS will publish the final harvest specifications for 2018 and 2019 after (1) considering comments received within the comment period (see **DATES**), (2) consulting with the Council at its December 2017 meeting, (3) considering information presented in the SIR to the EIS that assesses the need to prepare a Supplemental EIS (see **ADDRESSES**), and (4) considering information presented in the final 2017 SAFE reports prepared for the 2018 and 2019 groundfish fisheries.

Other Actions Affecting the 2018 and 2019 Harvest Specifications

Amendment 117: Reclassify Squid as an Ecosystem Species

In June 2017, the Council recommended for Secretarial review Amendment 117 to the FMP. Amendment 117 would reclassify squid in the FMP as an ''Ecosystem Component'' species, which is a category of non-target species that are not in need of conservation and management. Currently, NMFS annually sets an Overfishing Level (OFL), ABC, and TAC for squid in the BSAI groundfish harvest specifications. Under Amendment 117, OFL, ABC, and TAC specifications would no longer be required. Proposed regulations to implement Amendment 117 would prohibit directed fishing for squid, require recordkeeping and reporting to monitor and report catch of squid species annually, and establish a squid maximum retainable amount when directed fishing for groundfish species at 20 percent to discourage retention, while allowing flexibility to prosecute groundfish fisheries. Further details will be available on publication of the proposed rule for Amendment 117. If Amendment 117 and its implementing regulations are approved by the Secretary of Commerce, Amendment 117 and its implementing regulations are anticipated to be effective by 2019. Until Amendment 117 is effective, NMFS will continue to publish OFLs, ABCs, and TACs for squid in the BSAI groundfish harvest specifications.

Alaska Guideline Harvest Levels

The Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF), a regulatory body for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, established a guideline harvest level (GHL) in State of Alaska (State) waters between 164 and 167 degrees west longitude in the Bering Sea subarea (BS) equal to 6.4 percent of the Pacific cod ABC for the BS. The Council recommends that the proposed 2018 and 2019 Pacific cod TACs accommodate the State's GHLs for Pacific cod in State waters in the BS. The Council and its BSAI Groundfish Plan Team (Plan Team), Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), and Advisory Panel (AP) recommended that the sum of all State and Federal water Pacific cod removals from the BS not exceed the proposed ABC recommendations of 208,265 mt.

Accordingly, the Council recommends the proposed 2018 and 2019 Pacific cod TACs in the BS to account for State GHLs.

For 2018 and 2019, the BOF established a GHL in State waters in the Aleutian Islands subarea (AI) equal to 27 percent of the Pacific cod ABC for the AI. The Council recommends that the proposed 2018 and 2019 Pacific cod TACs accommodate the State's GHLs for Pacific cod in State waters in the AI. The Council and its Plan Team, SSC, and AP recommended that the sum of all State and Federal water Pacific cod removals from the AI not exceed the proposed ABC recommendations of 21,500 mt. Accordingly, the Council recommends that the proposed 2018 and 2019 Pacific cod TACs in the AI account for State GHLs.

Proposed ABC and TAC Harvest Specifications

At the October 2017 Council meeting, the SSC, AP, and Council reviewed the most recent biological and harvest information on the condition of the BSAI groundfish stocks. The Plan Team compiled and presented this information, which was initially compiled by the Plan Team and presented in the final 2016 SAFE report for the BSAI groundfish fisheries, dated November 2016 (see **ADDRESSES**).

The Council recommends and NMFS proposes a reduction in the Pacific cod OFL, ABC, and TAC levels as compared to those levels implemented for Pacific cod in the 2017 and 2018 final BSAI groundfish harvest specifications published in February 2017 (82 FR 11826, February 27, 2017). The only changes to the proposed 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications from the final 2018 harvest specifications are associated with a decrease in Pacific cod OFL, ABC, and TAC in the BS and increases in pollock TAC amounts in the BS, Atka mackerel, Pacific ocean perch, and rock sole TAC amounts in the BSAI. The net increases of TAC equal the decrease of Pacific cod TAC, and leave the sum of the TACs equal to 2.0 million mt. The Council concurred with its SSC's recommendation to reduce the Pacific cod OFL and ABC, as well as its AP's recommendation for a corresponding reduction in the Pacific cod TAC. The reductions to the Pacific cod OFL, ABC, and TAC are the result of preliminary 2017 BSAI bottom trawl survey data, as well as other data, that recently became available to stock assessment scientists.

Based on the results of the 2017 BSAI bottom trawl survey estimates and preliminary modeling for the Pacific cod stock assessment, the Pacific cod biomass and abundance has decreased significantly since the 2016 BSAI bottom trawl survey. This decrease is corroborated by additional data sets that appear to support the trawl survey results associated with a decrease in the Pacific cod biomass. This information led to the recommended reduction in the proposed 2018 and 2019 Pacific cod OFL and ABC. The SSC opted to recommend a proposed 2018 OFL and ABC based on the average of the current 2018 OFL and ABC amounts and preliminary Tier 5 OFL and ABC amounts provided by the Pacific cod stock assessment author. This precautionary approach provides a strong indication of decreases in the OFL and ABC amounts for the final harvest specifications. However, this was a temporary approach used only for these proposed specifications, and Pacific cod remains in Tier 3a. The SSC also strongly noted that the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications for Pacific cod could be even lower than those recommended in the proposed 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications once the stock assessment process has been completed and reviewed by December 2017.

The proposed Pacific cod OFL, ABC, and TAC amounts likely will further change once the Pacific cod stock assessment is finalized, reviewed by the Council's groundfish Plan Team in November, and then subsequently reviewed by the SSC, AP, and Council in December 2017. The proposed reductions to Pacific cod OFL, ABC, and TAC amounts apply in the BS, while for the AI, the proposed OFL, ABC, and TAC amounts are unchanged from the final 2018 amounts. The Council increased the proposed TACs of Atka mackerel, Pacific ocean perch, pollock, and rock sole to match the decrease of Pacific cod TAC in the BS, and these TACs could also change in the final specifications based on the final Pacific cod harvest amounts.

The amounts proposed for the 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications are based on the 2016 SAFE report, and initial survey data, and are subject to change in the final harvest specifications to be published by NMFS following the Council's December 2017 meeting. In November 2017, the Plan Team will update the 2016 SAFE report to include new information collected during 2017, such as NMFS stock surveys, revised stock assessments, and catch data. At its December 2017 meeting, the Council will consider information contained in the final 2017 SAFE report, recommendations from the November 2017 Plan Team meeting, public testimony from the December 2017 SSC and AP meetings, and relevant written comments in making its recommendations for the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications.

In previous years, the OFLs and ABCs that have had the most significant changes (relative to the amount of assessed tonnage of fish) from the proposed to the final harvest specifications have been for OFLs and ABCs that are based on the most recent NMFS stock surveys, which provide updated estimates of stock biomass and spatial distribution, and changes to the models used in the stock assessments. Any changes will be recommended by the Plan Team in November 2017 and then included in the final 2017 SAFE report. The final 2017 SAFE report will include the most recent information, such as catch data.

The final harvest specification amounts for these stocks are not expected to vary greatly from the proposed harvest specification amounts published here, except that Pacific cod harvest amounts could change and even decrease further, which could impact other TAC amounts in order to achieve OY, as explained earlier in this preamble. If the final 2017 SAFE report indicates that the stock biomass trend is increasing for a species, then the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications may reflect an increase from the proposed harvest specifications. Conversely, if the final 2017 SAFE report indicates that the stock biomass trend is decreasing for a species, then the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications may reflect a decrease from the proposed harvest specifications. In addition to changes driven by biomass trends, there may be changes in TACs due to the sum of ABCs exceeding 2 million mt. Since the regulations require TACs to be set to an OY between 1.4 and 2 million mt, the Council may be required to recommend TACs that are lower than the ABCs recommended by the Plan Team and the SSC, if setting TACs equal to ABCs would cause total TACs to exceed an OY of 2 million mt. Generally, total ABCs greatly exceed 2 million mt in years with a large pollock biomass. NMFS anticipates that, both for 2018 and 2019, the sum of the ABCs will exceed 2 million mt. NMFS expects that the final total TAC for the BSAI for both 2018 and 2019 will equal 2 million mt each year.

The proposed OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are based on the best available biological and socioeconomic data, including projected biomass trends, information on assumed distribution of stock biomass, and revised technical methods used to calculate stock

biomass. In general, the development of ABCs and OFLs involves statistical modeling of fish populations. The FMP specifies a series of six tiers to define OFLs and ABCs based on the level of reliable information available to fishery scientists. Tier 1 represents the highest level of information quality available, while Tier 6 represents the lowest.

In October 2017, the SSC adopted the proposed 2018 and 2019 OFLs and ABCs recommended by the Plan Team for all groundfish species, with the exception of the decreases for Pacific cod OFL and ABC in the BS. The Council adopted the SSC's OFL and ABC recommendations. These amounts are unchanged from the final 2018 harvest specifications published in the **Federal Register** on February 27, 2017 (82 FR 11826), with the exception of the decreases for BS Pacific cod OFL, ABC, and TAC and the related increases for Atka mackerel, Pacific ocean perch, pollock, and rock sole TAC amounts. The Council adopted the AP's TAC recommendations. For 2018 and 2019, the Council recommended and NMFS proposes the OFLs, ABCs, and TACs listed in Table 1. The proposed ABCs reflect harvest amounts that are less than the specified OFLs. The sum of the proposed 2018 and 2019 ABCs for all assessed groundfish is 4,167,913 mt, which is less than the final 2018 ABC total in the final 2017 and 2018 BSAI harvest specifications to account for the decrease in BS Pacific cod ABC (82 FR 11826, February 27, 2017). The sum of TACs is the same as the final 2018 TAC total in the final 2017 and 2018 BSAI harvest specifications, but the proposed harvest specifications reflect the decrease in the BS Pacific cod TAC amount and the corresponding increases in Atka mackerel, Pacific ocean perch, pollock, and rock sole TAC amounts.

Specification and Apportionment of TAC Amounts

The Council recommended proposed TACs for 2018 and 2019 Bering Sea and Eastern Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel that are equal to the proposed ABCs. The Council recommended proposed TACs less than the respective proposed ABCs for all other TACs. Section 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(*1*) requires the AI pollock TAC to be set at 19,000 mt when the AI pollock ABC equals or exceeds 19,000 mt. The Bogoslof pollock TAC is set to accommodate incidental catch amounts. TACs are set so that the sum of the overall TAC does not exceed the BSAI OY.

The proposed groundfish OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are subject to change pending the completion of the final 2017 SAFE report and the Council's recommendations for final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications during its December 2017 meeting. These proposed amounts are consistent with the biological condition of groundfish stocks as described in the 2016 SAFE report, and have been adjusted for other biological and socioeconomic considerations. Pursuant to Section 3.2.3.4.1 of the FMP, the Council could recommend adjusting the TACs if ''warranted on the basis of bycatch considerations, management uncertainty, or socioeconomic considerations; or if required in order to cause the sum of the TACs to fall within the OY range.'' Table 1 lists the proposed 2018 and 2019 OFL, ABC, TAC, initial TAC (ITAC), and CDQ amounts for groundfish for the BSAI. The proposed apportionment of TAC amounts among fisheries and seasons is discussed below.

TABLE 1—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 OVERFISHING LEVEL (OFL), ACCEPTABLE BIOLOGICAL CATCH (ABC), TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH (TAC), INITIAL TAC (ITAC), AND CDQ RESERVE ALLOCATION OF GROUNDFISH IN THE BSAI [1]

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Species	Area	Proposed 2018 and 2019				
		OFL	ABC	TAC	ITAC [2]	CDQ [3 4]
Pollock [4]	BS	4,360,000	2,979,000	1,359,858	1,223,872	135,986
	AI	49,291	40,788	19,000	17,100	1,900
	Bogoslof	130,428	97,428	500	500	.....
Pacific cod [5]	BS	258,687	208,265	194,936	174,078	20,858
	AI	28,700	21,500	15,695	14,016	1,679
Sablefish	BS	1,519	1,291	1,274	541	175
	AI	2,072	1,758	1,735	369	293
Yellowfin sole	BSAI	276,000	250,800	154,000	137,522	16,478
Greenland turbot	BSAI	12,831	10,864	4,500	3,825	n/a
	BS	n/a	9,484	4,375	3,719	468
	AI	n/a	1,380	125	106	.....
Arrowtooth flounder	BSAI	67,023	58,633	14,000	11,900	1,498
Kamchatka flounder	BSAI	10,700	9,200	5,000	4,250	.....
Rock sole [6]	BSAI	147,300	143,100	50,100	44,739	5,361
Flathead sole [7]	BSAI	79,136	66,164	15,500	13,842	1,659
Alaska plaice	BSAI	36,900	32,100	13,000	11,050	.....
Other flatfish [8]	BSAI	17,591	13,193	2,500	2,125	.....
Pacific Ocean perch	BSAI	51,950	42,735	40,400	35,604	n/a
	BS	n/a	11,924	11,000	9,350	.....
	EAI	n/a	10,074	9,900	8,841	1,059
	CAI	n/a	7,828	7,500	6,698	803
	WAI	n/a	12,909	12,000	10,716	1,284
Northern rockfish	BSAI	15,854	12,947	5,000	4,250	.....
Blackspotted and Rougheye rockfish [10]	BSAI	750	614	225	191	.....
	EBS/EAI	n/a	374	100	85	.....
	CAI/WAI	n/a	240	125	106	.....
Shortraker rockfish	BSAI	666	499	125	106	.....
Other rockfish [10]	BSAI	1,816	1,362	875	744	.....
	BS	n/a	791	325	276	.....
	AI	n/a	571	550	468	.....
Atka mackerel	BSAI	99,900	85,000	69,410	61,983	7,427
	EAI/BS	n/a	34,000	34,000	30,362	3,638
	CAI	n/a	29,600	21,500	19,200	2,301

TABLE 1—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 OVERFISHING LEVEL (OFL), ACCEPTABLE BIOLOGICAL CATCH (ABC), TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH (TAC), INITIAL TAC (ITAC), AND CDQ RESERVE ALLOCATION OF GROUNDFISH IN THE BSAI [1]—Continued

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Species	Area	Proposed 2018 and 2019				
		OFL	ABC	TAC	ITAC [2]	CDQ [3 4]
	WAI	n/a	21,400	13,910	12,422	1,488
Skates	BSAI	46,583	39,008	26,000	22,100	
Sculpins	BSAI	56,582	42,387	4,500	3,825	
Sharks	BSAI	689	517	125	106	
Squids	BSAI	6,912	5,184	1,342	1,141	
Octopuses	BSAI	4,769	3,576	400	340	
TOTAL		5,764,649	4,167,913	2,000,000	1,790,119	196,927

[1] These amounts apply to the entire BSAI management area unless otherwise specified. With the exception of pollock, and for the purpose of these harvest specifications, the BS includes the Bogoslof District.

[2] Except for pollock, the portion of the sablefish TAC allocated to hook-and-line or pot gear, and the Amendment 80 species (Atka mackerel, Aleutian Islands Pacific ocean perch, yellowfin sole, rock sole, flathead sole, and Pacific cod), 15 percent of each TAC is put into a reserve. The ITAC for these species is the remainder of the TAC after the subtraction of these reserves. For pollock and Amendment 80 species, ITAC is the non-CDQ allocation of TAC.

[3] For the Amendment 80 species (Atka mackerel, Aleutian Islands Pacific ocean perch, yellowfin sole, rock sole, flathead sole, and Pacific cod), 10.7 percent of the TAC is reserved for use by CDQ participants (see §§ 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C) and 679.31). Twenty percent of the sablefish TAC is allocated to hook-and-line gear or pot gear, 7.5 percent of the sablefish TAC is allocated to trawl gear, and 10.7 percent of the TACs for Bering Sea Greenland turbot and arrowtooth flounder are reserved for use by CDQ participants (see §§ 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(B) and (D)). The 2018 hook-and-line or pot gear portion of the sablefish ITAC and CDQ reserve will not be specified until the final 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications. Aleutian Islands Greenland turbot, ''other flatfish,'' Alaska plaice, Bering Sea Pacific ocean perch, Kamchatka flounder, northern rockfish, shortraker rockfish, blackspotted and rougheye rockfish, ''other rockfish,'' squids, octopuses, skates, sculpins, and sharks are not allocated to the CDQ Program.

[4] Under § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(*1*), the annual BS pollock TAC, after subtracting first for the CDQ directed fishing allowance (10 percent) and second for the incidental catch allowance (3.9 percent), is further allocated by sector for a pollock directed fishery as follows: inshore—50 percent; catcher/processor—40 percent; and motherships—10 percent. Under § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(*2*), the annual AI subarea pollock TAC, after subtracting first for the CDQ directed fishing allowance (10 percent) and second for the incidental catch allowance (2,400 mt), is allocated to the Aleut Corporation for a directed pollock fishery.

[5] The BS Pacific cod TAC is set less than 6.4 percent of the BS ABC to account for the State's guideline harvest level in State waters of the BS. The AI Pacific cod TAC is set less than 27 percent of the AI ABC to account for the State guideline harvest level in State waters of the AI.

[6] ''Rock sole'' includes *Lepidopsetta polyxystra* (Northern rock sole) and *Lepidopsetta bilineata* (Southern rock sole).

[7] ''Flathead sole'' includes *Hippoglossoides elassodon* (flathead sole) and *Hippoglossoides robustus* (Bering flounder).

[8] ''Other flatfish'' includes all flatfish species, except for halibut (a prohibited species), flathead sole, Greenland turbot, rock sole, yellowfin sole, arrowtooth flounder, Kamchatka flounder, and Alaska plaice.

[9] ''Blackspotted and Rougheye rockfish'' includes Sebastes melanostictus (blackspotted) and *Sebastes aleutianus* (rougheye).

[10] ''Other rockfish'' includes all *Sebastes* and *Sebastolobus* species except for Pacific ocean perch, northern, shortraker, and rougheye rockfish.

Note: Regulatory areas and districts are defined at § 679.2 (BSAI=Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area, BS=Bering Sea subarea, AI=Aleutian Islands subarea, EAI=Eastern Aleutian district, CAI=Central Aleutian district, WAI=Western Aleutian district.)

Groundfish Reserves and the Incidental Catch Allowance (ICA) for Pollock, Atka Mackerel, Flathead Sole, Rock Sole, Yellowfin Sole, and AI Pacific Ocean Perch

Section 679.20(b)(1)(i) requires NMFS to reserve 15 percent of the TAC for each target species category, except for pollock, hook-and-line and pot gear allocation of sablefish, and Amendment 80 species, in a non-specified reserve. Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(B) requires NMFS to allocate 20 percent of the hook-and-line or pot gear allocation of sablefish to the fixed gear sablefish CDQ reserve. Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(D) requires NMFS to allocate 7.5 percent of the trawl gear allocation of sablefish and 10.7 percent of Bering Sea Greenland turbot and arrowtooth flounder TACs to the respective CDQ reserves. Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C) requires NMFS to allocate 10.7 percent of the TACs for Atka mackerel, AI Pacific ocean perch, yellowfin sole, rock sole, flathead sole, and Pacific cod to the CDQ reserves. Sections 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A) and 679.31(a) also require allocation of 10 percent of the BS pollock TACs to the pollock CDQ directed fishing allowance (DFA). The entire Bogoslof District pollock TAC is allocated as an ICA pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(ii) because the Bogoslof Area is closed to directed fishing for pollock by regulation (§ 679.22(a)(7)(i)(B)). With the exception of the hook-and-line or pot gear sablefish CDQ reserve, the regulations do not further apportion the CDQ reserves by gear.

Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(*1*), NMFS proposes a pollock ICA of 3.9 percent or 47,731 mt of the BS pollock TAC after subtracting the 10 percent CDQ reserve. This allowance is based on NMFS' examination of the pollock incidentally retained and discarded catch, including the incidental catch by CDQ vessels, in target fisheries other than pollock from 2000 through 2017. During this 18-year period, the pollock incidental catch ranged from a low of 2.4 percent in 2006 to a high of 4.8 percent in 2014, with a 18-year average of 3.3 percent. Pursuant to §§ 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(*2*)(*i*) and (*ii*), NMFS proposes a pollock ICA of 14 percent or 2,400 mt of the AI TAC after subtracting the 10-percent CDQ DFA. This allowance is based on NMFS' examination of the pollock incidental catch, including the incidental catch by CDQ vessels in target fisheries other than pollock from 2003 through 2017. During this 15-year period, the incidental catch of pollock ranged from a low of 5 percent in 2006 to a high of 17 percent in 2014, with a 15-year average of 8 percent.

Pursuant to §§ 679.20(a)(8) and (10), NMFS proposes ICAs of 4,000 mt of flathead sole, 6,000 mt of rock sole, 4,000 mt of yellowfin sole, 10 mt of Western Aleutian District Pacific ocean perch, 60 mt of Central Aleutian District Pacific ocean perch, 100 mt of Eastern Aleutian District Pacific ocean perch, 20

mt of Western Aleutian District Atka mackerel, 75 mt of Central Aleutian District Atka mackerel, and 800 mt of Eastern Aleutian District and Bering Sea subarea Atka mackerel after subtracting the 10.7 percent CDQ reserve. These ICAs are based on NMFS' examination of the average incidental retained and discarded catch in other target fisheries from 2003 through 2017.

The regulations do not designate the remainder of the non-specified reserve by species or species group. Any amount of the reserve may be apportioned to a target species that contributed to the non-specified reserve during the year, provided that such apportionments are consistent with § 679.20(a)(3) and do not result in overfishing (see § 679.20(b)(1)(i)).

Allocations of Pollock TAC Under the American Fisheries Act (AFA)

Section 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A) requires that BS pollock TAC be apportioned as a DFA, after subtracting 10 percent for the CDQ Program and 3.9 percent for the ICA, as follows: 50 percent to the inshore sector, 40 percent to the catcher/processor sector, and 10 percent to the mothership sector. In the BS, 45 percent of the DFA is allocated to the A season (January 20 to June 10) and 55 percent of the DFA is allocated to the B season (June 10 to November 1) (§§ 679.20(a)(5)(i)(B)(*1*) and 679.23(e)(2)). The AI directed pollock fishery allocation to the Aleut Corporation is the amount of pollock TAC remaining in the AI after subtracting 1,900 mt for the CDQ DFA (10 percent), and 2,400 mt for the ICA (§ 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(*2*)). In the AI, the total A season apportionment of the pollock TAC (including the AI directed fishery allocation, the CDQ allowance, and the ICA) may equal up to 40 percent of the ABC for AI pollock, and the remainder of the pollock TAC is allocated to the B season (§ 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(*3*)). Table 2 lists these proposed 2018 and 2019 amounts.

Section 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(*6*) sets harvest limits for pollock in the A season (January 20 to June 10) in Areas 543, 542, and 541. In Area 543, the A season pollock harvest limit is no more than 5 percent of the Aleutian Islands pollock ABC. In Area 542, the A season pollock harvest limit is no more than 15 percent of the Aleutian Islands pollock ABC. In Area 541, the A season pollock harvest limit is no more than 30 percent of the Aleutian Islands pollock ABC.

Section 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(*4*) also includes several specific requirements regarding BS pollock allocations. First, it requires that 8.5 percent of the pollock allocated to the catcher/processor sector be available for harvest by AFA catcher vessels with catcher/processor sector endorsements, unless the Regional Administrator receives a cooperative contract that allows the distribution of harvest among AFA catcher/processors and AFA catcher vessels in a manner agreed to by all members. Second, AFA catcher/processors not listed in the AFA are limited to harvesting not more than 0.5 percent of the pollock allocated to the catcher/processor sector. Table 2 lists the proposed 2018 and 2019 allocations of pollock TAC. Tables 13 through 16 list the AFA catcher/processor and catcher vessel harvesting sideboard limits. The BS inshore pollock cooperative and open access sector allocations are based on the submission of AFA inshore cooperative applications due to NMFS on December 1 of each calendar year. Because AFA inshore cooperative applications for 2018 have not been submitted to NMFS, and NMFS therefore cannot calculate 2018 allocations, NMFS has not included inshore cooperative text and tables in these proposed harvest specifications. NMFS will post 2018 AFA inshore pollock cooperative and open access sector allocations on the Alaska Region Web site at *http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov* prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2018, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date.

Table 2 also lists proposed seasonal apportionments of pollock and harvest limits within the Steller Sea Lion Conservation Area (SCA). The harvest of pollock within the SCA, as defined at § 679.22(a)(7)(vii), is limited to no more than 28 percent of the DFA before 12:00 noon, April 1, as provided in § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(C). The A season pollock SCA harvest limit will be apportioned to each sector in proportion to each sector's allocated percentage of the DFA. Table 2 lists these proposed 2018 and 2019 amounts by sector.

TABLE 2—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 ALLOCATIONS OF POLLOCK TACS TO THE DIRECTED POLLOCK FISHERIES AND TO THE CDQ DIRECTED FISHING ALLOWANCES (DFA) [1]

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Area and sector	2018 and 2019 allocations	A season [1]		B season [1]
		A season DFA	SCA harvest limit [2]	B season DFA
Bering Sea subarea TAC	1,359,858	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	135,986	61,194	38,076	74,792
ICA [1]	47,731	n/a	n/a	n/a
AFA Inshore	588,071	264,632	164,660	323,439
AFA Catcher/Processors [3]	470,456	211,705	131,728	258,751
Catch by C/Ps	430,468	193,710	n/a	236,757
Catch by C/Vs [3]	39,989	17,995	n/a	21,994
Unlisted C/P Limit [4]	2,352	1,059	n/a	1,294
AFA Motherships	117,614	52,926	32,932	64,688
Excessive Harvesting Limit [5]	205,825	n/a	n/a	n/a
Excessive Processing Limit [6]	352,842	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Bering Sea DFA (non-CDQ)	1,176,141	529,264	329,320	646,878
Aleutian Islands subarea ABC	40,788	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aleutian Islands subarea TAC	19,000	n/a	n/a	n/a
CDQ DFA	1,900	760	n/a	1,140
ICA	2,400	1,200	n/a	1,200
Aleut Corporation	14,700	14,355	n/a	345
Area harvest limit [7]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Area 541 harvest limit [7]	12,236	n/a	n/a	n/a
Area 542 harvest limit [7]	6,118	n/a	n/a	n/a
Area 543 harvest limit [7]	2,039	n/a	n/a	n/a

TABLE 2—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 ALLOCATIONS OF POLLOCK TACS TO THE DIRECTED POLLOCK FISHERIES AND TO THE CDQ DIRECTED FISHING ALLOWANCES (DFA) [1]—Continued

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Area and sector	2018 and 2019 allocations	A season [1]		B season [1]
		A season DFA	SCA harvest limit [2]	B season DFA
Bogoslof District ICA [8]	500	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A), the annual Bering Sea subarea pollock TAC, after subtracting the CDQ DFA (10 percent) and the ICA (3.9 percent), is allocated as a DFA as follows: inshore sector–50 percent, catcher/processor sector(C/Ps)–40 percent, and mothership sector—10 percent. In the Bering Sea subarea, 45 percent of the DFA is allocated to the A season (January 20–June 10) and 55 percent of the DFA is allocated to the B season (June 10–November 1). Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(*2*), the annual AI pollock TAC, after subtracting first for the CDQ DFA (10 percent) and second for the ICA (2,400 mt), is allocated to the Aleut Corporation for a directed pollock fishery. In the AI subarea, the A season is allocated up to 40 percent of the ABC, and the B season is allocated the remainder of the directed pollock fishery.

[2] In the Bering Sea subarea, pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(c), no more than 28 percent of each sector's annual DFA may be taken from the SCA before noon, April 1.

[3] Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(*4*), not less than 8.5 percent of the DFA allocated to listed C/Ps shall be available for harvest only by eligible catcher vessels (CVs) delivering to listed CPs.

[4] Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(*4*)(*iii*), the AFA unlisted C/Ps are limited to harvesting not more than 0.5 percent of the C/Ps sector's allocation of pollock.

[5] Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(*6*), NMFS establishes an excessive harvesting share limit equal to 17.5 percent of the sum of the non-CDQ pollock DFAs.

[6] Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(i)(A)(*7*), NMFS establishes an excessive processing share limit equal to 30.0 percent of the sum of the non-CDQ pollock DFAs.

[7] Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(5)(iii)(B)(*6*), NMFS establishes harvest limits for pollock in the A season in Area 541 no more than 30 percent, in Area 542 no more than 15 percent, and in Area 543 no more than 5 percent of the Aleutian Islands pollock ABC.

[8] Pursuant to § 679.22(a)(7)(i)(B), the amounts specified are for incidental catch only and are not apportioned by season or sector.

Allocation of the Atka Mackerel TACs

Section 679.20(a)(8) allocates the Atka mackerel TACs to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors, after subtracting the CDQ reserves, ICAs for the BSAI trawl limited access sector and non-trawl gear sectors, and the jig gear allocation (Table 3). The percentage of the ITAC for Atka mackerel allocated to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors is listed in Table 33 to 50 CFR part 679 and in § 679.91. Pursuant to § 679.20(a)(8)(i), up to 2 percent of the Eastern Aleutian District and Bering Sea subarea Atka mackerel TAC may be allocated to vessels using jig gear. The percent of this allocation is recommended annually by the Council based on several criteria, including the anticipated harvest capacity of the jig gear fleet. The Council recommended, and NMFS proposes, a 0.5 percent allocation of the Atka mackerel TAC in the Eastern Aleutian District and Bering Sea subarea to jig gear in 2018 and 2019. This percentage is applied to the TAC after subtracting the CDQ reserve.

Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(A) apportions the Atka mackerel TAC into two equal seasonal allowances. Section 679.23(e)(3) sets the first seasonal allowance for directed fishing with trawl gear from January 20 through June 10 (A season), and the second seasonal allowance from June 10 through December 31 (B season). Section 679.23(e)(4)(iii) applies Atka mackerel seasons to CDQ Atka mackerel fishing. The ICA and jig gear allocations are not apportioned by season.

Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(*1*)(*i*) and (*ii*) limits Atka mackerel catch within waters 0 nm to 20 nm of Steller sea lion sites listed in Table 6 to 50 CFR part 679 and located west of 178° W longitude to no more than 60 percent of the annual TACs in Areas 542 and 543, and equally divides the annual TAC between the A and B seasons as defined at § 679.23(e)(3). Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(*2*) requires the annual TAC in Area 543 will be no more than 65 percent of the ABC in Area 543. Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(D) requires that any unharvested Atka mackerel A season allowance that is added to the B season be prohibited from being harvested within waters 0 nm to 20 nm of Steller sea lion sites listed in Table 6 to 50 CFR part 679 and located in Areas 541, 542, and 543.

One Amendment 80 cooperative has formed for the 2018 fishing year. Because all Amendment 80 vessels are part of the cooperative, no allocation to the Amendment 80 limited access sector is required.

Table 3 lists the 2018 and 2019 Atka mackerel season allowances, area allowances, and the sector allocations. The 2019 allocations for Atka mackerel between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2018. NMFS will post 2019 Amendment 80 cooperatives and Amendment 80 limited access allocations on the Alaska Region Web site at *http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov* prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2019, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date.

TABLE 3—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 SEASONAL AND SPATIAL ALLOWANCES, GEAR SHARES, CDQ RESERVE, INCIDENTAL CATCH ALLOWANCE, AND AMENDMENT 80 ALLOCATIONS OF THE BSAI ATKA MACKEREL TAC

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector [1]	Season [2 3 4]	2018 and 2019 allocation by area		
		Eastern Aleutian District/Bering Sea	Central Aleutian District [5]	Western Aleutian District [5]
TAC	n/a	34,000	21,500	13,910

TABLE 3—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 SEASONAL AND SPATIAL ALLOWANCES, GEAR SHARES, CDQ RESERVE, INCIDENTAL CATCH ALLOWANCE, AND AMENDMENT 80 ALLOCATIONS OF THE BSAI ATKA MACKEREL TAC—Continued

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector [1]	Season [2 3 4]	2018 and 2019 allocation by area		
		Eastern Aleutian District/Bering Sea	Central Aleutian District [5]	Western Aleutian District [5]
CDQ reserve	Total	3,638	2,301	1,488
	A	1,819	1,150	744
	Critical habitat [5]	n/a	690	447
	B	1,819	1,150	744
	Critical habitat [5]	n/a	690	447
non-CDQ TAC	n/a	30,362	19,200	12,422
Jig [6]	Total	152	.....	.....
ICA	Total	800	75	20
BSAI trawl limited access	Total	2,941	1,912	.....
	A	1,471	956	.....
	Critical habitat [5]	n/a	574	.....
	B	1,471	956	.....
	Critical habitat [5]	n/a	574	.....
Amendment 80	Total	26,469	17,212	12,402
	A	13,235	8,606	6,201
	Critical habitat [5]	n/a	5,164	3,720
	B	13,235	8,606	6,201
	Critical habitat [5]	n/a	5,164	3,720

[1] Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii) allocates the Atka mackerel TACs, after subtracting the CDQ reserves, the jig gear allocation, and ICAs, to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors. The allocation of the ITAC for Atka mackerel to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors is established in Table 33 to part 679 and § 679.91. The CDQ reserve is 10.7 percent of the TAC for use by CDQ participants (see §§ 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C) and 679.31).

[2] Sections 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(A) and 679.22(a) establish temporal and spatial limitations for the Atka mackerel fishery.

[3] The seasonal allowances of Atka mackerel are 50 percent in the A season and 50 percent in the B season.

[4] Section 679.23(e)(3) authorizes directed fishing for Atka mackerel with trawl gear during the A season from January 20 to June 10, and the B season from June 10 to December 31.

[5] Section 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(*1*)(*i*) limits no more than 60 percent of the annual TACs in Areas 542 and 543 to be caught inside of Steller sea lion critical habitat; § 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(*1*)(*ii*) equally divides the annual TACs between the A and B seasons as defined at § 679.23(e)(3); and § 679.20(a)(8)(ii)(C)(*2*) requires the TAC in Area 543 shall be no more than 65 percent of ABC in Area 543.

[6] Section 679.20(a)(8)(i) requires that up to 2 percent of the Eastern Aleutian District and Bering Sea subarea TAC be allocated to jig gear after subtraction of the CDQ reserve. The amount of this allocation is proposed at 0.5 percent. The jig gear allocation is not apportioned by season.

Allocation of the Pacific Cod TAC

The Council separated Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands subarea OFLs, ABCs, and TACs for Pacific cod in 2014 (79 FR 12108, March 4, 2014). Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C) allocates 10.7 percent of the BS TAC and the AI TAC to the CDQ Program. After CDQ allocations have been deducted from the respective BS and AI Pacific cod TACs, the remaining BS and AI Pacific cod TACs are combined for calculating further BSAI Pacific cod sector allocations. If the non-CDQ Pacific cod TAC is or will be reached in either the BS or the AI, NMFS will prohibit non-CDQ directed fishing for Pacific cod in that subarea, as provided in § 679.20(d)(1)(iii).

As explained earlier in the ''Proposed ABC and TAC Harvest Specifications'' section, the Council recommended reduced Pacific cod OFL, ABC, and TAC amounts in the BS as a result of preliminary data indicating a decrease in biomass. For the AI, the proposed OFL, ABC, and TAC amounts are unchanged from those amounts implemented through the final 2018 harvest specifications published in February 2017. The proposed amounts could likely change, including a further decrease, once the 2017 Pacific cod stock assessment is finalized, reviewed by the Council's Plan Team in November, and then subsequently reviewed by the SSC, AP, and Council in December 2017.

Sections 679.20(a)(7)(i) and (ii) allocate the Pacific cod TAC in the combined BSAI TAC, after subtracting 10.7 percent for the CDQ Program, as follows: 1.4 percent to vessels using jig gear, 2.0 percent to hook-and-line or pot catcher vessels less than 60 ft (18.3 m) length overall (LOA), 0.2 percent to hook-and-line catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 ft (18.3 m) LOA, 48.7 percent to hook-and-line catcher/processors, 8.4 percent to pot catcher vessels greater than or equal to 60 ft (18.3 m) LOA, 1.5 percent to pot catcher/processors, 2.3 percent to AFA trawl catcher/processors, 13.4 percent to the Amendment 80 sector, and 22.1 percent to trawl catcher vessels. The BSAI ICA for the hook-and-line and pot sectors will be deducted from the aggregate portion of BSAI Pacific cod TAC allocated to the hook-and-line and pot sectors. For 2018 and 2019, the Regional Administrator proposes a BSAI ICA of 400 mt, based on anticipated incidental catch by these sectors in other fisheries.

The BSAI ITAC allocation of Pacific cod to the Amendment 80 sector is established in Table 33 to 50 CFR part 679 and § 679.91. One Amendment 80 cooperative has formed for the 2018 fishing year. Because all Amendment 80 vessels are part of the cooperative, no allocation to the Amendment 80 limited access sector is required.

The 2019 allocations for Amendment 80 species between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2018. NMFS will post 2019 Amendment 80 cooperatives and Amendment 80 limited access allocations on the Alaska Region Web site at *http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov*

prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2019, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date.

The Pacific cod TAC is apportioned into seasonal allowances to disperse the Pacific cod fisheries over the fishing year (see §§ 679.20(a)(7)(i)(B), 679.20 (a)(7)(iv)(A), and 679.23(e)(5)). In accordance with §§ 679.20(a)(7)(iv)(B) and (C), any unused portion of a seasonal Pacific cod allowance for any sector, except the jig sector, will become available at the beginning of that sector's next seasonal allowance.

Section 679.20(a)(7)(vii) requires the Regional Administrator to establish an Area 543 Pacific cod harvest limit based on Pacific cod abundance in Area 543. Based on the 2016 stock assessment, the Regional Administrator determined the Area 543 Pacific cod harvest limit to be 26.3 percent of the AI Pacific cod TAC for 2018 and 2019. NMFS will first subtract the State GHL Pacific cod amount from the AI Pacific cod ABC. Then NMFS will determine the harvest limit in Area 543 by multiplying the percentage of Pacific cod estimated in Area 543 by the remaining ABC for AI Pacific cod. Based on these calculations, the Area 543 harvest limit is 4,128 mt.

Section 679.20(a)(7)(viii) requires specification of the 2018 and 2019 Pacific cod allocations for the Aleutian Islands ICA, non-CDQ DFA, CV Harvest Set-Aside, and Unrestricted Fishery, as well as the Bering Sea Trawl CV A-Season Sector Limitation. If NMFS receives notification of intent to process AI Pacific cod from either the city of Adak or the city of Atka, the harvest limits in Table 4a will be in effect in 2018 or 2019. Notification of intent to process AI Pacific cod must be postmarked by October 31 of the previous year, and submitted electronically to NMFS by October 31 of the previous year.

Prior to October 31, 2017, NMFS received timely notice from the City of Adak indicating an intent to process AI Pacific cod in 2018. Accordingly, the harvest limits in Table 4a will be in effect in 2018, subject to the performance requirements outlined in § 679.20(a)(7)(viii).

Section 679.20(a)(7)(viii) contains specific performance requirements that (1) if less than 1,000 mt of the Aleutian Islands CV Harvest Set-Aside is delivered to Aleutian Islands shoreplants by February 28 of that year, the Aleutian Islands CV Harvest Set-Aside is lifted and the Bering Sea Trawl CV A-Season Sector Limitation is suspended; and (2) if the entire Aleutian Islands CV Harvest Set-Aside is fully harvested and delivered to Aleutian Islands shoreplants before March 15 of that year, the Bering Sea Trawl CV A-Season Sector Limitation is suspended.

The CDQ and non-CDQ seasonal allowances by gear based on the proposed 2018 and 2019 Pacific cod TACs are listed in Table 4 based on the sector allocation percentages of Pacific cod set forth at §§ 679.20(a)(7)(i)(B) and (a)(7)(iv)(A) and the seasonal allowances of Pacific cod set forth at § 679.23(e)(5).

TABLE 4—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 GEAR SHARES AND SEASONAL ALLOWANCES OF THE BSAI [1] PACIFIC COD TAC

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector	Percent	2018 and 2019 share of gear sector total	2018 and 2019 share of sector total	2018 and 2019 seasonal apportionment	
				Season	Amount
Total Bering Sea TAC	n/a	194,936	n/a	n/a	n/a
Bering Sea CDQ	n/a	20,858	n/a	See § 679.20(a)(7)(i)(B)	n/a
Bering Sea non-CDQ TAC	n/a	174,078	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total Aleutian Islands TAC	n/a	15,695	n/a	n/a	n/a
Aleutian Islands CDQ	n/a	1,679	n/a	See § 679.20(a)(7)(i)(B)	n/a
Aleutian Islands non-CDQ TAC	n/a	14,016	n/a	n/a	n/a
Western Aleutians Islands Limit	n/a	4,128	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total BSAI non-CDQ TAC [1]	100	188,093	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total hook-and-line/pot gear	60.8	114,361	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hook-and-line/pot ICA [2]	n/a	n/a	400	n/a	n/a
Hook-and-line/pot sub-total	n/a	113,961	n/a	n/a	n/a
Hook-and-line catcher/processors	48.7	n/a	91,281	Jan 1–Jun 10	46,553
				Jun 10–Dec 31	44,728
Hook-and-line catcher vessels ≥60 ft LOA.	0.2	n/a	375	Jan 1–Jun 10	191
				Jun 10–Dec 31	184
Pot catcher/processors	1.5	n/a	2,812	Jan 1–Jun 10	1,434
				Sept 1–Dec 31	1,378
Pot catcher vessels ≥60 ft LOA	8.4	n/a	15,745	Jan 1–Jun 10	8,030
				Sept–1–Dec 31	7,715
Catcher vessels <60 ft LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear.	2	n/a	3,749	n/a	n/a
Trawl catcher vessels	22.1	41,569	n/a	Jan 20–Apr 1	30,761
				Apr 1–Jun 10	4,573
				Jun 10–Nov 1	6,235
AFA trawl catcher/processors	2.3	4,326	n/a	Jan 20–Apr 1	3,245
				Apr 1–Jun 10	1,082
				Jun 10–Nov 1	0
Amendment 80	13.4	25,205	n/a	Jan 20–Apr 1	18,903
				Apr 1–Jun 10	6,301
				Jun 10–Nov 1	0
Jig	1.4	2,633	n/a	Jan 1–Apr 30	1,580
				Apr 30–Aug 31	527
				Aug 31–Dec 31	527

[1] The gear shares and seasonal allowances for BSAI Pacific cod TAC are based on the sum of the BS and AI Pacific cod TACs, after subtraction of CDQ. If the TAC for Pacific cod in either the AI or BS is reached, then directed fishing for Pacific cod in that subarea may be prohibited, even if a BSAI allowance remains.

[2] The ICA for the hook-and-line and pot sectors will be deducted from the aggregate portion of Pacific cod TAC allocated to the hook-and-line and pot sectors. The Regional Administrator proposes an ICA of 400 mt for 2018 and 2019 based on anticipated incidental catch in these fisheries.

TABLE 4a—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 BSAI A-SEASON PACIFIC COD LIMITS IF ALEUTIAN ISLANDS SHOREPLANTS INTEND TO PROCESS PACIFIC COD [1]

2018 and 2019 allocations under Aleutian Islands CV harvest set-aside	Amount (mt)
AI non-CDQ TAC	14,016
AI ICA	2,500
AI DFA	11,516
BS non-CDQ TAC	174,078
BSAI Trawl CV A-Season Allocation	30,761
BSAI Trawl CV A-Season Allocation minus Sector Limitation [2]	25,761
BS Trawl CV A-Season Sector Limitation	5,000
AI CV Harvest Set-Aside	5,000
AI Unrestricted Fishery	6,516

[1] These allocations will apply in 2018 or 2019 only if NMFS receives notice of intent to process AI Pacific cod by October 31 of the previous year, pursuant to § 679.20(a)(7)(viii), and if the performance requirements set forth in § 679.20(a)(7)(viii) are likewise met. Prior to October 31, 2017, NMFS received timely notice from the City of Adak indicating an intent to process AI Pacific cod for the 2018 season. Accordingly, the harvest limits in Table 4a will be in effect in 2018, subject to the performance requirements outlined in § 679.20(a)(7)(viii).

[2] This is the amount of the BSAI trawl CV A season allocation that may be harvested in the Bering Sea prior to March 21 of that year, unless modified because the performance requirements were not met.

Sablefish Gear Allocation

Sections 679.20(a)(4)(iii) and (iv) require allocation of sablefish TACs for the BS and AI between trawl gear and hook-and-line or pot gear. Gear allocations of the TACs for the BS are 50 percent for trawl gear and 50 percent for hook-and-line or pot gear. Gear allocations for the TACs for the AI are 25 percent for trawl gear and 75 percent for hook-and-line or pot gear. Section 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(B) requires NMFS to apportion 20 percent of the hook-and-line or pot gear allocation of sablefish to the CDQ reserve. Additionally, § 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(D)(*1*) requires that 7.5 percent of the trawl gear allocation of sablefish from the non-specified reserves, established under § 679.20(b)(1)(i), be apportioned to the CDQ reserve. The Council has recommended that only trawl sablefish TAC be established biennially. The harvest specifications for the hook-and-line gear or pot gear sablefish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) fisheries are limited to the 2018 fishing year to ensure those fisheries are conducted concurrently with the halibut IFQ fishery. Concurrent sablefish and halibut IFQ fisheries reduce the potential for discards of halibut and sablefish in those fisheries. The sablefish IFQ fisheries remain closed at the beginning of each fishing year until the final harvest specifications for the sablefish IFQ fisheries are in effect. Table 5 lists the proposed 2018 and 2019 gear allocations of the sablefish TAC and CDQ reserve amounts.

TABLE 5—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 GEAR SHARES AND CDQ RESERVE OF BSAI SABLEFISH TACS

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Subarea and gear	Percent of TAC	2018 Share of TAC	2018 ITAC [1]	2018 CDQ reserve	2019 Share of TAC	2019 ITAC	2019 CDQ reserve
Bering Sea:							
Trawl	50	637	541	48	637	541	48
Hook-and-line gear/pot [2]	50	637	n/a	127	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	100	1,274	541	175	637	541	48
Aleutian Islands:							
Trawl	25	434	369	33	434	369	33
Hook-and-line gear/pot [2]	75	1,301	n/a	260	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	100	1,735	369	293	434	369	33

[1] Except for the sablefish hook-and-line or pot gear allocation, 15 percent of TAC is apportioned to the non-specified reserve. The ITAC is the remainder of the TAC after the subtraction of these reserves.

[2] For the portion of the sablefish TAC allocated to vessels using hook-and-line or pot gear, 20 percent of the allocated TAC is reserved for use by CDQ participants § 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(B)). The Council recommended that specifications for the hook-and-line or pot gear sablefish IFQ fisheries be limited to one year.

Note: Seasonal or sector apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

Allocation of the Aleutian Islands Pacific Ocean Perch, and BSAI Flathead Sole, Rock Sole, and Yellowfin Sole TACs

Sections 679.20(a)(10)(i) and (ii) require that NMFS allocate AI Pacific ocean perch, and BSAI flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole TACs between the Amendment 80 sector and the BSAI trawl limited access sector, after subtracting 10.7 percent for the CDQ reserve and an ICA for the BSAI trawl limited access sector and vessels using non-trawl gear. The allocation of the ITAC for AI Pacific ocean perch, and BSAI flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole to the Amendment 80 sector is established in Tables 33 and 34 to 50 CFR part 679 and in § 679.91.

One Amendment 80 cooperative has formed for the 2018 fishing year. Because all Amendment 80 vessels are part of the cooperative, no allocation to the Amendment 80 limited access sector is required.

The 2019 allocations for Amendment 80 species between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2018. NMFS will post 2019 Amendment 80 cooperatives and Amendment 80 limited access allocations on the Alaska Region Web site at *http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov* prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2019, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date. Table 6 lists the proposed 2018 and 2019 allocations of the AI Pacific ocean perch, and BSAI flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole TACs.

TABLE 6—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT QUOTA (CDQ) RESERVES, INCIDENTAL CATCH AMOUNTS (ICAS), AND AMENDMENT 80 ALLOCATIONS OF THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS PACIFIC OCEAN PERCH, AND BSAI FLATHEAD SOLE, ROCK SOLE, AND YELLOWFIN SOLE TACS

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector	2018 and 2019 allocations					
	Pacific ocean perch			Flathead sole	Rock sole	Yellowfin sole
	Eastern Aleutian District	Central Aleutian District	Western Aleutian District	BSAI	BSAI	BSAI
TAC	9,900	7,500	12,000	15,500	50,100	154,000
CDQ	1,059	803	1,284	1,659	5,361	16,478
ICA	100	60	10	4,000	6,000	4,000
BSAI trawl limited access	874	664	214	0	0	18,351
Amendment 80	7,867	5,974	10,492	9,842	38,739	115,171

Section 679.2 defines the ABC surplus for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole as the difference between the annual ABC and TAC for each species. Section 679.20(b)(1)(iii) establishes ABC reserves for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole. The ABC surpluses and the ABC reserves are necessary to mitigate the operational variability, environmental conditions, and economic factors that may constrain the CDQ groups and the Amendment 80 cooperatives from achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield in the BSAI groundfish fisheries. NMFS, after consultation with the Council, may set the ABC reserve at or below the ABC surplus for each species thus maintaining the TAC below ABC limits. An amount equal to 10.7 percent of the ABC reserves will be allocated as CDQ ABC reserves for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole. The Amendment 80 ABC reserves shall be the ABC reserves minus the CDQ ABC reserves. Section 679.91(i)(2) establishes each Amendment 80 cooperative ABC reserve to be the ratio of each cooperatives' quota share units and the total Amendment 80 quota share units, multiplied by the Amendment 80 ABC reserve for each respective species. Table 7 lists the 2018 and 2019 ABC surplus and ABC reserves for BSAI flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole.

TABLE 7—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 ABC SURPLUS, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT QUOTA (CDQ) ABC RESERVES, AND AMENDMENT 80 ABC RESERVES IN THE BSAI FOR FLATHEAD SOLE, ROCK SOLE, AND YELLOWFIN SOLE

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Sector	Flathead sole	Rock sole	Yellowfin sole
ABC	66,164	143,100	250,800
TAC	15,500	50,100	154,000
ABC surplus	50,664	93,000	96,800
ABC reserve	50,664	93,000	96,800
CDQ ABC reserve	5,421	9,951	10,358
Amendment 80 ABC reserve	45,243	83,049	86,442

Proposed PSC Limits for Halibut, Salmon, Crab, and Herring

Sections 679.21(b), (e), (f), and (g) set forth the BSAI PSC limits. Pursuant to § 679.21(b)(1), the 2018 and 2019 BSAI halibut PSC limits total 3,515 mt. Section 679.21(b)(1) allocates 315 mt of the halibut PSC limit as the PSQ reserve for use by the groundfish CDQ Program, 1,745 mt of halibut PSC limit for the Amendment 80 sector, 745 mt of halibut PSC limit for the BSAI trawl limited access sector, and 710 mt of halibut PSC limit for the BSAI non-trawl sector.

Sections 679.21(b)(1)(iii)(A) and (B) authorize apportionment of the BSAI non-trawl halibut PSC limit into PSC allowances among six fishery categories, and § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(A) and (B), (e)(3)(i)(B), and (e)(3)(iv) require apportionment of the BSAI trawl limited

access halibut and crab PSC limits into PSC allowances among seven fishery categories. Table 10 lists the proposed fishery PSC allowances for the BSAI trawl limited access fisheries, and Table 11 lists the proposed fishery PSC allowances for the non-trawl fisheries.

Pursuant to Section 3.6 of the FMP, the Council recommends, and NMFS proposes, that certain specified non-trawl fisheries be exempt from the halibut PSC limit. As in past years, after consultation with the Council, NMFS exempts pot gear, jig gear, and the sablefish IFQ hook-and-line gear fishery categories from halibut bycatch restrictions for the following reasons: (1) The pot gear fisheries have low halibut bycatch mortality; (2) NMFS estimates halibut mortality for the jig gear fleet to be negligible because of the small size of the fishery and the selectivity of the gear; and (3) the sablefish and halibut IFQ fisheries have low halibut bycatch mortality because the IFQ Program requires legal-size halibut to be retained by vessels using hook-and-line gear if a halibut IFQ permit holder or a hired master is aboard and is holding unused halibut IFQ for that vessel category and the IFQ regulatory area in which the vessel is operating (§ 679.7(f)(11)).

As of November 2017, total groundfish catch for the pot gear fishery in the BSAI was 42,662 mt, with an associated halibut bycatch mortality of 3 mt. The 2017 jig gear fishery harvested about 13 mt of groundfish. Most vessels in the jig gear fleet are exempt from observer coverage requirements. As a result, observer data are not available on halibut bycatch in the jig gear fishery. As mentioned above, NMFS estimates a negligible amount of halibut bycatch mortality because of the selective nature of jig gear and the low mortality rate of halibut caught with jig gear and released.

Under § 679.21(f)(2), NMFS annually allocates portions of either 33,318, 45,000, 47,591, or 60,000 Chinook salmon PSC limits among the AFA sectors, depending on past bycatch performance, on whether Chinook salmon bycatch incentive plan agreements (IPAs) are formed, and on whether NMFS determines it is a low Chinook salmon abundance year. NMFS will determine that it is a low Chinook salmon abundance year when abundance of Chinook salmon in western Alaska is less than or equal to 250,000 Chinook salmon. The State provides to NMFS an estimate of Chinook salmon abundance using the 3-System Index for western Alaska based on the Kuskokwim, Unalakleet, and Upper Yukon aggregate stock grouping.

If an AFA sector participates in an approved IPA and has not exceeded its performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6) and if it is not a low Chinook salmon abundance year, then NMFS will allocate a portion of the 60,000 Chinook salmon PSC limit to that sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(A). If no IPA is approved, or if the sector has exceeded its performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6), and it is not a low abundance year, NMFS will allocate a portion of the 47,591 Chinook salmon PSC limit to that sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(C). If an AFA sector participates in an approved IPA and has not exceeded its performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6) in a low abundance year, then NMFS will allocate a portion of the 45,000 Chinook salmon PSC limit to that sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(B). If no IPA is approved, or if the sector has exceeded its performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6) in a low abundance year, NMFS will allocate a portion of the 33,318 Chinook salmon PSC limit to that sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(D).

As of October 1, 2017, NMFS has determined that it is not a low Chinook salmon abundance year, based on the State's estimate that Chinook salmon abundance in western Alaska is greater than 250,000 Chinook salmon. Therefore, in 2018, the Chinook salmon PSC limit is 60,000 Chinook salmon, allocated to each sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(A). The AFA sector Chinook salmon allocations are also seasonally apportioned with 70 percent of the allocation for the A season pollock fishery, and 30 percent of the allocation for the B season pollock fishery, as provided in § 679.21(f)(3)(i) and § 679.23(e)(2). Additionally, in 2017, the Chinook salmon bycatch performance standard under § 679.21(f)(6) is 47,591 Chinook salmon, allocated to each sector as specified in § 679.21(f)(3)(iii)(C).

The basis for these PSC limits is described in detail in the final rule implementing management measures for Amendment 91 (75 FR 53026, August 30, 2010) and Amendment 110 (81 FR 37534, June 10, 2016). NMFS publishes the approved IPAs, allocations, and reports at *http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/bycatch/default.htm.*

Section 679.21(g)(2)(i) specifies 700 fish as the 2018 and 2019 Chinook salmon PSC limit for the AI pollock fishery. Section 679.21(g)(2)(ii) allocates 7.5 percent, or 53 Chinook salmon, as the AI PSQ reserve for the CDQ Program and allocates the remaining 647 Chinook salmon to the non-CDQ fisheries.

Section 679.21(f)(14)(i) specifies 42,000 fish as the 2018 and 2019 non-Chinook salmon PSC limit in the Catcher Vessel Operational Area (CVOA). Section 679.21(f)(14)(ii) allocates 10.7 percent, or 4,494, non-Chinook salmon in the CVOA as the PSQ reserve for the CDQ Program, and allocates the remaining 37,506 non-Chinook salmon in the CVOA to the non-CDQ fisheries.

PSC limits for crab and herring are specified annually based on abundance and spawning biomass. Due to the lack of new information as of October 2017 regarding herring PSC limits and apportionments, the Council recommended and NMFS proposes basing the herring 2018 and 2019 PSC limits and apportionments on the 2016 survey data. The Council will reconsider these amounts in December 2017.

Section 679.21(e)(3)(i)(A)(*1*) allocates 10.7 percent of each trawl gear PSC limit specified for crab as a PSQ reserve for use by the groundfish CDQ Program.

Based on 2017 survey data, the red king crab mature female abundance is estimated at 18.5 million red king crabs, and the effective spawning biomass is estimated at 39,776 million lbs (18,042 mt). Based on the criteria set out at § 679.21(e)(1)(i), the proposed 2018 and 2019 PSC limit of red king crab in Zone 1 for trawl gear is 97,000 animals. This limit derives from the mature female abundance estimate of more than 8.4 million red king crab and the effective spawning biomass estimate of more than 14.5 million lbs (6,577 mt) but less than 55 million lbs (24,948 mt).

Section 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)(*2*) establishes criteria under which NMFS must specify an annual red king crab bycatch limit for the Red King Crab Savings Subarea (RKCSS). The regulations limit the RKCSS bycatch to up to 25 percent of the red king crab PSC allowance based on the need to optimize the groundfish harvest relative to red king crab bycatch. NMFS proposes the Council's recommendation that the red king crab bycatch limit be equal to 25 percent of the red king crab PSC allowance within the RKCSS (Table 9). Based on 2017 survey data, Tanner crab (*Chionoecetes bairdi*) abundance is estimated at 344 million animals. Pursuant to criteria set out at § 679.21(e)(1)(ii), the calculated 2018 and 2019 *C. bairdi* crab PSC limit for trawl gear is 830,000 animals in Zone 1, and 2,520,000 animals in Zone 2. The limit in Zone 1 is based on the abundance of *C. bairdi* estimated at 344 million animals, which is greater than

270 million and less than 400 million animals. The limit in Zone 2 is based on the abundance of *C. bairdi* estimated at 344 million animals, which is greater than 290 million animals and less than 400 million animals.

Pursuant to § 679.21(e)(1)(iii), the PSC limit for snow crab (*C. opilio*) is based on total abundance as indicated by the NMFS annual bottom trawl survey. The *C. opilio* crab PSC limit in the *C. opilio* bycatch limitation zone (COBLZ) is set at 0.1133 percent of the Bering Sea abundance index minus 150,000 crabs. Based on the 2017 survey estimate of 8.182 billion animals, which is above the minimum PSC limit of 4.5 million and below the maximum PSC limit of 13 million animals, the calculated *C. opilio* crab PSC limit is 9,120,539 animals.

Pursuant to § 679.21(e)(1)(v), the PSC limit of Pacific herring caught while conducting any trawl operation for BSAI groundfish is 1 percent of the annual eastern Bering Sea herring biomass. The best estimate of 2018 and 2019 herring biomass is 201,278 mt. This amount was developed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game based on biomass for spawning aggregations. Therefore, the herring PSC limit proposed for 2018 and 2019 is 2,013 mt for all trawl gear as listed in Tables 8 and 9.

Section 679.21(e)(3)(i)(A) requires PSQ reserves to be subtracted from the total trawl PSC limits. The 2018 crab and halibut PSC limits assigned to the Amendment 80 and BSAI trawl limited access sectors are specified in Table 35 to 50 CFR part 679. The resulting allocations of PSC limits to CDQ PSQ, the Amendment 80 sector, and the BSAI trawl limited access sector are listed in Table 8.

One Amendment 80 cooperative has formed for the 2018 fishing year. Because all Amendment 80 vessels are part of the cooperative, no allocation to the Amendment 80 limited access sector is required.

The 2019 PSC limit allocations between Amendment 80 cooperatives and the Amendment 80 limited access sector will not be known until eligible participants apply for participation in the program by November 1, 2018. NMFS will post 2019 Amendment 80 cooperatives and Amendment 80 limited access allocations on the Alaska Region Web site at *http://alaska fisheries.noaa.gov* prior to the start of the fishing year on January 1, 2019, based on the harvest specifications effective on that date.

Sections 679.21(b)(2) and (e)(5) authorize NMFS, after consulting with the Council, to establish seasonal apportionments of PSC amounts for the BSAI non-trawl, BSAI trawl limited access, and Amendment 80 limited access sectors to maximize the ability of the fleet to harvest the available groundfish TAC and to minimize bycatch. The factors considered are (1) seasonal distribution of prohibited species, (2) seasonal distribution of target groundfish species relative to prohibited species distribution, (3) PSC bycatch needs on a seasonal basis relevant to prohibited species biomass and expected catches of target groundfish species, (4) expected variations in bycatch rates throughout the year, (5) expected changes in directed groundfish fishing seasons, (6) expected start of fishing effort, and (7) economic effects of seasonal PSC apportionments on industry sectors. The Council recommended and NMFS proposes the seasonal PSC apportionments in Tables 10 and 11 to maximize harvest among gear types, fisheries, and seasons while minimizing bycatch of PSC based on the above criteria.

TABLE 8—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 APPORTIONMENT OF PROHIBITED SPECIES CATCH ALLOWANCES TO NON-TRAWL GEAR, THE CDQ PROGRAM, AMENDMENT 80, AND THE BSAI TRAWL LIMITED ACCESS SECTORS

PSC species and area [1]	Total PSC	Non-trawl PSC	CDQ PSQ reserve [2]	Trawl PSC remaining after CDQ PSQ	Amendment 80 sector [3]	BSAI trawl limited access fishery
Halibut mortality (mt) BSAI	3,515	710	315	n/a	1,745	745
Herring (mt) BSAI	2,013	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Red king crab (animals) Zone 1	97,000	n/a	10,379	86,621	43,293	26,489
C. opilio (animals) COBLZ	9,120,539	n/a	975,898	8,144,641	4,003,091	2,617,688
C. bairdi crab (animals) Zone 1	830,000	n/a	88,810	741,190	312,115	348,285
C. bairdi crab (animals) Zone 2	2,520,000	n/a	269,640	2,250,360	532,660	1,053,394

[1] Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of zones.
[2] The PSQ reserve for crab species is 10.7 percent of each crab PSC limit.
[3] The Amendment 80 program reduced apportionment of the trawl PSC limits for crab below the total PSC limit. These reductions are not apportioned to other gear types or sectors.

TABLE 9—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 HERRING AND RED KING CRAB SAVINGS SUBAREA PROHIBITED SPECIES CATCH ALLOWANCES FOR ALL TRAWL SECTORS

Fishery categories	Herring (mt) BSAI	Red king crab (animals) Zone 1
Yellowfin sole	100	n/a
Rock sole/flathead sole/other flatfish [1]	43	n/a
Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/Kamchatka flounder/sablefish	5	n/a
Rockfish	5	n/a
Pacific cod	10	n/a
Midwater trawl pollock	1,800	n/a
Pollock/Atka mackerel/other species [2 3]	50	n/a
Red king crab savings subarea non-pelagic trawl gear [4]	n/a	24,250
Total trawl PSC	2,013	97,000

[1] "Other flatfish" for PSC monitoring includes all flatfish species, except for halibut (a prohibited species), arrowtooth flounder, flathead sole, Greenland turbot, Kamchatka flounder, rock sole, and yellowfin sole.
[2] Pollock other than midwater trawl pollock, Atka mackerel, and "other species" fishery category.

[3] "Other species" for PSC monitoring includes sculpins, sharks, skates, squids, and octopuses.
[4] In October 2017 the Council recommended that the red king crab bycatch limit for non-pelagic trawl fisheries within the RKCSS be limited to 25 percent of the red king crab PSC allowance (see § 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)(*2*)).
Note: Species apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

TABLE 10—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 PROHIBITED SPECIES BYCATCH ALLOWANCES FOR THE BSAI TRAWL LIMITED ACCESS SECTOR

BSAI trawl limited access fisheries	Prohibited species and area [1]				
	Halibut mortality (mt) BSAI	Red king crab (animals) Zone 1	*C. opilio* (animals) COBLZ	*C. bairdi* (animals)	
				Zone 1	Zone 2
Yellowfin sole	150	23,338	2,467,662	293,234	1,005,879
Rock sole/flathead sole/other flatfish [2]					0
Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/Kamchatka flounder/ sablefish					0
Rockfish April 15–December 31	4		4,076		849
Pacific cod	391	2,954	105,182	50,816	42,424
Pollock/Atka mackerel/other species [3]	200	197	40,768	4,235	4,243
Total BSAI trawl limited access PSC	745	26,489	2,617,688	348,285	1,053,394

[1] Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of areas.
[2] "Other flatfish" for PSC monitoring includes all flatfish species, except for halibut (a prohibited species), arrowtooth flounder, flathead sole, Greenland turbot, Kamchatka flounder, rock sole, and yellowfin sole.
[3] "Other species" for PSC monitoring includes sculpins, sharks, skates, squids, and octopuses.
Note: Species apportionments may not total precisely due to rounding.

TABLE 11—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 HALIBUT PROHIBITED SPECIES BYCATCH ALLOWANCES FOR NON-TRAWL FISHERIES

		Halibut mortality (mt) BSAI		
Non-trawl fisheries	Seasons	Catcher/ processor	Catcher vessel	All non-trawl
Pacific cod	Annual Pacific cod	648	13	n/a.
	January 1–June 10	388	9	n/a.
	June 10–August 15	162	2	n/a.
	August 15–December 31	98	2	n/a.
Non-Pacific cod non-trawl-Total	May 1–December 31	n/a	n/a	49.
Groundfish pot and jig	n/a	n/a	n/a	Exempt.
Sablefish hook-and-line	n/a	n/a	n/a	Exempt.
Total for all non-trawl PSC	n/a	n/a	n/a	710.

Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

To monitor halibut bycatch mortality allowances and apportionments, the Regional Administrator uses observed halibut incidental catch rates, halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs), and estimates of groundfish catch to project when a fishery's halibut bycatch mortality allowance or seasonal apportionment is reached. Halibut incidental catch rates are based on observers' estimates of halibut incidental catch in the groundfish fishery. DMRs are estimates of the proportion of incidentally caught halibut that do not survive after being returned to the sea. The cumulative halibut mortality that accrues to a particular halibut PSC limit is the product of a DMR multiplied by the estimated halibut PSC. DMRs are estimated using the best scientific information available in conjunction with the annual BSAI stock assessment process. The DMR methodology and findings are included as an appendix to the annual BSAI groundfish SAFE report.

In 2016, the DMR estimation methodology underwent revisions per the Council's directive. An interagency halibut working group (IPHC, Council, and NMFS staff) developed improved estimation methods that have undergone review by the Plan Team, SSC, and the Council. A summary of the revised methodology is included in the BSAI proposed 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications (81 FR 87863, December 6, 2016), and the comprehensive discussion of the working group's statistical methodology is available from the Council (see **ADDRESSES**). The DMR working group's revised methodology is intended to improve estimation accuracy, as well as transparency and transferability in the methodology used, for calculating DMRs. The working group will continue to consider improvements to the methodology used to calculate halibut mortality, including potential changes to the reference period (the period of data used for calculating the DMRs). Future DMRs may change based on additional years of observer sampling, which could provide more recent and accurate data and which could improve the accuracy of estimation and progress on methodology. The new methodology will continue to ensure that NMFS is using DMRs that more accurately reflect halibut mortality, which will inform the different sectors of their estimated halibut mortality and allow specific sectors to respond with methods that could reduce mortality and, eventually, the DMR for that sector.

At the December 2016 meeting, the SSC, AP, and Council concurred in the revised DMR estimation methodology, and NMFS adopted the DMRs calculated under the revised methodology for the 2016 and 2017 harvest specifications. In October 2017,

the Council recommended adopting the halibut DMRs derived from the 2016 process for the proposed 2018 and 2019 DMRs. The proposed 2018 and 2019 DMRs maintain the new estimation method adopted in 2016 using an updated 3-year reference period of 2014 through 2016. The proposed DMR for motherships and catcher/processors using non-pelagic trawl gear decreased to 84 percent from 85 percent, the proposed DMR for catcher vessels using non-pelagic trawl gear increased to 60 percent from 52 percent, the proposed DMR for catcher vessels using hook-and-line gear increased to 17 percent from 14 percent, and the proposed DMR for pot gear increased to 9 percent from 6 percent. Table 12 lists the proposed 2018 and 2019 DMRs.

TABLE 12—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 PACIFIC HALIBUT DISCARD MORTALITY RATES FOR THE BSAI

Gear	Sector	Halibut discard mortality rate (percent)
Pelagic trawl	All	100
Non-pelagic trawl	Mothership and catcher/processor	84
Non-pelagic trawl	Catcher vessel	60
Hook-and-line	Catcher vessel	17
Hook-and-line	Catcher/processor	8
Pot	All	9

Listed AFA Catcher/Processor Sideboard Limits

Pursuant to § 679.64(a), the Regional Administrator is responsible for restricting the ability of listed AFA catcher/processors to engage in directed fishing for groundfish species other than pollock to protect participants in other groundfish fisheries from adverse effects resulting from the AFA and from fishery cooperatives in the directed pollock fishery. These restrictions are set out as ''sideboard'' limits on catch. The basis for these proposed sideboard limits is described in detail in the final rules implementing the major provisions of the AFA (67 FR 79692, December 30, 2002) and Amendment 80 (72 FR 52668, September 14, 2007). Table 13 lists the proposed 2018 and 2019 catcher/processor sideboard limits.

All harvest of groundfish sideboard species by listed AFA catcher/processors, whether as targeted catch or incidental catch, will be deducted from the sideboard limits in Table 13. However, groundfish sideboard species that are delivered to listed AFA catcher/processors by catcher vessels will not be deducted from the 2018 and 2019 sideboard limits for the listed AFA catcher/processors.

TABLE 13—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 BSAI GROUNDFISH SIDEBOARD LIMITS FOR LISTED AMERICAN FISHERIES ACT CATCHER/PROCESSORS (C/PS)

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Target species	Area	1995–1997			2018 and 2019 ITAC available to all trawl C/Ps [1]	2018 and 2019 AFA C/P sideboard limit
		Retained catch	Total catch	Ratio of retained catch to total catch		
Sablefish trawl	BS	8	497	0.0160	541	9
	AI	.....	145	.....	369	.....
Greenland turbot	BS	121	17,305	0.0070	3,825	27
	AI	23	4,987	0.0050	106	1
Arrowtooth flounder	BSAI	76	33,987	0.0020	11,900	24
Kamchatka flounder	BSAI	76	33,987	0.0020	4,250	9
Rock sole	BSAI	6,317	169,362	0.0370	44,739	1,655
Flathead sole	BSAI	1,925	52,755	0.0360	13,842	498
Alaska plaice	BSAI	14	9,438	0.0010	11,050	11
Other flatfish	BSAI	3,058	52,298	0.0580	2,125	123
Pacific ocean perch	BS	12	4,879	0.0020	9,350	19
	Eastern AI	125	6,179	0.0200	8,841	177
	Central AI	3	5,698	0.0010	6,698	7
	Western AI	54	13,598	0.0040	10,716	43
Northern rockfish	BSAI	91	13,040	0.0070	4,250	30
Rougheye rockfish	EBS/EAI	50	2,811	0.0180	85	2
	CAI/WAI	50	2,811	0.0180	106	2
Shortraker rockfish	BSAI	50	2,811	0.0180	106	2
Other rockfish	BS	18	621	0.0290	276	8
	AI	22	806	0.0270	468	13
Atka mackerel	Central AI	n/a	n/a	0.1150	19,200	2,208
	A season [2]	n/a	n/a	0.1150	9,600	1,104
	B season [2]	n/a	n/a	0.1150	9,600	1,104
	Western AI	n/a	n/a	0.2000	12,422	2,484
	A season [2]	n/a	n/a	0.2000	6,211	1,242
	B season [2]	n/a	n/a	0.2000	6,211	1,242
Skates	BSAI	553	68,672	0.0080	22,100	177
Sculpins	BSAI	553	68,672	0.0080	3,825	31
Sharks	BSAI	553	68,672	0.0080	106	1

TABLE 13—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 BSAI GROUNDFISH SIDEBOARD LIMITS FOR LISTED AMERICAN FISHERIES ACT CATCHER/PROCESSORS (C/PS)—Continued

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Target species	Area	1995–1997			2018 and 2019 ITAC available to all trawl C/Ps [1]	2018 and 2019 AFA C/P sideboard limit
		Retained catch	Total catch	Ratio of retained catch to total catch		
Squids	BSAI	73	3,328	0.0220	1,141	25
Octopuses	BSAI	553	68,672	0.0080	340	3

[1] Aleutians Islands Pacific ocean perch, and BSAI Atka mackerel, flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole are multiplied by the remainder of the TAC after the subtraction of the CDQ reserve under § 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C).

[2] The seasonal apportionment of Atka mackerel in the open access fishery is 50 percent in the A season and 50 percent in the B season. Listed AFA catcher/processors are limited to harvesting no more than zero in the Eastern Aleutian District and Bering Sea subarea, 20 percent of the annual ITAC specified for the Western Aleutian District, and 11.5 percent of the annual ITAC specified for the Central Aleutian District.

Note: Section 679.64(a)(1)(v) exempts AFA catcher/processors from a yellowfin sole sideboard limit because the 2018 and 2019 aggregate ITAC of yellowfin sole assigned to the Amendment 80 sector and BSAI trawl limited access sector is greater than 125,000 mt.

Section 679.64(a)(2) and Tables 40 and 41 to 50 CFR part 679 establish a formula for calculating PSC sideboard limits for halibut and crab caught by listed AFA catcher/processors. The basis for these sideboard limits is described in detail in the final rules implementing the major provisions of the AFA (67 FR 79692, December 30, 2002) and Amendment 80 (72 FR 52668, September 14, 2007).

PSC species listed in Table 14 that are caught by listed AFA catcher/processors participating in any groundfish fishery other than pollock will accrue against the proposed 2018 and 2019 PSC sideboard limits for the listed AFA catcher/processors. Sections 679.21(b)(4)(iii), (e)(7), and (e)(3)(v) authorize NMFS to close directed fishing for groundfish other than pollock for listed AFA catcher/processors once a proposed 2018 or 2019 PSC sideboard limit listed in Table 14 is reached.

Pursuant to § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(C) and (e)(3)(ii)(C), halibut or crab PSC caught by listed AFA catcher/processors while fishing for pollock will accrue against the PSC allowances annually specified for the pollock/Atka mackerel/''other species'' fishery categories, according to § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(B) and (e)(3)(iv).

TABLE 14—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 BSAI PROHIBITED SPECIES SIDEBOARD LIMITS FOR AMERICAN FISHERIES ACT LISTED CATCHER/PROCESSORS

PSC species and area [1]	Ratio of PSC to total PSC	Proposed 2018 and 2019 PSC available to trawl vessels after subtraction of PSQ [2]	Proposed 2018 and 2019 C/P sideboard limit [2]
BSAI Halibut mortality	n/a	n/a	286
Red king crab Zone 1	0.007	86,621	606
C. opilio (COBLZ)	0.153	8,144,641	1,246,130
C. bairdi Zone 1	0.140	741,190	103,767
C. bairdi Zone 2	0.050	2,250,360	112,518

[1] Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of areas.

[2] Halibut amounts are in metric tons of halibut mortality. Crab amounts are in numbers of animals.

AFA Catcher Vessel Sideboard Limits

Pursuant to § 679.64(b), the Regional Administrator is responsible for restricting the ability of AFA catcher vessels to engage in directed fishing for groundfish species other than pollock to protect participants in other groundfish fisheries from adverse effects resulting from the AFA and from fishery cooperatives in the directed pollock fishery. Section 679.64(b)(3) and (b)(4) establish formulas for setting AFA catcher vessel groundfish and PSC sideboard limits for the BSAI. The basis for these sideboard limits is described in detail in the final rules implementing the major provisions of the AFA (67 FR 79692, December 30, 2002) and Amendment 80 (72 FR 52668, September 14, 2007). Tables 15 and 16 list the proposed 2018 and 2019 AFA catcher vessel sideboard limits.

All catch of groundfish sideboard species made by non-exempt AFA catcher vessels, whether as targeted catch or as incidental catch, will be deducted from the 2018 and 2019 sideboard limits listed in Table 15.

TABLE 15—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 BSAI GROUNDFISH SIDEBOARD LIMITS FOR AMERICAN FISHERIES ACT CATCHER VESSELS (CVS)

[Amounts are in metric tons]

Species	Fishery by area/gear/season	Ratio of 1995–1997 AFA CV catch to 1995–1997 TAC	2018 and 2019 initial TAC [1]	2018 and 2019 AFA catcher vessel sideboard limits
Pacific cod	BSAI	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Jig gear		2,633	
	Hook-and-line CV >60 ft LOA	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Jan 1–Jun 10	0.0006	191	0
	Jun 10–Dec 31	0.0006	184	0
	Pot gear CV >60 ft LOA	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Jan 1–Jun 10	0.0006	8,030	5
	Sept 1–Dec 31	0.0006	7,715	5
	CV <60 ft LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear.	0.0006	3,749	2
	Trawl gear CV	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Jan 20–Apr 1	0.8609	30,761	26,482
	Apr 1–un 10	0.8609	4,573	3,937
	Jun 10–Nov 1	0.8609	6,235	5,368
Sablefish	BS trawl gear	0.0906	541	49
	AI trawl gear	0.0645	369	24
Greenland turbot	BS	0.0645	3,719	240
	AI	0.0205	106	2
Arrowtooth flounder	BSAI	0.0690	11,900	821
Kamchatka flounder	BSAI	0.0690	4,250	293
Rock sole	BSAI	0.0341	44,739	1,526
Flathead sole	BS trawl gear	0.0505	13,842	699
Alaska plaice	BSAI	0.0441	11,050	487
Other flatfish	BSAI	0.0441	2,125	94
Pacific ocean perch	BS	0.1000	9,350	935
	Eastern AI	0.0077	8,841	68
	Central AI	0.0025	6,698	17
	Western AI		10,716	
Northern rockfish	BSAI	0.0084	4,250	36
Rougheye rockfish	EBS/EAI	0.0037	85	0
	CAI/WAI	0.0037	106	0
Shortraker rockfish	BSAI	0.0037	106	0
Other rockfish	BS	0.0048	276	1
	AI	0.0095	468	4
Atka mackerel	Eastern AI/BS	n/a	30,362	n/a
	Jan 1–Jun 10	0.0032	15,181	49
	Jun 10–Nov 1	0.0032	15,181	49
	Central AI	n/a	19,200	n/a
	Jan 1–Jun 10	0.0001	9,600	1
	Jun 10–Nov 1	0.0001	9,600	1
	Western AI	n/a	12,422	n/a
	Jan 1–Jun 10		6,211	
	Jun 10–Nov 1		6,211	
Skates	BSAI	0.0541	22,100	1,196
Sculpins	BSAI	0.0541	3,825	207
Sharks	BSAI	0.0541	106	6
Squids	BSAI	0.3827	1,141	437
Octopuses	BSAI	0.0541	340	18

[1] Aleutians Islands Pacific ocean perch, and BSAI Atka mackerel, flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole are multiplied by the remainder of the TAC of that species after the subtraction of the CDQ reserve under § 679.20(b)(1)(ii)(C).

Note: Section 679.64(b)(6) exempts AFA catcher vessels from a yellowfin sole sideboard limit because the 2018 and 2019 aggregate ITAC of yellowfin sole assigned to the Amendment 80 sector and BSAI trawl limited access sector is greater than 125,000 mt.

Halibut and crab PSC limits listed in Table 16 that are caught by AFA catcher vessels participating in any groundfish fishery other than pollock will accrue against the 2018 and 2019 PSC sideboard limits for the AFA catcher vessels. Section 679.21(b)(4)(iii), (e)(7), and (e)(3)(v) authorize NMFS to close directed fishing for groundfish other than pollock for AFA catcher vessels once a proposed 2018 and 2019 PSC sideboard limit listed in Table 16 is reached. Pursuant to § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(C) and (e)(3)(ii)(C), halibut or crab PSC caught by AFA catcher vessels while fishing for pollock in the BS will accrue against the bycatch allowances annually specified for the pollock/Atka mackerel/''other species'' fishery categories under § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(B) and (e)(3)(iv).

TABLE 16—PROPOSED 2018 AND 2019 AMERICAN FISHERIES ACT CATCHER VESSEL PROHIBITED SPECIES CATCH SIDEBOARD LIMITS FOR THE BSAI [1]

PSC species and area [1]	Target fishery category [2]	AFA catcher vessel PSC sideboard limit ratio	Proposed 2018 and 2019 PSC limit after subtraction of PSQ reserves [3]	Proposed 2018 and 2019 AFA catcher vessel PSC sideboard limit [3]
Halibut	Pacific cod trawl	n/a	n/a	887
	Pacific cod hook-and-line or pot	n/a	n/a	2
	Yellowfin sole total	n/a	n/a	101
	Rock sole/flathead sole/other flatfish.[4]	n/a	n/a	228
	Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/ Kamchatka flounder/sablefish.	n/a	n/a	
	Rockfish	n/a	n/a	2
	Pollock/Atka mackerel/other species.[5]	n/a	n/a	5
Red king crab Zone 1	n/a	0.2990	86,621	25,900
C. opilio COBLZ	n/a	0.1680	8,144,641	1,368,300
C. bairdi Zone 1	n/a	0.3300	741,190	244,593
C. bairdi Zone 2	n/a	0.1860	2,250,360	418,567

[1] Refer to § 679.2 for definitions of areas.
[2] Target fishery categories are defined at § 679.21(b)(1)(ii)(B).
[3] Halibut amounts are in metric tons of halibut mortality. Crab amounts are in numbers of animals.
[4] ''Other flatfish'' for PSC monitoring includes all flatfish species, except for halibut (a prohibited species), arrowtooth flounder, Kamchatka flounder, flathead sole, Greenland turbot, rock sole, and yellowfin sole.
[5] ''Other species'' for PSC monitoring includes skates, sculpins, sharks, and octopuses.

Classification

NMFS has determined that the proposed harvest specifications are consistent with the FMP and preliminarily determined that the proposed harvest specifications are consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable laws, and subject to further review after public comment.

This action is authorized under 50 CFR 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

NMFS prepared an EIS for this action and made it available to the public on January 12, 2007 (72 FR 1512). On February 13, 2007, NMFS issued the Record of Decision (ROD) for the Final EIS. A Supplemental Information Report (SIR) that assesses the need to prepare a Supplemental EIS is being prepared for the final action. Copies of the Final EIS, ROD, and SIR for this action are available from NMFS (see **ADDRESSES**). The Final EIS analyzes the environmental consequences of the proposed groundfish harvest specifications and alternative harvest strategies on resources in the action area. The Final EIS found no significant environmental consequences from the proposed action or its alternatives.

NMFS prepared an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA), as required by section 603 of the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), analyzing the methodology for establishing the relevant TACs. The IRFA evaluates the impacts on small entities of alternative harvest strategies for the groundfish fisheries in the exclusive economic zone off Alaska. As described in the methodology, TACs are set to a level that falls within the range of ABCs recommended by the SSC; the sum of the TACs must achieve OY specified in the FMP. While the specific numbers that the methodology may produce vary from year to year, the methodology itself remains constant.

A description of the proposed action, why it is being considered, and the legal basis for this proposed action are contained in the preamble above. A copy of the IRFA is available from NMFS (see **ADDRESSES**). A summary of the IRFA follows.

The action under consideration is a harvest strategy to govern the catch of groundfish in the BSAI. The preferred alternative is the existing harvest strategy in which TACs fall within the range of ABCs recommended by the SSC, but, as discussed below, NMFS considered other alternatives. This action is taken in accordance with the FMP prepared by the Council pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

The entities directly regulated by this action are those that harvest groundfish in the exclusive economic zone of the BSAI and in parallel fisheries within State waters. These include entities operating catcher vessels and catcher/processors within the action area and entities receiving direct allocations of groundfish.

For RFA purposes only, NMFS has established a small business size standard for businesses, including their affiliates, whose primary industry is commercial fishing (see 50 CFR 200.2). A business primarily engaged in commercial fishing (NAICS code 11411) is classified as a small business if it is independently owned and operated, is not dominant in its field of operation (including its affiliates), and has combined annual gross receipts not in excess of $11 million for all its affiliated operations worldwide.

The estimated number of directly regulated small entities in 2016 include approximately 119 catcher vessels, five catcher/processors, and six CDQ groups. Some of these vessels are members of AFA inshore pollock cooperatives, Gulf of Alaska rockfish cooperatives, or BSAI Crab Rationalization Program cooperatives, and, since under the RFA the aggregate gross receipts of all participating members of the cooperative must meet the ''under $11 million'' threshold, the cooperatives are considered to be large entities within the meaning of the RFA. Thus, the estimate of 119 catcher vessels may be an overstatement of the number of small entities. Average gross revenues were $690,000 for small hook-and-line vessels, $1.25 million for small pot vessels, and $3.44 million for small trawl vessels. The average gross revenue for catcher/processor hook and line vessels was $2.90 million. The revenue data for other catcher/processor's data are not reported, due to confidentiality considerations.

The preferred alternative (Alternative 2) was compared to four other alternatives. Alternative 1 would have set TACs to generate fishing rates equal

to the maximum permissible ABC (if the full TAC were harvested), unless the sum of TACs exceeded the BSAI OY, in which case TACs would have been limited to the OY. Alternative 3 would have set TACs to produce fishing rates equal to the most recent 5-year average fishing rates. Alternative 4 would have set TACs equal to the lower limit of the BSAI OY range. Alternative 5, the ''no action'' alternative, would have set TACs equal to zero.

The TACs associated with Alternative 2, the preferred harvest strategy, are those adopted by the Council in October 2017. OFLs and ABCs for the species were based on recommendations prepared by the Council's BSAI Groundfish Plan Team in September 2017, and reviewed and modified by the Council's SSC in October 2017. The Council based its TAC recommendations on those of its AP, which were consistent with the SSC's OFL and ABC recommendations.

Alternative 1 selects harvest rates that would allow fishermen to harvest stocks at the level of ABCs, unless total harvests were constrained by the upper bound of the BSAI OY of two million mt. As shown in Table 1 of the preamble, the sum of ABCs in 2018 and 2019 would be about 4,214,648 mt, which falls above the upper bound of the OY range. Under Alternative 1, the sum of TACs is equal to the sum of ABCs. In this instance, Alternative 1 is consistent with the preferred alternative (Alternative 2), meets the objectives of that action, and has small entity impacts that are equivalent to small entity impacts of the preferred alternative. However, NMFS cannot set TACs equal to the sum of ABCs in the BSAI due to the constraining OY limit of 2.0 million mt, which Alternative 1 would exceed.

Alternative 3 selects harvest rates based on the most recent 5 years of harvest rates (for species in Tiers 1 through 3) or based on the most recent 5 years of harvests (for species in Tiers 4 through 6). This alternative is inconsistent with the objectives of this action (as reflected in Alternative 2, the Council's preferred harvest strategy) because it does not take account of the most recent biological information for this fishery. NMFS annually conducts at-sea stock surveys for different species, as well as statistical modeling, to estimate stock sizes and permissible harvest levels. Actual harvest rates or harvest amounts are a component of these estimates, but in and of themselves may not accurately portray stock sizes and conditions. Harvest rates are listed for each species category for each year in the SAFE report (see **ADDRESSES**).

Alternative 4 would lead to significantly lower harvests of all species and reduce TACs from the upper end of the OY range in the BSAI, to its lower end of 1.4 million mt. Overall, this would reduce 2018 TACs by about 30 percent, which would lead to significant reductions in harvests of species by small entities. While reductions of this size would alter the supply, and, therefore, would be associated with offsetting price increases, the size of these associated price increases is uncertain. While production declines in the BSAI would undoubtedly be associated with price increases in the BSAI, these increases would be constrained by production of substitutes, and are unlikely to completely offset revenue declines resulting from reductions in harvests of these species by small entities. Thus, this alternative action would have a detrimental impact on small entities.

Alternative 5, which sets all harvests equal to zero, would have a significant adverse impact on small entities and would be contrary to the requirement for achieving OY on a continuing basis, as mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

The proposed harvest specifications (Alternative 2) extend the current 2018 OFLs, ABCs, and TACs to 2018 and 2019, with the exceptions for decreases of Pacific cod OFL, ABC, and TAC in the BS and related increases in Atka mackerel, Pacific ocean perch, pollock, and rock sole TAC amounts. As noted in the IRFA, the Council may modify these OFLs, ABCs, and TACs in December 2017, when it reviews the November 2017 SAFE report from its groundfish Plan Team, and the reports of the SSC and AP at the December Council meeting. Because most of the TACs in the proposed 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications are unchanged from the 2018 harvest specification TACs, with the exception of modifications for TACs for five species, and because the sum of all TACs remains within the upper limit of OY for the BSAI of 2.0 million mt, NMFS does not expect adverse impacts on small entities. Also, NMFS does not expect any changes made by the Council in December 2017 to be large enough to have an impact on small entities.

This action does not modify recordkeeping or reporting requirements, or duplicate, overlap, or conflict with any Federal rules.

Adverse impacts on marine mammals resulting from fishing activities conducted under these harvest specifications are discussed in the Final EIS (see **ADDRESSES**), and in the 2017 SIR (*https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/sir-2017-18.pdf*).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.;* 16 U.S.C. 1540(f); 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.;* 16 U.S.C. 3631 *et seq.;* Pub. L. 105–277; Pub. L. 106–31; Pub. L. 106–554; Pub. L. 108–199; Pub. L. 108–447; Pub. L. 109–241; Pub. L. 109–479.

Dated: December 4, 2017.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs, National Marine Fisheries Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 170816769–7769–01]

RIN 0648–XF633

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Gulf of Alaska; 2018 and 2019 Harvest Specifications for Groundfish

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Proposed rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS proposes 2018 and 2019 harvest specifications, apportionments, and Pacific halibut prohibited species catch limits for the groundfish fishery of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This action is necessary to establish harvest limits for groundfish during the 2018 and 2019 fishing years and to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska. The intended effect of this action is to conserve and manage the groundfish resources in the GOA in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

DATES: Comments must be received by January 8, 2018.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments on this document, identified by NOAA–NMFS–2017–0107, by either of the following methods:

- *Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:* Go to *www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0107,* click the ''Comment Now!'' icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.