



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

August 30, 2021

Dear Reviewer:

In accordance with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), we enclose for your review the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) *Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) halibut abundance-based management (ABM) of Amendment 80 Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) Limit.*

Halibut is an important resource in the BSAI, supporting commercial halibut fisheries, recreational fisheries, subsistence fisheries, and groundfish fisheries. The Amendment 80 trawl sector is accountable for the majority of the annual halibut PSC mortality in the BSAI groundfish fisheries. When BSAI halibut abundance declines, PSC in Amendment 80 fisheries can become a larger proportion of total halibut removals in the BSAI and can reduce the proportion of halibut available for harvest in directed halibut fisheries. While the Amendment 80 fleet has reduced halibut mortality in recent years, continued decline in the halibut stock requires consideration of additional measures for management of halibut PSC in the Amendment 80 fisheries.

This DEIS is prepared pursuant to NEPA to assess the environmental impacts from alternative actions for proceeding with a proposed management measure to link the Pacific halibut PSC limit for the Amendment 80 commercial groundfish trawl fleet in the BSAI groundfish fisheries to halibut abundance. The principal objectives of linking the PSC limit are to minimize halibut PSC to the extent practicable under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) National Standard 9 and achieve optimum yield in the BSAI groundfish fisheries on a continuing basis under MSA National Standard 1. The action would also be expected to provide incentives for the Amendment 80 fleet to minimize halibut mortality at all times. Achievement of these objectives could result in additional harvest opportunities in the commercial halibut fishery.

This document is expected to be published in mid-September and will be available on the National Marine Fisheries Service Alaska Region's website at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/alaska/bycatch/bering-sea-and-aleutian-islands-bsai-halibut-abundance-based-management> or at www.regulations.gov after entering docket number "NOAA-NMFS-2021-0074" in the search bar.

NOAA Fisheries will be accepting public comments on this DEIS for 45 business days after it has been published. We anticipate the comment period to start on September 10, 2021 and close on October 25, 2021. Please check the Alaska Region's website noted above for updates on the comment period start and close dates. Written comments on the DEIS should be directed to the responsible official identified below by the end of the comment period. Written comments may also be submitted electronically through the www.regulations.gov portal.



Responsible Official:

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JB', with a small dot above the 'i'.

James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.
Administrator, Alaska Region