



Report to the International Pacific Halibut Commission
2019 Annual Meeting
Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service

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CONTRACTING PARTY: UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AGENCY:

Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service

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FISHERY SECTOR/S

ALL

IPHC REGULATORY AREA/S

IPHC Regulatory Areas 2C, 3, and 4 (USA: Alaska)

DISCUSSION

Data from the Pacific halibut fisheries in Alaska (IPHC Regulatory Areas 2C through 4CDE) are presented in the attached National Marine Fisheries Service Alaska Region annual report to the IPHC. Data in the report is current through 20 December 2019. If updated data become available prior to the IPHC Annual Meeting, a revision to the report will be submitted.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the Commission **NOTE** paper IPHC-2019-AM095-AR13, which provided an overview of the activities of the NOAA-Fisheries Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service relevant to the IPHC for 2018.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Report to the International Pacific Halibut Commission 2019 Annual Meeting, Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service

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Section 1: Charter Halibut Fisheries

Harvest under 2018 Annual Management Measures in Areas 2C and 3A

The Area 2C and 3A Halibut Catch Sharing Plan was implemented in 2014, and is the method for determining allowable levels of charter halibut harvests in those areas. The Catch Sharing Plan also endorses a process through which the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) recommends annual management measures to the IPHC that are likely to limit charter harvests to their annual catch limits.

In Area 2C, the 2018 charter catch limit was 810,000 pounds (lb), and the fishery was managed under a daily bag limit of one fish that had to be 38 inches or less or greater than 80 inches total length. The preliminary 2018 charter halibut harvest estimate of 729,393 lb is 10.0 percent below the catch limit.

In Area 3A, the 2018 charter catch limit was 1,790,000 lb, and the fishery was managed under a two-fish daily bag limit, with a maximum size limit of 28 inches total length on one fish, a Wednesday closure for the entire season as well as six Tuesday closures in July and August, a 4-fish annual limit, a one-trip per day per charter vessel limit, and a one-trip per day per charter halibut permit limit. A prohibition on halibut harvest by skipper and crew during charter vessel fishing trips was effective in both management areas. The preliminary 2018 charter halibut harvest estimate of 1,867,244 lb indicates that harvest exceeded the catch limit by approximately 4.3 percent.

In December 2018, the Council will recommend charter management measures for the 2019 fishery. These management measures will be described in the Council's management letter for the 2018 IPHC Annual Meeting.

Guided Angler Fish Program- 2018 Summary

In 2014, NMFS implemented the guided angler fish (GAF) program to authorize limited annual transfers of commercial halibut IFQ as GAF to qualified charter halibut permit holders for harvest by charter vessel anglers in Areas 2C and 3A. The GAF program allows qualified charter halibut permit holders to offer charter vessel anglers the opportunity to retain halibut up to the limit for unguided anglers when the charter management measure in place limits charter vessel anglers to a more restrictive harvest limit. In 2018, by using GAF, charter vessel anglers in Area 2C and Area 3A could harvest up to two halibut of any size per day, and GAF were not subject to the annual limit or daily closures in Area 3A. Table 1 summarizes IFQ to GAF transfers for 2014 through 2018. In 2018, approximately 80,600 lb of Area 2C IFQ was transferred as GAF and 64,300 lb was harvested in the charter fishery. This was a significant increase over 2017. In 2018, approximately 12,700 lb of Area 3A IFQ was transferred as GAF and 9,000 lb was harvested in the charter fishery.

Table 1. Summary of IFQ to GAF transfers

Year	IPHC Regulatory Area	Number of Transfers (GAF Permits Issued)	IFQ Pounds Transferred	Number of GAF Transferred	Number of GAF Harvested (% of amount transferred)
2014	2C	92	29,498	1,117	800 (72%)
	3A	19	11,654	910	269 (30%)
	Total	111	41,152	2,027	1,069 (53%)
2015	2C	119	36,934	548	428 (78%)
	3A	25	10,337	269	143 (53%)
	Total	144	47,271	817	571 (70%)
2016	2C	132	47,064	723	529 (73%)
	3A	26	10,442	289	220 (76%)
	Total	158	57,506	1,012	749 (74%)
2017	2C	207	53,206	719	576 (80%)
	3A	22	9,786	233	157 (67%)
	Total	229	62,992	952	733 (77%)
2018	2C	332	80,656	1,222	972 (80%)
	3A	31	12,760	304	215 (71%)
	Total	363	93,416	1,526	1,187 (78%)

Section 2: Commercial Groundfish Fisheries

Halibut Bycatch

Current Halibut Bycatch Amounts and Management

Halibut bycatch mortality in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) and Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries is highly regulated and closely managed by the Council and NMFS through the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for each management area. Through regulations implementing the FMPs, NMFS manages halibut bycatch by (1) establishing annual halibut prohibited species catch (PSC) limits, (2) apportioning PSC limits to fishery categories and seasons to accommodate halibut PSC needs in specific groundfish fisheries, and (3) managing groundfish fisheries to prevent PSC from exceeding the established limits.

The FMPs specify that halibut bycatch in groundfish fisheries is managed as PSC. Catch of PSC species must be avoided while fishing for groundfish and PSC species may not be retained unless required under the FMP. Halibut PSC limits are an apportioned, non-retainable amount of halibut provided to a groundfish fishery to provide an upper limit on the bycatch of halibut in a fishery. **When a halibut PSC limit is reached in an area, further fishing with specific types of gear or modes of operation is prohibited by those types of operations taking halibut PSC in that area.**

Although halibut PSC is taken by vessels using all types of gear (trawl, hook-and-line, pot, and jig gear), halibut PSC primarily occurs in the trawl and hook-and-line (non-trawl) groundfish fisheries. The Council and NMFS annually establish halibut PSC limits for vessels in the trawl and non-trawl groundfish fisheries in the BSAI and GOA. NMFS manages groundfish fisheries to ensure these limits are not exceeded.

The established halibut PSC limits and total estimated halibut PSC use for 2018 are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. 2018 BSAI halibut PSC limits and estimated halibut PSC use*

BSAI Fishery	Halibut PSC Limit metric tons (mt)	Halibut PSC Use (mt)	Remaining PSC limit (mt and %)
Trawl (Amendment 80 and BSAI Trawl Limited Access)	2,490	1,799	691 (28%)
Non-trawl	710	119	591 (83%)
Community Development Quota (trawl and non-trawl)	315	155	160 (51%)
TOTAL	3,515	2,073	1,442 (41%)

*PSC use as of December 20, 2018.

Table 3. 2018 GOA halibut PSC limits and estimated halibut PSC use*

GOA Fishery	Halibut PSC Limit (mt)	Halibut PSC Use (mt)	Remaining PSC limit (mt and %)
Trawl	1,706	1,163	543 mt (32%)
Non-trawl	257	51	206 mt (80%)
TOTAL	1,963	1,214	749 mt (38%)

*PSC use as of December 20, 2018.

As shown in Figures 1-3 below, halibut PSC use has not exceeded established limits in the trawl or non-trawl fisheries in the BSAI or GOA in recent years.

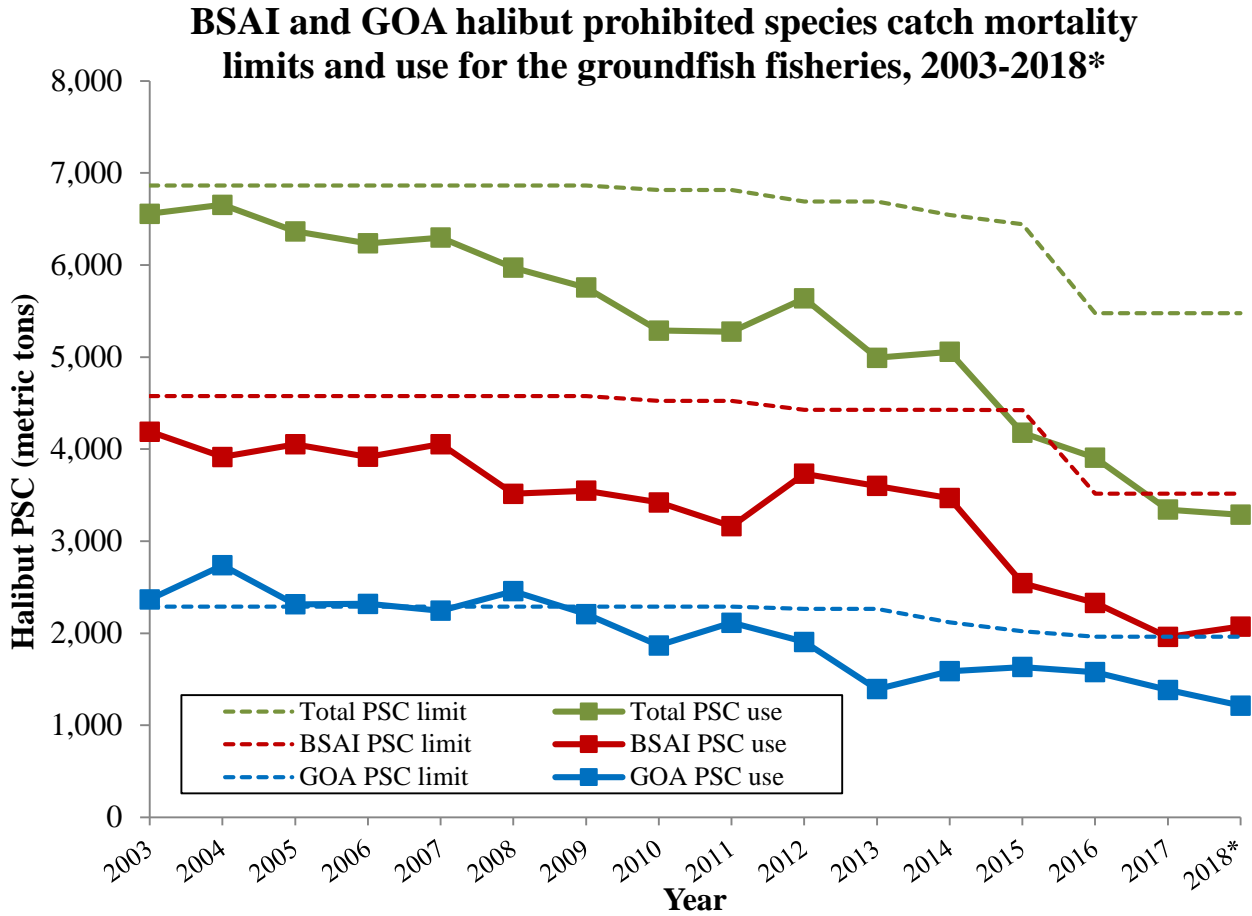


Figure 1. Total BSAI (including CDQ and deck sorting exempted fishing permit for 2016 - 2018) and GOA halibut prohibited species catch limits and use for all groundfish fisheries, 2003 through December 20, 2018.

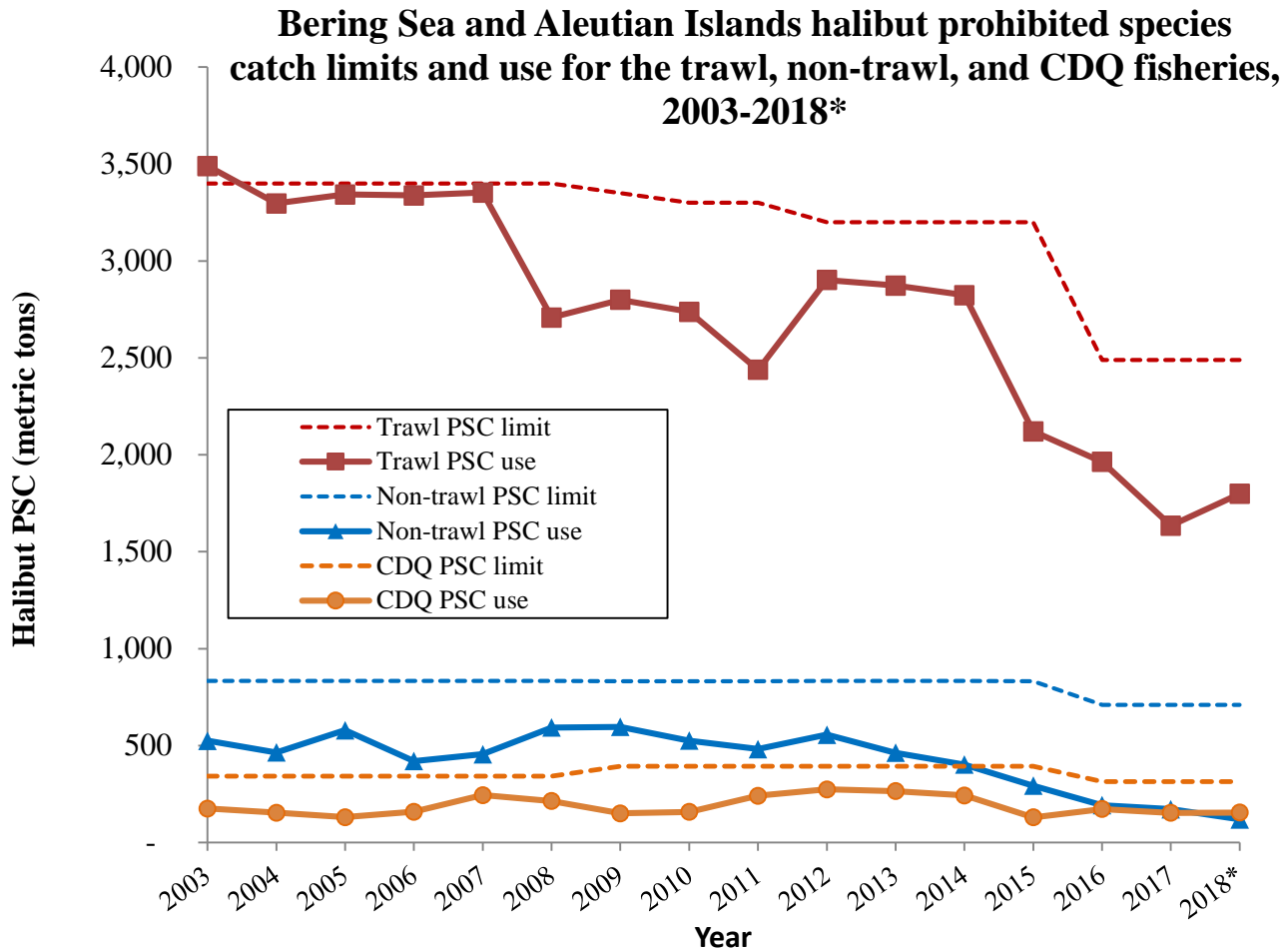


Figure 2. BSAI halibut prohibited species catch limits and use for the trawl (including deck sorting exempted fishing permit for 2016 - 2018), non-trawl, and CDQ groundfish fisheries, 2003 through December 20, 2018.

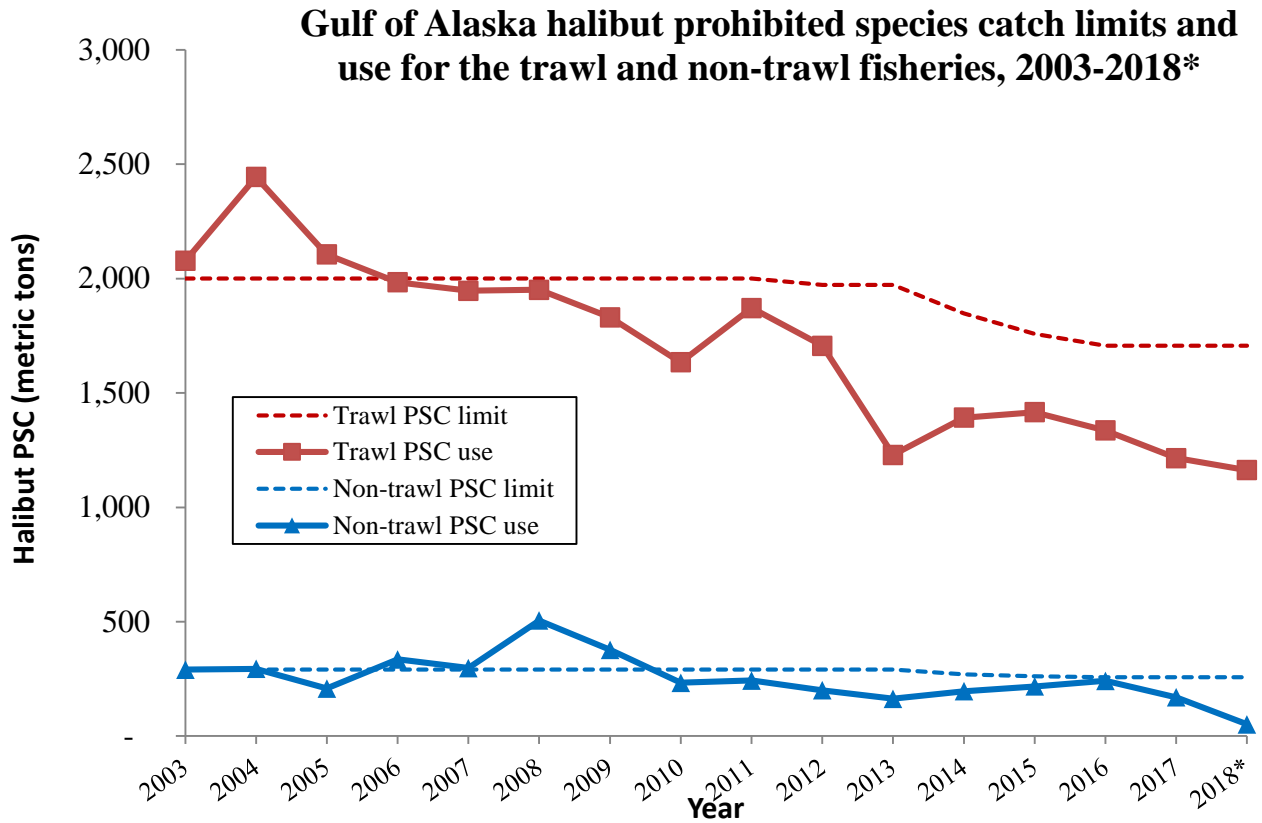


Figure 3. GOA halibut prohibited species catch limits and use for the trawl and non-trawl groundfish fisheries, 2003 through December 20, 2018.

2018 Halibut PSC Estimates

The 2018 halibut PSC estimates were developed using a method to spatially account for PSC. This is the same method developed in 2015 by NMFS in consultation with the IPHC. NMFS submitted preliminary 2018 PSC data to the IPHC for its halibut stock assessment in October 2018. NMFS will provide final revised estimates to the IPHC in early January 2019.

Halibut Bycatch Management Actions in Progress

This report covers actions that are under development by NMFS. Please refer to the Council’s management letter for actions under development by the Council.

Exempted fishing permits (EFP) to reduce halibut mortality

EFP for 2018 and 2019

On December 20, 2017, NMFS issued an EFP to the Alaska Seafood Cooperative (AKSC) to permit deck sorting of halibut PSC on non-pelagic trawl catcher/processor vessels fishing for

flatfish in the BSAI and the GOA. Twenty-one vessels participated in this EFP in 2018, 5 of which also fished in the GOA. The EFP is effective until December 31, 2019.

Regulatory amendment to authorize halibut deck sorting

The data collected during EFP fishing shows that the practice of deck sorting halibut can improve the viability and therefore lower the total halibut mortality estimate of the halibut encountered by the vessel. This reduction in halibut mortality benefits the trawl fleet by reducing the amount of halibut that accrues toward PSC limits. Halibut deck sorting may also benefit the directed halibut fishery by returning halibut to the water in better condition thus reducing mortality of discarded halibut and potentially increasing halibut biomass.

NMFS presented a draft regulatory impact review to the Council at its June 2018 meeting. The RIR analyzes the potential impacts of implementing monitoring and enforcement provisions to allow halibut deck sorting on non-pollock trawl catcher/processors and motherships. NMFS will revise the analysis and publish a proposed rule in the Federal Register in early 2019, with possible implementation by January 2020.

Section 3: Commercial Halibut IFQ Program

Retention of Halibut in Pots Used in the GOA Sablefish IFQ Fishery

In April 2015, the Council recommended regulatory revisions to authorize the use of longline pot gear in the GOA sablefish IFQ fisheries. As part of this action, the Council recommended that vessels be able to retain legal-sized halibut that are caught incidentally in sablefish pots if the person(s) on the vessel hold sufficient area-specific halibut IFQ to cover the incidental catch. The Council's recommendation included a request to the IPHC to consider revisions to the annual management measures to authorize retention of incidentally caught halibut in sablefish pot gear in the GOA. At the 2016 IPHC annual meeting, the Commissioners approved amendments to Section 19 of the management measures to authorize retention of legal-size halibut in the GOA sablefish IFQ fishery if such retention is authorized by NMFS regulations. The Commission also stated its intent to review the use of pot gear as a legal gear for halibut in the GOA sablefish fishery after three years.

NMFS authorized the use of longline pot gear in the GOA sablefish IFQ fishery beginning with the 2017 fishing season. Consistent with IPHC regulations, NMFS regulations at 50 CFR 679.42(l)(6) require retention of legal-size halibut caught in longline pots in the IFQ fishery if any person on board the vessel holds sufficient halibut IFQ.

NMFS provides the Council with a report on the use of pot gear in the GOA sablefish IFQ fishery, including information on halibut retained in pot gear. See Table 3 and Figures 3 and 4 in the Appendix.

Area 4 CDQ leasing

On October 18, 2018, NMFS published a final rule to allow CDQ groups to receive IFQ by transfer in IFQ regulatory areas 4B, 4C, and 4D in years of extremely low halibut commercial catch limits. This action was intended to provide additional harvest opportunities to CDQ groups. This rule is effective November 19, 2018.

BSAI Halibut in Pots

In October 2018, the Council took final action to allow retention of legal-size halibut in pot gear used to fish sablefish and halibut in the commercial halibut and sablefish IFQ and Community Development Quota (CDQ) fisheries in the BSAI.

In the analysis, NMFS expressed concern about the potential impact of this action to increase the use of pot gear that could increase the bycatch of Pribilof Island Blue King Crab (PIBKC) and other species of concern. The proposed action could impact PIBKC if fishing with pot gear increased in the Pribilof Island Habitat Conservation Zone (PIHCZ) or in the larger, surrounding stock boundary area. As part of this action, NMFS recommends closing the PIHCZ to all pot gear in addition to establishing inseason management authority to the halibut fisheries in the event there is a conservation concern with PIBKC. This action would give NMFS the authority to close halibut IFQ fishing in both the GOA and BSAI if an overfishing limit is approached for groundfish or shellfish that is consistent with regulations in place for groundfish.

Appendix

Table 1. 2017 and 2018 Halibut PSC Use in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands by gear type and IPHC Management Area (rounded to the nearest metric ton). PSC use as of December 20, 2018.

	2017	2018 Estimate made (10/13/2018)	2018 (Actual 12/20/2018)
Area 2C			
Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	3	2	3
Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	8	17	23
Pot	0	0	0
Total	11	19	26
Area 3A			
Trawl	744	919	911
Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	77	37	35
Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	21	28	36
Pot	6	2	0
Total	848	986	983
Area 3B			
Trawl	464	260	252
Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	56	11	8
Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	10	8	10
Pot	8	1	1
Total	538	280	269

*3A Trawl projection estimate is conservative due to ongoing fisheries

Table 1 includes estimates of halibut mortality from groundfish fisheries managed by the State of Alaska, and halibut mortality attributable to the 2017/2018 deck sorting EFP catch (in Areas 4A, 4CDE, and 4 Closed Area). Table 1 estimates the amount of halibut mortality by each gear type using a method of apportioning by IPHC area. Catch Accounting estimates through December 20, 2018 are subject to revision as new observer information is used in estimation, and existing observer information is debriefed.

Slight discrepancies may exist between Table 1 and Table 2 due to the incorporation of State of Alaska GHL fishery data in Table 1, and other minor rounding errors. Table 1 provides the most complete assessment of halibut mortality.

	2017	<i>2018 Estimate made (10/13/2018)</i>	2018 (Actual 12/19/18)
Area 4A			
Trawl	184	142	164
Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	54	21	17
Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	1	1	1
Pot	3	2	1
Total	241	166	183
Area 4B			
Trawl	117	127	76
Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	8	8	7
Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	0	1	0
Pot	0	1	1
Total	126	137	83
Area 4CDE			
Trawl	663	949	973
Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	108	68	66
Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	0	0	0
Pot	0	0	0
Total	771	1,017	1,039
Area 4 Closed			
Trawl	813	720	736
Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	54	47	46
Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	0	0	0
Pot	1	0	0
Total	867	767	781
TOTAL (all Areas)			
Trawl	2,985	3,117	3,112
Hook-and-line (non-sablefish)	358	194	181
Hook-and-Line (sablefish)	41	56	69
Pot	18	5	4
Total	3,402	3,372	3,366

Table 2. 2011 through 2018 BSAI and GOA Halibut PSC Use by Sector. 2018 data through 12/20/2018.

Halibut Mortality (Data through 12/20/18)	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
BERING SEA AND ALEUTIAN ISLANDS									
Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Trawl									
Non-Pelagic Trawl (Amendment 80 C/P)	2,243	1,810	1,944	2,166	2,178	1,633	1,405	1,167	1,343
Non-Pelagic Trawl (AFA C/P)	33	95	117	127	204	71	78	57	105
Non-Pelagic Trawl (Catcher Vessels)	254	250	497	382	305	310	410	337	309
Non-Pelagic Trawl (CDQ)	77	135	203	194	185	100	140	129	137
Pelagic Trawl (AFA C/P)	109	167	180	166	79	74	64	57	32
Pelagic Trawl (AFA catcher vessels)	87	116	165	33	57	30	19	17	10
Pelagic Trawl (CDQ)	8	38	13	12	21	8	9	6	7
Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Hook-and-line and Pot gear									
Hook-and-Line	501	482	556	463	402	293	196	172	119
Hook-and-Line (CDQ Groundfish)	73	68	58	58	37	22	25	18	11
Hook-and-Line (IFQ/CDQ sablefish)	21	10	8	6	3	2	1	0	0
Pot Gear	7	7	6	5	4	3	3	3	2
Total BSAI	3,414	3,180	3,747	3,611	3,476	2,547	2,347	1,963	2,075
GULF OF ALASKA									
Gulf of Alaska Trawl									
Non-Pelagic Trawl (Central GOA C/Vs)	1,090	1,304	1,199	740	821	975	967	751	905
Non-Pelagic Trawl (Western GOA C/Vs)	6	37	111	93	70	47	107	18	32
Pelagic Trawl	19	19	5	19	1	13	12	13	38
Trawl (C/P)	516	510	389	377	502	375	246	433	188
Gulf of Alaska Hook-and-line and Pot gear									
Hook & Line (C/P)	127	131	53	34	77	69	76	69	10
Hook & Line (Catcher vessels)	107	114	147	129	119	148	166	99	41
Hook & Line - IFQ sablefish	41	40	51	31	30	34	29	40	69
Pot Gear	29	45	42	15	11	22	44	15	1
TOTAL GOA	1,936	2,198	1,997	1,440	1,630	1,684	1,647	1,439	1,284
TOTAL All Areas	5,350	5,378	5,743	5,051	5,106	4,231	3,995	3,402	3,359

Figure 1. 2017 and 2018 BSAI Trawl Halibut PSC Use by Groundfish Fishery. 2018 Data through 12/20/2018

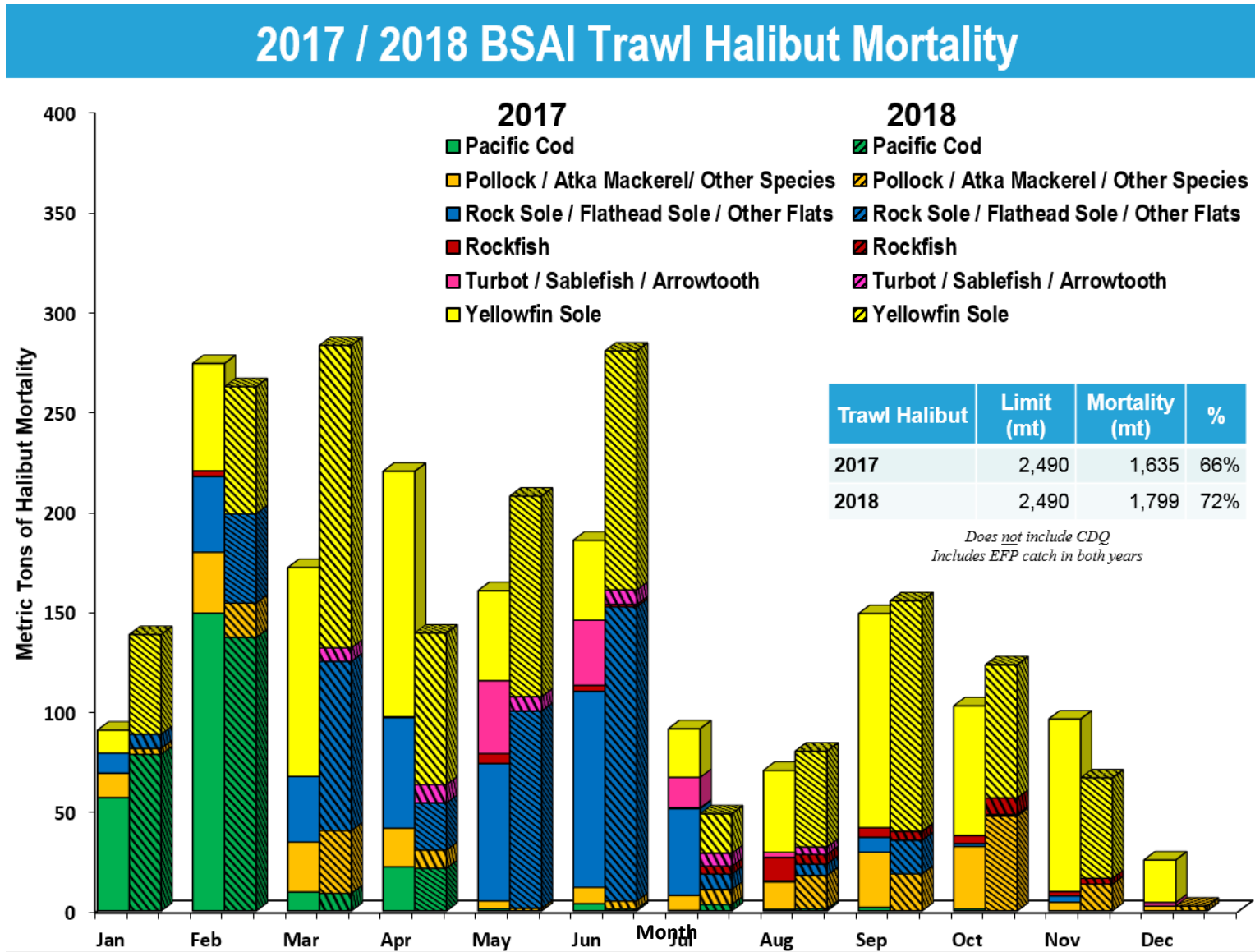


Table 3. 2018 GOA Sablefish IFQ Fishery by Gear Type; 2018 Data through December 20, 2018

2018 Sablefish	Hook-and-Line			Pot		
	Unique Vessels	Sablefish (mt)	% of IFQ Sablefish	Unique Vessels	Sablefish (mt)	% of IFQ Sablefish
Southeast	154	2,645	94%	12	164	6%
West Yakutat	81	1,435	97%	8	42	3%
Central GOA	119	2,707	83%	18	547	17%
Western GOA	47	751	67%	11	365	33%
GOA Wide	238	7,538	87%	24	1,118	13%

Figure 2. 2018 Sablefish and Other Species Incidental Catch in GOA Fixed Gear Sablefish Target. 2018 Data through 12/20/2018

2018 Sablefish and Incidental Catch in Fixed Gear Sablefish Targets

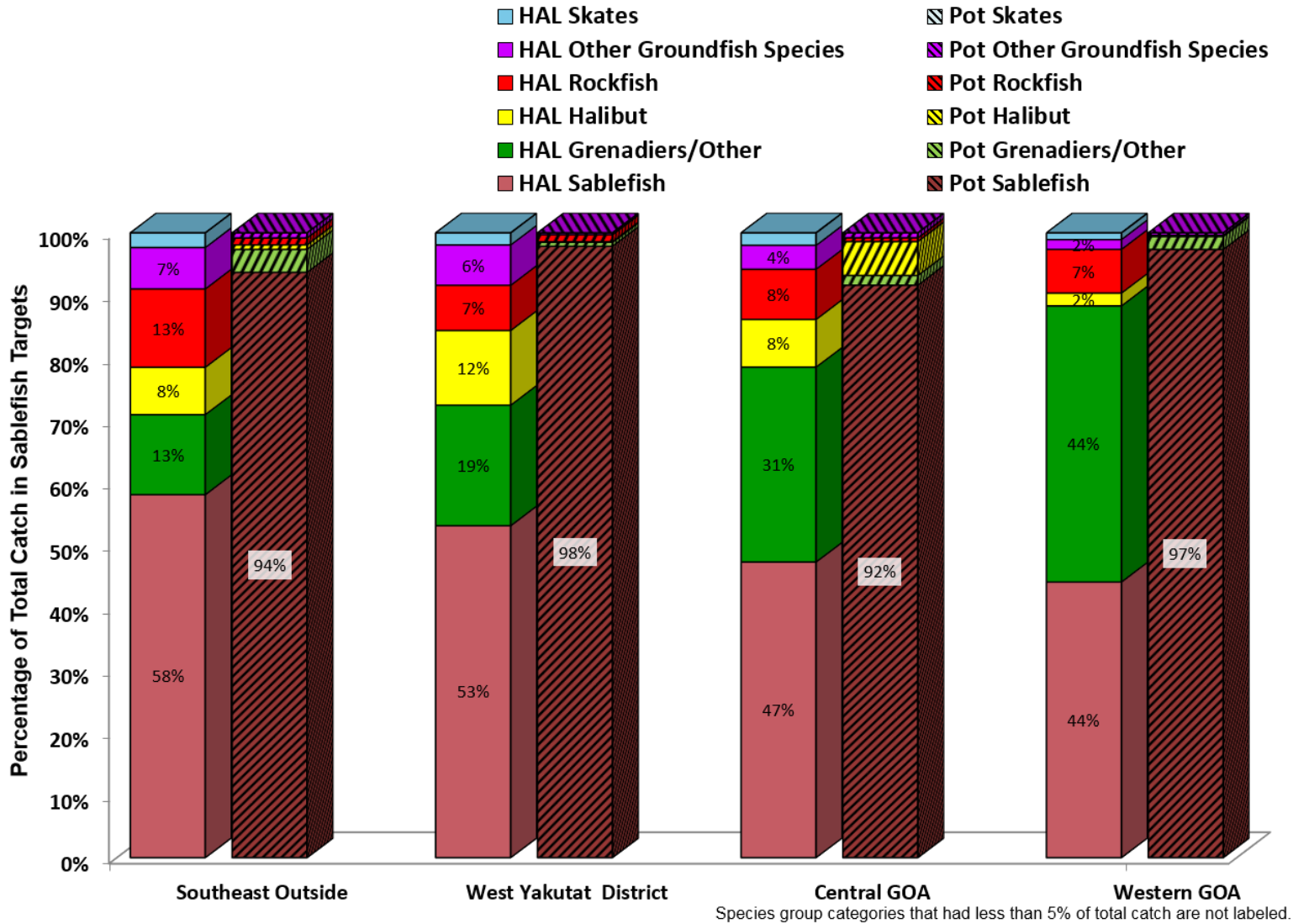


Figure 3. 2018 Sablefish Retained and Discarded by GOA Fixed Gear. 2018 Data through 12/20/2018

