

Inseason Management Highlights

**Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands**

**Bering Sea Pollock**

All three sectors completed the A season by April 1. The combined non-Community Development Quota (CDQ) A season allocation was 522,296 mt. Each of the three components came within 99% of their allocations and all three left a total of about 1,500 mt. The uncaught fish rolls to the B season allocation. Seventeen catcher/processors, 3 motherships and 73 catcher vessels participated in the 2006 A season fishery.

The Chinook Salmon Savings Areas closed February 15 and opened April 15. They will close again September 1 through December 31. The Pollock B season starts at noon, June 10.

The pollock incidental catch through May 27 is 23,064 mt which is less than in 2005 (23,841 mt). The flatfish targets (yellowfin sole and rock sole) account for about 50% of the incidental catch with catcher/processor and catcher vessel Pacific cod targets accounting for about 38% of the catch. Total groundfish catch in the flatfish targets is also less in 2006 compared to 2005.

Pollock retention rates within the trawl fisheries were highest in yellowfin sole (77%). The rock sole target retained 57% of its pollock incidental catch. Retention rates were up about 6% for both targets over the January-May period in 2005.

**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. A total of 9,500 mt remained in the AI directed fishery. Catch in the Aleutian Islands directed fishery is about 10% of that amount. Incidental catch stands at 380 mt, about 85% in the trawl Pacific cod fisheries and the remainder primarily in the trawl Atka mackerel fisheries.

**Flatfish**

Flatfish fisheries have been driven more by halibut bycatch mortality in 2006 than in 2004 or 2005. Halibut mortality in 2006 is more similar to years prior to 2004.

The rock sole with roe fishery opened January 1. A total of 17 non-American Fisheries Act (AFA) trawl catcher/processors participated in the rock sole fishery during January and February taking a total of 10,385 mt. Due to halibut mortality limits the rock sole/other flatfish/flathead sole target category closed to directed fishing February 21, opened April 1 and closed April 13. Currently 170 mt of halibut mortality are available for this category opening July 1.

The fleet began targeting yellowfin sole during the week ending February 25 after the closure of rock sole. The yellowfin sole fishery closed April 20. Twenty non-AFA trawl catcher/processors, 5 AFA trawl catcher processors and 3 catcher vessels participated in the fishery between February and April. Of the current catch of 59,531 mt, 52,400 mt was taken in the February-April directed fishery. Non-AFA trawl catcher/processors accounted for 77% of the catch and the remainder was taken by the AFA catcher/processors and catcher vessels. Seventy three percent of the total allowable catch (TAC) has been taken and about 50% of the halibut mortality allocation.

The fishery opened May 21. Currently 16 catcher/processors are in the yellowfin target. The fishery will remain open until it accounts for about 75 mt of halibut mortality. The fishery will open July 1 with an expected 380 mt of halibut mortality available.

If fishing patterns are consistent between 2005 and 2006 the rock sole/other flatfish/flathead sole and the yellowfin sole trawl categories are expected to exhaust their halibut mortality allocations by the middle of August.

### **Atka mackerel**

Preparations are being made for the second harvest limitation area (HLA) 'platoon' fisheries in areas 542 and 543. The registration deadline is July 31 for the September 1 opening.

Six catcher/processors participated in the 2006 A season fishery in area 542 taking about 103% of the available 18,500 mt TAC. Within the HLA in 542, 11,100 mt was available of which 9,640 mt was taken. Although 7,196 mt was available in area 543, 59 mt was taken. The remaining TAC (not HLA limit) will rollover to the B season. In 2004 and 2005 about 10 non-AFA trawl catcher/processors targeted Atka mackerel to end their 'open access' season in the Western Aleutian Islands fishery.

### **Pacific cod**

#### ***BSAI Hook-and-Line (H&L) Catcher/Processor***

The 2006 A season H&L catcher/processor fishery was faster paced than the 2005 fishery which was noticeably faster than previous years. The highest week of the 2006 fishery was nearly 7,500 mt, 8% higher than the highest week of the 2005 fishery. The average weekly catch for full weeks of fishing was about 6,500 mt, 5% higher than the 2005 average. Thirty nine catcher/processors took 45,200 mt in 48 days. The fishery closed February 18.

The fishery opens August 15. About 25,000 mt of Pacific cod is currently available. The total 2005 rollover to this component was 22,175 mt. Projecting the 2006 rollover is difficult at this time. As the H&G trawl fisheries complete their season and intentions of the catcher vessel pot vessels is better known in the fall, rollover projections will be made.

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

The A season H&L catcher vessel allocation is 159 mt. The fishery closed February 24 with the entire allocation taken by vessels > 60'. The B season allocation of 106 mt becomes available August 15.

The 2006 allocation of Pacific cod to vessels < 60' using H&L or pot gear under the final specifications is 1,236 mt. Transfers from the jig fishery have made an additional 1,700 available. The fishery opened January 1, closed April 7, opened May 1 and closed May 23. Twenty four catcher vessels have participated in the 2006 fishery, one more than in 2005. The preferred gear in 2006 shifted to pot gear (15 vessels) over H&L gear (9 vessels).

***Jig Gear***

Seven vessels have caught 35 mt of Pacific cod in 2006. In all of 2005, 17 vessels caught 117 mt of Pacific cod.

***Trawl Catcher Vessels***

About 60 catcher vessels have caught 32,246 mt of Pacific cod primarily delivering shore side. One mothership is involved in the directed fishery and three motherships took Pacific cod as incidental catch in the pollock target. About 90% of the catch is in the directed Pacific cod fishery, the remainder primarily incidental to the pollock fishery. The A season closed March 8. The B season opened April 1 and closed April 8. On June 10, the final seasonal allocation of 8,181 mt will be released.

***Trawl Catcher/Processors***

The directed fishery under the B season allocation is open with about 5,000 mt remaining. At this time in 2005, the fleet had more than 10,000 mt remaining in its B season fishery. The non-AFA trawl catcher/processors have depended on the Pacific cod fishery in 2006 as an alternate to yellowfin sole in April and May. The A season closed March 12 and the B season opened April 1. The final 2006 allocation of 8,181 mt becomes available June 10.

***Trawl Pacific Cod Halibut Mortality***

The total halibut mortality in the trawl Pacific cod target is 1,347 mt as of May 27. Mortality in the category has been climbing over the last two years. For a comparable time period, the estimate for 2006 is about 300 mt higher than 2005 and 740 mt higher than 2004. Less than 90 mt remains in the 2006 allocation. The remaining amount is expected to be taken in June prior to the July 1 opening of the BSAI rockfish, yellowfin sole and rock sole/other flatfish/flathead sole fisheries.

**Greenland turbot and arrowtooth flounder**

The Greenland turbot total catch in the Bering Sea subarea is 55 mt. The greatest proportion of the catch is in the rock sole target with the remainder scattered among sablefish, Pacific cod and pollock. The directed fishery by H&L catcher/processors opened May 1 and has been very slow with two vessels showing minimal catch. In the last few years the H&L directed fishery has typically accelerated in July and slowed in

early August. Effort then shifted to the Pacific cod fishery opening August 15. In 2005, the Bering Sea TAC was 2,295 mt and the catch was 2,071 mt, the directed fishery was not closed and took about 1,500 mt. In 2006, the TAC is 1,607 mt. Assuming incidental catch needs of 600 mt similar to 2005, the 2006 directed fishing allowance is 1,000 mt, about 500 mt less than was taken in 2005.

About 5,000 mt of arrowtooth flounder have been caught through May 2006. Ninety five percent was caught by trawl gear and the remainder by H&L gear with small amounts in the pot sablefish and Pacific cod fisheries. Other than “top off fisheries” there is no trawl directed arrowtooth fishery. Compared to May 2005, catch is up by about 600 mt. The Pacific cod fishery accounts for the highest proportion of the catch, 60% through May 2006. Overall retention is 35%, which is consistent with the trawl Pacific cod rate of 31%. The highest retention rate of 65% occurs where arrowtooth flounder (8% of the overall catch) is calculated as a target.

### **Aleutian Islands Pacific Ocean Perch (POP)**

The directed Aleutian Islands POP fishery opens July 1. The fishery normally starts in the Eastern area and then moves from the Central to the Western areas. In 2005, five vessels participated. The fishery opened July 5. It closed in the Eastern area July 10, the Central July 12 and the Western July 18. A total of 6,550 mt of POP was taken in July. Significant amounts of the POP are taken incidentally in the Atka mackerel fisheries.

### **Gulf of Alaska**

#### **Western GOA Pacific cod**

The Western GOA Pacific cod A season inshore component closed March 2. The total catch is 12,285 mt against a 10,876 mt TAC, an overage of 13%. Incidental catch is about 100 mt. The directed fishery catch was split 10% to H&L gear and 45% each to pot and trawl gear. The B season fishery opens September 1 with an allocation of 5,842 mt after the A season overage is deducted from the B season allocation. In 2005 about 1,600 mt was taken during the B season.

#### **Central GOA Pacific cod**

The Central GOA Pacific cod A season inshore component closed February 28. The trawl fishery was interrupted by a halibut mortality closure from February 23 through 27. The directed fishery took about 13,800 mt. Current total catch is 14,913 mt leaving about 426 mt of the 15,339 mt A season allocation available. Pacific cod continues to be taken as incidental catch during the remainder of the A season in the on going shallow water flatfish fishery. Any remaining amount will be added to the B season allocation of 10,226 mt. Catch by gear type during the A season fishery are as follows: H&L gear 30%, non-pelagic trawl 29%, pot gear 40% and jig gear 1%. Compared to the 2005 fishery these percentages represent a decrease for the trawl component and an increase for the H&L and pot gear. The absolute amounts were all higher than 2004. In 2006, about 55 mt were taken incidentally to the pollock pelagic trawl fishery.

#### **GOA Pollock**

Of the 77,858 mt available for harvest in the Western (Area 610) and Central (Areas 620 and 630) GOA in 2006, 52% has been taken. Fifty eight percent of the catch is from Area 620, 12 % from Area 630, and 30% from Area 610. The C season fisheries will open August 25 at noon.

#### ***Area 610***

The A season fishery opened for two days. The catch was 4,226 mt of the 4,210 mt TAC. The B season (March 10) 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 3,656 mt in the B season. The current estimate for the C season TAC is 6,577 mt. Twenty four vessels fished during the A season and 18 vessels during the B season. The average catch per day per vessel during the B season was about 25% higher than during the A season.

#### ***Area 620***

The A season fishery was slow. The fishery extended without a closure into the B season. The B season fishery closed March 21 based on a combined A and B season TAC of 24,586 mt. Catch is under the TAC by about 750 mt. The C season TAC available will be about 3,705 mt. Catcher vessel effort increased between February (23 vessels) and March (43 vessels).

#### ***Area 630***

The A season fishery closed February 15. The fishery was very slow for the first several weeks with low participation. Effort and catch per unit effort increased at the end of the fishery. Six vessels participated during January which increased to 24 vessels during February. The A season allocation of 4,062 mt was exceeded by 610 mt which is about half a day's catch at the end of the fishery. The B season fishery was not conducted because the amount available, about 750 mt, was not enough to conduct a directed fishery. It will roll to the C season making the amount available about 7,664 mt.

#### ***Area 640***

Initially the 640 (West Yakutat) fishery was very slow. A few vessels unsuccessfully searched for fish in March. In the first ten days of April, five vessels caught 1,567 mt against a TAC of 1,792 mt. The fishery closed April 10.

#### **Flatfish**

Four categories of flatfish have been targeted in the Western and Central GOA. A total of about 19,600 mt have been caught. In descending order of total catch they are arrowtooth flounder (66%), shallow water flatfish (16%), flathead sole (10%), rex sole (9%), and deep water flatfish (1%). The overall retention rate is 73% driven by arrowtooth flounder with an individual retention rate of 63%. In 2006, arrowtooth flounder has primarily been a shoreside fishery compared to previous years. When arrowtooth is excluded from the calculation the average retention rate for the remaining flatfish categories is 91%. Within the shallow water flatfish category the primary target is rock sole and within the deep water complex the primary target is Dover sole. Among the 5 flatfish categories the TACs are relatively lightly exploited so far. An average of 14% in the Western GOA is

taken ranging from 1% for the deep water flatfish complex to 26% for rex sole. In the Central GOA an average of 25% is taken ranging from 3% for deep water flatfish to 47% for arrowtooth flounder.

During the summer, flatfish are typically targeted in late July after the rockfish fisheries close and before the pollock and Pacific cod fisheries open in late August and September.

### **Trawl Pacific Halibut Mortality**

#### ***Deep Water Complex Trawl Fishery***

The trawl deep water complex fishery closed for the second season April 27 and will open July 1. Of the 400 mt halibut mortality allocation from the first and second seasons, 389 mt were taken. The arrowtooth flounder target accounted for 72% of the halibut mortality with 5% taken by catcher/processors. Most of the catcher/processor catch was in the rex sole target which accounted for 27% of the halibut mortality accrued. Most of the catcher vessels catch was in the arrowtooth target. Compared to the fishery through May 2005, about 80 mt less halibut mortality was taken in the arrowtooth target by catcher/processors, but the same amount for catcher vessels. The amount of groundfish taken (a total of about 14,500 mt) in the arrowtooth flounder and rex sole targets is consistent with the proportional distribution of the halibut mortality.

#### ***Shallow Water Complex Trawl Fishery***

The shallow water complex fishery closed briefly between February 23 and 27. About 499 mt of halibut mortality have been taken with a total of about 62,000 mt of groundfish. Pollock targets account for 74% of the groundfish and 1% of the halibut mortality.

If pollock is removed from the estimates, about 491 mt of halibut mortality was taken with 15,900 mt of groundfish. Without pollock, Pacific cod becomes the dominant species accounting for 68% of the groundfish and 56% of the halibut mortality. Shallow water flatfish follows with 23% of the groundfish and 38% of the mortality. Lastly, flathead sole takes 9% of the groundfish and 4% of the halibut mortality. Within the shallow water complex fishery, catcher/processors dominate the flathead sole target and take several hundred tons each in the Pacific cod and shallow water flatfish targets.

As of May 27, 51 mt of halibut mortality remains in the fishery with one catcher processor and 6-7 catcher vessels active.