

BERING SEA and ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

Bering Sea Pollock

The Pollock A season is almost finished with the AFA inshore component at 96%, catcher/processor component at 98%, and the mothership component at 99% of their respective A season TACs.

About 80% of the 2004 Chinook Salmon Savings Area limit has been reached with 5,000 chinook of the 26,825 non-CDQ limit taken. The fishery will be challenged to avoid a closure this year, as the average catch over the last two years between April and November is about 12,000 fish. After an annual 'step down' in the number of chinook in the limit, the 2004 amount is now the annual limit into the future. So far this year the fishery has taken 10,000 fewer chinook than through March of 2003.

Average daily catch rates across the three components of the fishery during the January-February portion of the A season have been fairly consistent between 2003 and 2004 with catcher/processors and motherships taking about 100 mt per day more than the 2003 average. Shoreside deliveries have been about 4,400 mt per day and catcher/processors about 3,250 mt per day. Mothership landings have peaked 15% higher in this portion of the fishery at an average of 1,055 mt per day relative to 2003 with more of their catch coming from late February rather than early March. In March of 2004 mothership landings are 20% lower than in 2003. In general during March shoreside and catcher/processor catch declines relative to February but in 2004 are more than 20% higher on the average compared to 2003 at 3,600 mt per day and 3,100 mt per day respectively. Seventeen catcher/processors, seventy seven catcher vessels and all three motherships have participated in the fishery in 2004.

Flatfish

Flatfish fisheries (rock sole, flathead sole, 'other flatfish' and yellowfin sole targets) have taken about 62,000 mt of groundfish into mid March, compared to about 50,000 mt through the same time period in 2003. Of the 62,000 mt of groundfish caught about 65% has been taken in the rock sole target.

Rock sole

With a focus on rock sole with roe, the mixed flatfish fishery began January 20. A total of eighteen c/ps participated by the time the fishery closed due to halibut mortality on February 24, six days later than in 2003. The fishery was much more successful in catching rock sole than in any year in recent history. By the end of February in 2004, 30,000 mt of rock sole were taken compared to 17,000 mt in 2003 and 19,000 in 2002. For the first time in the modern history of the BSAI groundfish fishery, the rock sole fishery has been closed due to attainment of the directed fishing allowance rather than a

prohibited species catch limit. About 3,200 mt remain in the initial total allowable catch and 3,075 mt in the reserve.

Yellowfin sole

As many as sixteen catcher/processors have focused on the yellowfin sole target since the rock sole closure, taking about 22,600 mt of groundfish and 122 mt of halibut mortality against the January-March halibut mortality allocation of 262 mt. An additional 195 mt becomes available on April 1.

The second season for the rock sole/other flatfish/flathead sole fishery opens at noon, April 1 with 164 mt of halibut mortality available. The fleet currently targeting yellowfin sole or Atka mackerel will likely focus on flathead sole.

Atka mackerel

The area 541/Bering Sea subarea fishery lasted 2 days and took about 2,500 mt of the 5,147 mt A season TAC which appears to be a large amount to hold out for incidental catch. However, in 2003, 5,800 mt were taken incidentally in the Bering Sea subarea predominately in the trawl Pacific cod, pollock, and rockfish fisheries and to lesser extent flatfish fisheries.

The HLA fisheries begin on January 24, 48 hours after the closure of the 541/Bering Sea subarea fishery. Six c/ps registered for the A season harvest limitation area (HLA) fisheries in 542 and 543 compared to eight in 2003 and 2002. The last HLA fishery closed February 13. Area 542 is scheduled to closed March 27 and area 543 is expected to close on April 15, which is the end of the A season. HLA catch is limited to 60 percent of the seasonal allocation. The Central HLA fishery took 44 percent and the Western HLA fishery took 14 percent.

BSAI Pacific cod

In general the A season Pacific cod fishery has had a steadily increasing pace over the last three seasons. Weekly catch rates have increased on the average by about 15%.

Hook-and-Line Catcher Processor

Thirty-seven hook-and-line c/ps participated in the Pacific cod fishery. Catch for 2004 is 49,000 mt through March 13. The 2004 fishery averaged about 4,700 mt per week compared to 4,450 in 2003. The peak weekly catch in 2004 is estimated at about 5,850 mt, 10% higher than the peak in 2003. The 2004 fishery closed March 13 taking more TAC than in 2003 when it closed on March 15.

Pot Gear

With the closure of the *C. opilio* crab fishery on January 23 pot effort picked up and accelerated faster than in 2003. The 2004 fishery is marked by the implementation of Amendment 77, which split the catcher vessel and catcher/processors into two separate quotas. It has had the effect of drawing out the pot gear fishery as three catcher processors have continued to fish through March 27 to the A season 2,000 mt TAC. The catcher vessel component with 58 participants was closed on February 15 at 8,200 mt .

Trawl Gear

Sixty catcher vessels, one mother ship and 18 catcher/processors have participated in the Pacific cod target so far this year, taking a total of 41,000 mt. The catcher/processors were closed on March 14, about 2000 mt shy of their 23,422 mt A season quota and a reopening is planned for 3 days prior to the scheduled April 1 B season fishery. Catcher vessels were closed March 23 and final catch numbers have not been tabulated due to late reporting from a few shore side plants.

Hook-and-Line Catcher Vessel

This fishery opened on January 1 with the first season apportionment of 182 metric tons. Landings in this fishery do not normally occur until late winter or early spring, as weather improves and daylight hours increase. In 2004 however, weather conditions were less severe than normal, and the first delivery in this fishery occurred in early February. A total of three vessels, all under 60 ft LOA, made 13 landings for a total harvest of 181 tons. The fishery was closed on March 18, 2004, 10 days earlier than in 2003. The vessels continue to fish on the allocation to vessels < 60' using hook-and-line or pot gear.

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

Four pot vessels joined by three vessels using hook-and-line gear as the hook-and-line catcher vessel fishery closed, are currently active in this fishery. The annual allocation is 1,416 mt. In the most recent three years catch has been dominated by pot gear. Given the anticipated allocation of unused jig quota, the fishery is expected to extend beyond the 2003 closure date of April 30.

Jig

Currently seven vessels are participating in the Pacific cod jig gear fishery. A total of 24 mt have been landed against the first season apportionment of 1,595 mt. Amendment 77 allows unused jig quota to be transferred to vessels less than 60 ft LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear. It is anticipated that approximately 1,500 mt of unused quota will be reallocated to the hook-and-line/pot vessels less than 60 feet LOA prior to April 30, 2004.

Gulf of Alaska

Skates

A few small hook-and-line catcher vessels are targeting skates out of Kodiak. Deliveries have ranged between about 5 to 10 mt. Alaska Department of Fish and Game personnel are sampling deliveries for species identification and life history characteristics. Catches have generally been female big skates. The final specifications for the skate total allowable catch amounts are currently in the NMFS review process. Under the final specifications the Central GOA TAC is 3,284 mt of which about 1,100 mt are available to the directed fishery. The current estimate of total catch is 230 mt of which less than 50 mt has been taken in the directed fishery. Anecdotal information indicates lower prices in 2004 may slow the fishery.

Western GOA Pacific cod

The Western GOA Pacific cod A season inshore component closed February 24 (February 17 in 2003) and the offshore component closed March 8 (March 20 in 2003). The inshore component fishery has taken 10,500 mt against the allocation of 9,157 mt. Inshore catch by predominate gear types was as follows: 65% pot, 17% nonpelagic trawl, and 17% hook-and-line with over 80% by catcher vessels of all gear types.

The offshore component closed on March 8, 2004, taking 360 mt against the A season allocation of 1,017 mt. A large percentage was left because the potential catching capacity from the BSAI hook-and-line catcher/processor fleet as they left the Bering Sea fishery could have easily over run the quota. Which occurred in the A season in 2003.

Central GOA Pacific cod

In the Central GOA, the inshore component fishery closed January 31 (February 9 in 2003) and the offshore component on February 2 (February 1 in 2003). The offshore component fishery, which was entirely driven by hook-and-line gear, took 1,330 mt of Pacific cod against the A season allocation of 1,627 mt. The inshore component took a total of 14,000 mt against the A season allocation of 14,600 mt. In the Central GOA catch by gear types was as follows: 25% pot, 43% nonpelagic trawl, and 23% hook-and-line.

Pollock

During the A season, pollock fishing was very good in Area 610 (Western GOA), but very slow in Area 620 and just fair in Area 630 (Central GOA). Not all of the available pollock was harvested by the time the season closed by regulation February 25. For the B season we were unable to roll over approximately 1,800 mt of the unharvested A season apportionment due to the Steller sea lion protection measures which do not allow more than 30% of the annual TAC in the W/C areas of the GOA to be harvested in a single season.

During the B season (March 10 opening date) fishing was very good in all areas. In Area 610 the average daily catch (1,300 mt) was similar to those in the A season, however participation was down from 24 vessels in the A season to 11 vessels in the B season. In Area 630 the fishery took over 4,600 mt in a 24 hour opening with participation up from 18 catcher vessels in the A season to 29 vessels in the B season. Area 620 closed on March 21 with about 90% of the B season TAC taken. The total area 610, 620, 630 B season catch is estimated at 19,996 mt, about 5% over the 30% "Steller sea lion limit" of 19,038 mt.