

Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

Bering Sea Pollock

All components of the A season pollock fishery have completed the first season fishery. The combined A season allocation was 514,430 mt.

Of the 26,825 Chinook salmon limit, 25,374 have been taken, leaving just under 1,500 animals. Chinook catch in the pelagic trawl fishery during the 2005 A season is up compared to 2004 (22,787 Chinook) but much lower than 2003 when 32,063 Chinook were taken. Based on catch records for the last few years, it is expected the entire limit will be taken by early August, which will close the Chinook salmon savings areas September 1.

The A season CDQ fishery is nearly complete. NMFS is currently estimating 59,064 mt have been taken of the 59,140 mt allocation. The CDQ pollock fishery took about 1,300 Chinook in pollock targets.

The incidental catch of pollock during the first calendar quarter of the year is consistent with 2003 and 2004. Comparing January-March catch, about 10,000 mt were taken in 2005, 11,600 in 2004, and 9,200 in 2003. Roughly 60% of the incidental catch occurs in the yellowfin sole and rock sole fisheries and most of the remainder in the Pacific cod fishery.

Aleutian Islands Pollock

The Aleutian Island subarea directed pollock fishery became authorized on February 24, 2005. Currently, NMFS has catch reports from 2 vessels indicating pollock taken with pelagic nets amounts to less than 200 mt. One vessel encountered high incidental catch of Pacific ocean perch. The raw observer data estimated 43 Chinook salmon were caught. About 650 mt of pollock were taken incidentally primarily in the trawl catcher vessel and catcher/processor Pacific cod fisheries and to a lesser extent in the Atka mackerel fishery.

Flatfish and Non-pelagic Trawl Catcher/Processor Pacific cod

The non-pelagic trawl catcher/processors fishery (H&G trawl) caught a total of 80,202 mt in the Bering Sea subarea during the first three months of 2005 (data are incomplete for the last two weeks of March) in the rock sole, flathead sole, other flatfish, yellowfin sole and Pacific cod targets. This compares with 2003 when the fleet took 67,200 mt in the first quarter and to 2004 when the fleet took 85,331 mt in the first quarter.

In 2005, catch in the Bering Sea subarea, Pacific cod and yellowfin sole targets were markedly higher. Catch of groundfish in the Pacific cod target has increased each year over the last few years. At 18,634 mt in the first quarter, 2005 catch is 40% higher than the 2004 catch of 13,438 mt and is 57% higher than the 2003 catch of 8,539 mt. The 2005

yellowfin sole catch of 34,175 mt is 20% higher than 2004, which is roughly equivalent to 2003. The 2005 catch in the rock sole target is 26,000 mt which is equivalent to the 2003 catch both of which are about 40% lower than the banner 2004 rock sole year when over 41,000 mt were taken.

PSC Management

Zone 1 closed on March 16 until the remainder of the year to yellowfin sole fishing due to incidental catch of red king crab. The rock sole/flathead sole/other flatfish fishery exceeded its first seasonal allocation of halibut mortality by 43 mt and left 121 mt for the second season, which is expected to sustain the fishery for 2-4 weeks beginning April 1. The yellowfin sole fishery had reasonable bycatch rates of halibut. The average weekly halibut mortality rate for the first three weeks of the fishery was 39 mt until the week ending March 26 when the rate increased to 126 mt. The fleet moved to areas of lower bycatch to close out the first quarter of the year. The yellowfin sole fishery is allocated an additional 195 mt on April 1. With careful fishing this could sustain the fleet until May 21 when 49 mt of halibut mortality becomes available.

Atka mackerel

Six catcher/processors registered for the A season harvest limitation area (HLA) fisheries in 542 and 543. The area 541/Bering Sea subarea fishery was closed since the amount was considered necessary as incidental catch in other fisheries. Currently, less than 700 mt have been taken.

The bulk of the Atka mackerel fishery focused on the Central Aleutian District. Under the HLA fishery, half the fleet is assigned to the HLA in the Western District and half the fleet to the Central District. The fleets are allowed to switch after a predetermined time. In 2005, the portion of the Atka mackerel fleet that was assigned to the first fishery in the Western District abandoned that area after a short time and focused on fishing in the Central District outside the HLA until it was their turn for the inside fishery. The entire Central District closed to directed fishing on February 17. The A season directed fishing allowance in the Western District was not taken. The A season fishery for Atka mackerel closes by regulation on April 15. The B season opens September 1.

Pacific cod

BSAI Hook-and-Line Catcher/Processor

A 5% smaller Pacific cod A season TAC, stronger participation, good weather and higher catchability than previous years combined to create a very fast paced fishery. Comparing 2004 and 2005, the total number of vessels fishing increased from 37 to 39. In 2004, the average number of catcher/processors active during any given week was 33, and in 2005, the average was 38. The overall weekly CPUE increased from roughly 140 mt/vessel to 160 mt/vessel. In 2005, a total of 46,087 mt was taken of the 46,406 mt A season allocation. The fishery closed on February 22, 2005. The 2004 A season fishery closed on March 13. The second season opens August 15 when halibut mortality becomes available.

Eleven vessels fishing under the CDQ program have taken about 6,200 mt since the A season closure.

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

The A season hook-and-line catcher vessel allocation is 290 mt. The fishery closed on March 10 with the entire allocation taken by vessels < 60'.

The 2005 allocation of Pacific cod to vessels < 60' using hook-and-line or pot gear is 1,354 mt. Hook-and-line vessels have accounted for 260 mt since the March 10 closure and pot vessels have accounted for 740 mt. A transfer of 1,500 mt from the jig allocation is being processed. Effort has been higher in the first quarter of 2005 with 13 vessels making landings >10 mt vs. the first quarter of 2004 when 5 vessels participated.

Jig Gear

Five mt have been taken so far by three vessels.

Trawl catcher vessels

The trawl catcher vessel fishery initially had strong catches (both in the directed fishery and incidentally in the pollock target) averaging 800 mt per week higher than 2004 for the first few weeks of the fishery. A strong finish to the A season was expected. The fishery closed on March 13. However, despite indications of a very strong catch rate during the last few days of the fishery, the A season quota of 31,345 mt was under caught by about 2,000 mt. In response to several industry requests, the fishery was reopened on March 29, in advance of the April 1 B season fishery. The B season allocation adds 4,478 mt which is expected to be taken during the week ending April 9. Inseason management is monitoring the fishery on a daily basis.

Trawl Catcher/Processors

As mentioned above, effort in the Pacific cod target by this component has grown significantly over the last 2 years. The directed fishery was closed on March 13. This leaves just enough of the A season allocation of 22,390 mt to sustain incidental catch until the April 1 opening when an additional 13,424 mt becomes available.

Gulf of Alaska

Skates

A total of 836 mt of skates are reported as taken in the GOA in the first quarter of 2005. Of those 88% or 739 mt were taken in the Central GOA; predominately big and longnose skates. Seventy-five percent of the Central GOA catch was in statistical area 630. In the Central GOA, 142 mt have been retained of the 292 mt catch of big skates and 173 mt of the 294 mt catch of longnose skates. Most of the big skates were caught in the non-pelagic trawl arrowtooth target (55%) and hook-and-line Pacific cod target (11%), longnose skates showed strongest catch again in the non-pelagic trawl arrowtooth target (69%), 4% in the hook-and-line Pacific cod target and 11% in the 'other species' (= skate) target.

Western GOA Pacific cod

The Western GOA Pacific cod A season inshore component closed February 24. The catch (10,177 mt) has exceeded the A season TAC (8,471 mt) by 1,706 mt. Catch rates were very accelerated during the last week of the fishery. They were 5.5 times higher than the previous week and were not anticipated by inseason management. Catchability by the trawl catcher vessels drove the very steep spike at the end of the fishery. As a proportion of total A season catch, trawl catcher vessels increased by 26% from 15% in 2004 to 42% in 2005. Changes in the proportion of catch from 2004 to 2005 A season by other significant components of the fishery include catcher vessel pot gear from 65% to 50% and hook-and-line catcher/processors from 17% to 3%.

Central GOA Pacific cod

The Central GOA Pacific cod A season inshore component closed January 26 (January 31 in 2004). The A season TAC is 13,547 mt and the directed fishery caught 11,700 mt. The remainder of the A season allocation is expected to be taken as incidental catch primarily in trawl fisheries. The 2004 A season directed fishery took 14,000 mt. As a proportion of catch, the hook-and-line catcher vessels dropped 8% from 31% in 2004 to 23% in 2005, non-pelagic trawl catcher vessels dropped 6% from 42% to 36% and pot catcher vessels increased by 13% from 25% to 38%.

GOA Pollock

The A season in statistical area 610 was marked by very high catch rates in a 3 day fishery opening on January 20. It was expected to take 5,035 mt, and took more than 7,200 mt. The B season TAC was reduced by the A season overage to 2,900 mt. The fishery opened on March 10 for 2 days based on expected effort and historic catch rates. It took 2,200 mt which leaves about 610 mt of the combined A and B season TACs.

Fishing in the A season in statistical area 620 and 630 were delayed as the trawl fleet initially focused on Pacific cod.

Once fishing got moving in statistical area 620, 12,872 mt were taken by March 2 against the TAC of 11,692 mt. This overage is about a day of fishing. The B season fishery opened on March 10 and closed March 20 taking 13,629 mt against the TAC of 13,820 mt. This leaves an overall overage of 989 mt against the combined A and B season fisheries.

The A season fishery in statistical area 630 saw active fishing from February 6 through 14. About 4,447 mt were taken against the TAC of 4,148 mt leaving a small overage of about 300 mt. The bigger surprise occurred in the B season fishery when a 12 hour opening took 3,687 mt against a TAC of 2,021 mt leaving a combined A and B season overage of 1,961 mt.

The C season fishery for pollock in statistical areas 610, 620 and 630 opens August 25.

Statistical area 640, West Yakutat, has an annual TAC of 1,688 mt. A 3 day fishery from March 24 through 26, involving 15 vessels, took 1,876 mt. The statistical area 650 has a 6,520 mt TAC of which none is harvested.

Deep Water Complex Trawl Fishery

The trawl deep water complex fishery closed on March 23. The 100 mt allocation was exceeded by about 80 mt leaving 220 mt for the second season which becomes available on April 1. Effort is expected to focus on arrowtooth flounder and rex sole during the second season. Based on previous years catch rates the fishery may last two to three weeks.

Shallow Water Complex Trawl Fishery

The trawl shallow water complex fishery remains open. About 183 mt of halibut mortality remains out of the 450 mt first seasonal allocation. An additional 100 mt becomes available on April 1. Effort has focused on Pacific cod and flathead sole.