

Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

Bering Sea Pollock

All sectors completed their A season pollock fisheries. The combined A season allocations total 522,296 mt. The Chinook Salmon Savings Area closed to pollock fishing on February 15. This area remains closed until April 15 and then closes again from September 1 through December 31. Current estimates show 57,173 Chinook salmon caught through March 25, 2005.

The A season CDQ fishery is also complete. Current reports show catch equal to the 60,160 mt allocation. The CDQ pollock fishery took about 1,576 Chinook salmon.

The pollock incidental catch is consistent with the 2003-2005 fisheries. The projected pollock incidental catch for January-March, 2006 is 16,700 mt or about 1,000 mt less than the average for 2003-2005. Several fisheries accounted for the pollock incidental catch: rock sole (34%), yellowfin sole (25%), trawl Pacific cod (27%), and hook-and-line Pacific cod (13%). The 2006 first quarter retention rate is 57% for all fisheries. The 2003-2005 first quarter fisheries averaged about 53% retention. In 2005, the average retention rates by fishery were 90% for hook-and-line Pacific cod, 36% for trawl Pacific cod, 50% for trawl rock sole, and 58% for yellowfin sole. Preliminary 2006 fishery data indicates retention in the rock sole (58%) and yellowfin sole (81%) fisheries are higher than the 2003-2005 first quarter averages.

Aleutian Islands Pollock

On March 3, NMFS reallocated 5,800 mt of A season non-CDQ pollock from the Aleutian Islands directed fishery to the Bering Sea fisheries. Pollock catch in the Aleutian Islands totals 702 mt. The Atka mackerel and Pacific cod fisheries accounted for the 203 mt of pollock incidental catch. Between March 18-25, 499 mt have been delivered in the directed pollock fishery under an experimental fishing permit.

Non-pelagic Trawl Catcher Processors

Catcher processors using non-pelagic trawl gear have taken about 113,300 mt of groundfish through the week ending March 25, 2006. This total is similar to 2005 (113,600 mt) and less than in 2004 (119,500 mt). Compared to the 2004 and 2005 first quarters, more groundfish was caught in the yellowfin sole target and less in the Pacific cod, Atka mackerel, and rock sole targets all of which as a proportion of total groundfish catch are lower in 2006. In 2006, groundfish catch in the yellowfin sole target makes up 34% of the total groundfish catch.

Total halibut bycatch mortality assigned to this sector is roughly equivalent to 2005 for the same time period (week ending March 25, 2006 and March 26, 2005). The 2006 total is 1,174 mt, and the 2005 total was 1,187 mt. Both years are much higher than 2004 at

894 mt. Relative to 2005, the 2006 halibut mortality is higher in the Pacific cod, pollock/Atka mackerel/other species, and Greenland turbot/arrowtooth flounder/sablefish targets and lower in the rock sole and yellowfin sole targets.

Year	Pcod	Plck	Gtrb	Rsol	Ysol	Total
2005	337	44	23	526	257	1,187
2006	416	72	42	472	173	1,174

On February 21, NMFS closed directed fishing for rock sole/other flatfish/flathead sole and Alaska plaice due to the attainment of the first seasonal allocation of halibut mortality. The fishery reopens on April 1, 2006. So far in 2006, this is the only PSC closure affecting this sector of the groundfish fishery.

Atka mackerel

Six catcher/processors registered for the A season harvest limitation area (HLA) fisheries in areas 542 and 543. The Eastern Aleutian District/Bering Sea subarea fishery was closed to directed fishing since the TAC was considered necessary as incidental catch in other fisheries.

The Atka mackerel fishery took place entirely in the Central Aleutian District. Under the HLA fishery, half the fleet is assigned to the HLA in the Western Aleutian District and half the fleet to the Central Aleutian District. The fleets are allowed to switch after a predetermined time. This A season, the portion of the Atka mackerel fleet assigned to the first fishery in the Western Aleutian District abandoned that area and fished in the Central Aleutian District outside the HLA until it was their turn to fish the inside fishery. The entire Central Aleutian District closed to directed fishing on February 18. Catch in the Central Aleutian District is estimated at 18,956 mt, in the Western Aleutian District at 59 mt, and in the Eastern Aleutian District/Bering Sea subarea at 1,185 mt. Most of the Eastern Aleutian District/Bering Sea subarea catch (797 mt) came from area 519. Of that, 758 mt was caught in the Atka mackerel target and 84% was retained.

Pacific cod

On March 1, 2006, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game announced by emergency regulation a Pacific cod guideline harvest level (GHL) equal to 3% of the Pacific cod ABC established in the Federal final harvest specifications. The GHL was made available in State waters west of 170 degrees in the Aleutian Islands subarea. On March 14, NMFS issued an inseason adjustment responding to the State fishery. The TAC was reduced by 3% to prevent exceeding the Pacific cod ABC. The fishery began on March 15 and closed on March 24. Currently, NMFS estimates 22 mt of halibut mortality was incurred during the fishery. Of that halibut mortality, hook-and-line gear took 5 mt and trawl gear took 17 mt.

Hook-and-Line Catcher/Processors

The hook-and-line catcher processor fishery closed on February 18. Catch rates were slightly higher than in 2005 which also had high rates. In 2005, the average weekly catch was 6,111 mt, the maximum weekly catch was 6,852 mt, and the maximum catch per unit

effort (CPUE) by week was 180 mt. In 2006, the average weekly catch was 6,520 mt, the maximum weekly catch was 7,425 mt, and the maximum CPUE by week was 190 mt. Thirty-nine processors participated in 2005 and 2006. The adjusted A season apportionment is 42,372 mt. The A season catch was 45,667 mt. The 3,330 mt overage will be deducted from the B season (August 15 start) allocation of 28,248 mt. The hook-and-line catcher/processor fishery usually receives a rollover from trawl and jig gear in September. The 2005 rollovers to this fishery totaled 22,175 mt.

The Pacific cod CDQ catch totals 7,057 mt as of March 31, 2006. Ninety five percent was taken with hook-and-line gear in the directed fishery, and the remainder was taken in the pelagic trawl pollock fishery. About 5,800 mt was taken in the four weeks after the closure of the 'open access' hook-and-line catcher processor fishery.

Hook-and-Line/Pot Catcher Vessels < 60' and Hook-and-line/Pot Catcher Vessels

The A season hook-and-line catcher vessel adjusted allocation is 159 mt. This fishery closed on March 10 with the entire allocation taken by vessels < 60' length overall (LOA).

The 2006 Pacific cod allocation to vessels < 60' LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear was supplemented from unused jig allocation and is now 2,536 mt. Five hook-and-line vessels accounted for 144 mt and 11 pot vessels accounted for 1,584 mt. The catch by pot vessels < 60' LOA is deducted from the pot catcher vessel allocation while that fishery is open and the catch by hook-and-line vessels < 60' LOA is deducted from the hook-and-line catcher vessel allocation. Current catch rates indicate the fishery will probably close on or before April 6. In 2005, the fishery closed on April 19 with 2,200 mt of Pacific cod. In 2005, several reallocations to the < 60' LOA quota category were made. However, pot vessels that did fish in the fall did so when the catcher vessel pot quota was available after September 1.

Jig Gear

Two metric tons have been taken by 3 vessels so far in 2006. In 2005, 19 catcher vessels accounted for 117 mt for the year. Most of the effort is in May-July.

Trawl Catcher Vessels

The A season directed fishery closed on March 8. The A season catch is 28,049 mt, of which 10% was taken in the pollock fishery. The remaining 585 mt of the 28,634 mt adjusted A season allocation rolls over to the B season allocation of 4,091 mt and becomes available at noon on April 1.

Trawl Catcher/Processors

The A season directed fishery closed on March 12. The fishery took about 19,700 mt. Since the closure, incidental catch, primarily in the yellowfin sole fishery, increased the A season catch to 20,548 mt. The adjusted A season allocation is 20,453 mt. The overage will be deducted from the 12,272 mt B season allocation which becomes available at noon April 1.

Gulf of Alaska (GOA)

Skates and “Other Species” Management

Skates closed to directed fishing with the filing of the 2006/2007 final harvest specifications. The closure was in response to considerations in the GOA skate assessment in the 2005 North Pacific Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Report for 2006. The assessment estimated the combined skate catch in the halibut and groundfish fisheries as potentially approaching the ABC.

Amendment 69 for “other species” has been approved and published. A final rule implementing the amendment becomes effective April 12, 2006. This amendment allows the TAC for “other species” to be set equal to or less than 5% of the combined GOA TACs. A proposed rule and an IRFA to revise the 2006 and 2007 “other species” TACs to 4,500 mt are in regional review. After the proposed rule is published in April, a 30-day public comment period follows. The final rule is expected in late May-early June. The 4,500 mt TAC is sufficient to allow for a directed fishery targeting “other species” of about 500 mt annually.

Western GOA Pacific cod

The A season directed fishery for inshore component closed on March 3. The total A season catch, including incidental catch after the fishery closed, was 12,176 mt out of a 10,876 mt A season allocation. The overage will be deducted from the B season fishery. The directed fishery catch of about 12,130 mt was distributed between catcher processors using hook-and-line gear (9%) and catcher vessels using non-pelagic trawl gear (45%) and pot gear (45%). One percent came from hook-and-line catcher vessels and non-pelagic catcher processors.

Central GOA Pacific cod

The A season inshore component directed fishery closed on February 28. The A season catch was 14,158 mt out of the 15,339 mt TAC. The directed fishery catch of about 13,900 mt was distributed between catcher vessels using hook-and-line gear (31%), non-pelagic trawl gear (26%), pot gear (42%), and the pelagic trawl and jig fisheries (1%). NMFS expects the April and May flatfish fisheries to catch the remaining A season allowance of Pacific cod.

Pollock

Area 610

The A season fishery opened for two days and the catch limited to 4,229 mt of the 4,210 mt TAC. The B season fishery was allowed to open for four days based on 2005 catch rates and the expectation of limited effort. Catch rates and effort were higher than expected. The 4,210 mt TAC was exceeded by 3,600 mt in the B season. The 10,249 mt C season TAC will be reduced by the overage. While the effort was somewhat lower than in the A season, the average CPUE in the A season (76 mt per trip) was 60% higher in the B season (126 mt per vessel per trip). Some vessels completed more trips than in the A season through the use of tenders.

Area 620

The A season fishery was slow. The fishery did not close and was able to extend into the B season (March 10) fishery. The B season fishery closed on March 21 based on a combined A and B season TAC of 24,586 mt. Catch is under the TAC by about 600 mt.

Area 630

The A season fishery closed on February 15. Initially catch was slow at a 200-400 mt per week rate until the week ending February 18 when the catch accelerated to 1,100 mt per day. The A season allocation of 4,062 mt was exceeded by 588 mt which is about half a day's catch. When the overage and the B season estimated incidental catch (about 800 mt) are deducted from the B season allocation (1,848 mt), the remainder (about 800 mt) is not enough to sustain a directed fishery. The remainder will rollover to the C season fishery.

The C season pollock fisheries in statistical areas 610, 620, and 630 open August 25.

Area 640

The annual West Yakutat TAC is 1,792 mt. Two Kodiak vessels explored the district without finding fish. This fishery is typically hit or miss. In 2005, the fleet caught a similar TAC in a few days. Inseason management does not expect additional effort in the near future.

Deep Water Complex Trawl Fishery

The trawl deep water complex fishery remains open in 2006. In recent weeks shore side effort increased in the arrowtooth flounder target. The first season allocation of halibut mortality is 100 mt and an additional 300 mt becomes available April 1. At sea catcher/processors are expected to target rex sole and flathead sole in April.

Shallow Water Complex Trawl Fishery

The trawl shallow water complex fishery closed on February 23 based on very high observed rates. Once additional information was available, the estimate dropped, and the fishery reopened on February 27. The shallow water fishery remains open. There has been little effort through March, but effort is expected to increase in April and May.