

Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

Bering Sea Pollock

The shoreside and offshore processors are completing their 2004 harvest. Nineteen catcher/processors (c/ps), eight shore plants using eighty five catcher vessels, and three motherships have so far taken 1,222,874 mt of their 1,229,160 mt directed fishery allocation. As the fishery approaches October the offshore catcher/processors are nearly complete with their allocation, the mother ships have about 14,000 mt and the shoreside fleet about 60,000 mt remaining in their annual allocations. 2004 is the first year since the implementation of the American Fisheries Act that no allocations from the incidental catch account to the directed fisheries have been made. The amount allocated to the account (43,641 mt) was reduced relative to 2003 (46,990 mt). Both the chinook and chum salmon savings areas closed late this summer.

Flatfish/trawl catcher/processor Pacific cod

The trawl 'head & gut' (H&G) fleet has had an exceptional year. The directed fishery for yellowfin sole, which usually closes due to halibut bycatch mortality in September/October closed in early June, based on the attainment of the directed fishing allowance. Several high valued and incidentally caught species are now prohibited to retention as their TAC's have been taken. During the month of August, rocksole, flathead sole, and arrowtooth flounder became prohibited to retention. These species would normally not be taken in excess of their TACs because the trawl halibut mortality caps normally limit catch.

Twenty one non-AFA, H&G trawl vessels usually target yellowfin sole with incidental catch of other flatfish species and to a lesser extent Pacific cod through the end of October. Two of these vessels now are fishing Pacific cod, eight are targeting Atka mackerel and the rest have quit the field. While the Pacific cod fishery (which normally has low participation during the fall by this component of the fleet) is still open, much of the value of the fishery has been lost as many of the flatfish that could otherwise be retained are prohibited to retention. Most of the H&G trawl fleet that is remaining is expected to stop fishing in the next few weeks or fish on groundfish available under the CDQ program. In 2003, the non-AFA listed catcher/processors targeting groundfish in the Bering Sea subarea took about 186,000 mt of groundfish & discarded 34%. In 2004 the total groundfish for that component of the fishery is about 220,000 mt with a discard rate of 38%. The total amount retained by this fleet in 2004 increased from 123,000 mt in 2003 to 136,000 mt a 12% gain. Monthly discard rates for the Bering Sea subarea and all targets for the 21 non-AFA H&G trawl vessels are displayed in the attached graph.

Atka mackerel

Nine catcher/processors registered for the B season harvest limitation area (HLA) fisheries in the Central Aleutian District, reporting area 542 . Of those, 8 registered for the Western Aleutian District, reporting area 543 HLA fishery. Preliminary catch data indicates the fisheries have taken the HLA limits. The Central Aleutian District directed fishery closed September 23; the Western Aleutian District fishery closes October 3rd.

Pacific cod

Hook-and-Line Catcher Processor

The hook-and-line c/p fishery opened August 15. They have taken about 65,000 mt of their current Pacific cod allocation of 80,930 mt. The average weekly catch from mid August through mid September is about 3,100 mt with about 37 c/ps participating. In 2003 fewer boats (32) participated during the August/September time period with an average weekly catch of 3,200 mt indicating a higher CPUE for 2003. An action to allocate about 12,500 mt from trawl and jig gear to hook-and-line catcher/processors and pot gear (a split of 95% H&L and 5% Pot) is in the regulatory process. It is expected the H&G fishery will continue into mid-late November. Depending on the activity of other fisheries an additional allocation of Pacific cod may be made later this year thereby extending fishing time.

Pot Gear

Pot catcher vessels

A total of 76 catcher vessels have delivered about 11,000 mt of Pacific cod with pot gear in 2004. The strong (relative to 2002 and prior) 2004 participation by pot gear in the fall fishery is continuing, though with slightly fewer boats than in 2003. In mid September 2003 the fleet averaged 21 catcher vessels delivering 1,000 mt/week, vs an average of 19 vessels delivering 780 mt/week in 2004. If the fleet has a strong showing after the October red king crab fishery, they may take the remaining 4,000 mt of their 15,174 mt annual allocation.

Pot catcher processors

Four catcher/processors have reported about 2,400 mt of Pacific cod catch so far this year, about 850 mt more than in all of 2003. The B season, starting September 1 has seen a little lower effort than in 2003, though some of the vessels are expected to fish into November when the remainder of their 3,338-mt allocation will be available.

Trawl Gear

Both catcher vessels and catcher/processors have taken about 85% of their annual allocations of 46,844 mt (each). Most of this catch occurs in January-April. Of the 14,000 mt left in the combined allocations enough will be set aside to cover any lingering trawl fisheries for Pacific cod (the trawl Pacific cod fishery closes by regulation on November 1) and incidental catch in trawl fisheries for Atka mackerel and pollock. The remainder will be allocated to the catcher/processor hook-and-line and pot gear component as noted above.

Trawl catcher vessels

Four vessels have been active since mid September delivering about 400 mt of cod. In 2003 seven vessels delivered 450 mt in the same general season and wound up fishing by the end of September.

Hook-and-Line Catcher Vessel

Effort in this fishery has comprised almost entirely of vessels less than 60'. One landing occurred in early September by a vessel over 60'. Catch by vessels less than 60' are deducted from this category until it is closed. At that point the less than 60' vessels can continue to fish under the following fishery. About 70% of the 303 mt quota has been taken.

Hook-and-Line and Pot Catcher Vessels Less Than 60 ft Length Overall

Seventeen vessels have taken a total of about 3,000 mt in this fishery so far this year. Just less than 20% of the catch was by hook-and-line vessels, the remainder by pot gear. Activity was relatively strong in March through early May and in mid June through July with minimal landings through August and late September. In April the annual allocation of 1,416 mt was supplemented with 1,545 mt originally specified to the first seasonal jig fishery. An additional allocation from jig to the < 60' category is not expected as hook-and-line fishing in this category is not active and catch by the pot component is deducted from the catcher vessel pot allocation while that fishery remains open.

Jig

Jig gear has taken a total of 214 mt this year. The fishery initiated in February and March but gained its greatest momentum in April through July with average weekly deliveries at 11 mt. Deliveries from jig vessels have stopped at the end of August though there may be more activity in the fall by a few vessels as weather permits.

Greenland Turbot

A total of about 1,700 mt has been taken in the Bering Sea subarea of the 2,295 mt TAC. Seventy percent of the quota was taken by hook-and-line catcher/processors predominately in July though catch is being reported in September indicating that it is being taken incidentally to Pacific cod or perhaps as a second target as the H&L c/p cod fishery is relatively slow.

Total catch and Optimum Yield

The total catch of groundfish in the BSAI has been increasing in recent years. The attached graph indicates the percentage of the 2,000,000 mt OY cap that has been taken in 2002, 2003 and 2004 which includes projections for catch in October through December.

Gulf of Alaska

Skates

The Central GOA TAC for big and longnose skates is 3,284 mt of which about 1,000 mt are available to the directed fishery. The current estimate of total catch is 1,450 mt of which 476 mt has been taken in the directed fishery; 60 % by non-pelagic trawl gear and the remainder by hook-and-line. The lack of effort (relative to last year) in the directed fishery has been attributed to lower prices. Of the total catch 32% was taken by hook-and-line vessels, a little more than half of which in the Pacific cod target. The remainder was taken by non-pelagic trawl gear predominately in the skate, shallow water flatfish, and arrowtooth targets in that order.

The “other skates” category has a GOA-wide TAC of 3,709 mt and a directed fishing allowance of 1,000 mt. The “other skates” catch is currently 1,379 mt with 261 mt taken in the directed fishery. As opposed to the Central big and longnose fishery, sixty percent of the catch in this category was taken by hook-and-line gear and most of the remainder in non-pelagic trawls. Within the hook-and-line fishery most catch came in the Pacific cod target followed by sablefish and the directed fishery. Within trawl most of the catch was in the arrowtooth flounder target.

Pacific cod

The B season fisheries for offshore and inshore Pacific cod in the Western and Central GOA opened on September 1.

Western Gulf

Inshore Pacific cod

The total catch to date is nearly 13,000 mt leaving about 2,200 mt. Catch has declined each week since the beginning of the B season during which about 2,600 mt has been taken. Pot gear has caught about 80% of the quota followed by inshore hook-and-line catcher processors, trawling, jig, and hook-and-line catcher vessels. Effort by smaller vessels is declining as the weather deteriorates into the fall. Most pot vessels are expected to cease fishing by Oct 1 as they make preparations to enter the October red king crab fishery in the Bering Sea.

Offshore Pacific cod

A total of 238 mt of the 925 mt B season quota has been caught. Currently two H&L c/p vessels are participating, 686 tons remain in the quota.

Central Gulf

In the Central GOA the B season began on September 1st with 7,679 mt and 1,229 mt remaining in the annual TAC for processing by the inshore and offshore component respectively.

Inshore Pacific cod

Inshore P. cod closed to directed fishing September 10, 2004 and reopened September 28, 2004 for fixed gear only. The fishery will remain open to pot gear after hook-and-line gear closes October 2 due to halibut mortality. So far about 6,600 mt of the remaining B season TAC has been taken, leaving 700 mt. Vessels using non-pelagic gear have taken more than 80% of the catch, followed by hook-and-line and pot gear.

Offshore Pacific cod

The total catch for the year is 1,947 mt of a 2,712 mt TAC. Seventy percent was taken by hook-and-line vessels during the month of January the remainder by non-pelagic trawl vessels in July.

Rockfish

The trawl season for rockfish in the GOA opened on July 4 as the third seasonal apportionment of trawl halibut mortality became available.

Western Gulf

Catcher/processors took about 2,200 mt of Pacific Ocean perch TAC and 850 mt of northern rockfish during the July fishery. Nine vessels targeted either species until late July.

Central Gulf

During July about 8,200 mt of Pacific ocean perch were taken, 40% by seven catcher processors and 60% by 32 catcher vessels. The Pacific ocean perch fishery closed on July 12. With the closure of the deep-water complex on July 25, the northern and pelagic shelf rockfish TAC categories did not receive additional trawl effort and remain open to directed fishing. Several fishermen using jig gear have expressed an interest in targeting these species, principally light dusky rockfish, later this year. Only modest additional catch is expected.

Pollock

The C season for pollock opened across the Western and Central Gulf on August 25. The D season opened on October 1.

Area 610

The C season fishery closed on August 30 after 5 days. Eighteen vessels harvested 7,720 mt with a daily average harvest rate of 1,523 mt. Both participation and catch rates were higher than in the March fishery. Nineteen vessels are anticipated in the D season. Assuming a daily rate of about 1,600 mt (which is consistent with the 2004 C, and 2003 D season fisheries) the remaining TAC of 7,895 mt should last five days. The fishery could be extended, given that a high proportion of this fleet are less than 60' LOA and could be hindered by poor weather conditions.

Area 620

Area 620 has 5,286 mt remaining of the annual TAC of 26,490 mt. The D season fishery is expected to take about 10 days. Initial effort is likely to focus on the 630 fishery given that it will be open for only one day.

Area 630

Area 630 has 2,767 mt remaining of the annual TAC of 14,040 mt. A closure for this fishery has been announced for October 2 allowing 24 hours. Catch data from previous years indicates the October fishery can have highly accelerated rates compared to the September and August fisheries which averaged about 750 mt/day in 2004. The fishery will be monitored in the days following the closure to determine if an additional opening is warranted.

Flatfish

About 21,000 mt of flatfish have been taken so far this year with non-pelagic gear. This should represent most of the catch for 2004 since trawling is closed for the remainder of the season. It is a marked decrease from 2003 when a total of about 40,000 mt was taken. The biggest difference is in the arrowtooth flounder catch where catch in 2004 (14,000 mt) is less than half of 2003 (29,000mt). The reduction occurred in the catcher/processor component as inshore catch of arrowtooth is nearly equivalent between the two years. The other two species groups that experienced reductions are shallow water flatfish and rex sole. Shallow water flatfish, which are predominately taken by shoreside catcher vessels, are at a 35% lower rate in 2004 vs 2003 (2,914 vs 4,579 mt). This reduction may have been in part deliberate as information from the fleet is that they reduced their effort in August to maximize the amount of halibut mortality available for the September 1 Pacific cod opening. Rex sole, which is almost entirely taken by at-sea catcher/processors, is reduced by about 60% from 3,473 mt in 2003 to 1,409 in 2004. Both rex sole and shallow water flat fish catch were expected to be taken during the scheduled October 1 fishery. However halibut mortality in the September 1 Pacific cod fishery was high enough that the October 1 fishery did not occur.

Halibut Bycatch Mortality

Trawl Gear

Trawling for both the shallow water and deep water species complexes opened on July 1. The deep-water apportionment was taken and trawling for deepwater species (rockfish and rex sole are the primary targets in July) closed gulf-wide on July 25. The shallow water complex did not close in August, as is normally the case since effort in that component of the fishery essentially stopped. When the September 1 inshore Pacific cod fishery closed on September 10, the shallow complex and eventually all trawling closed for the remainder of the year due to extremely high halibut bycatch rates in the Pacific cod fishery. About 2,265 mt of halibut mortality are estimated to have been taken by trawl gear this year. Of that amount, 833 mt were taken in the nine days of the September fishery.

Hook-and-line

The hook-and-line fishery for groundfish (except sablefish and demersal shelf rockfish) closed October 2 due to halibut mortality. The majority of the halibut bycatch was taken in the winter and remainder in the fall Pacific cod fisheries.