

SUPPORTING STATEMENT
PROGRESS REPORT: COOPERATIVE MINIMIZATION OF THE INCIDENTAL
CATCH OF PACIFIC HALIBUT
OMB CONTROL NO. 0648-XXXX

INTRODUCTION

This is a request for a new collection of information.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) prepared the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Management Area (FMP) under the authority of the [Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act](#), 16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq. (Magnuson-Stevens Act). The FMP is implemented under regulations at [50 CFR part 679](#).

The Council manages the BSAI groundfish fisheries in which Pacific halibut are caught incidentally (bycatch). At its February 2014 meeting, the Council reviewed a report on halibut bycatch in the BSAI groundfish fisheries. The Council also received testimony from directed halibut fishery participants expressing concern about the impact of halibut bycatch on the halibut stock as well as the economic impacts of reduced directed fishery catch limits on halibut fishermen and on coastal communities in Alaska. After reviewing the report and hearing this testimony, the Council expressed its intent to identify, as soon as possible, regulatory and non-regulatory methods to reduce halibut bycatch in the groundfish fisheries to the extent practicable, in order to mitigate the negative economic impacts on directed halibut fishery participants and coastal communities.

These progress reports will provide valuable, time-sensitive information for the Council's consideration of management program revisions to reduce bycatch of halibut in the BSAI groundfish fisheries to the extent practicable, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and National Standards 1 and 9 in particular: “(1) Conservation and management measures shall prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield from each fishery for the United States (U.S.) fishing industry”, and “(9) Conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable, (A) minimize bycatch and (B) to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimize the mortality of such bycatch”. The Council identified this item as an extremely high priority.

The Pacific halibut stock has been continuously declining over the past decade due to decreasing size at age (fish aren't growing as large) and decreasing survival rate of juvenile halibut. As a result of this stock decline and lower spawning biomass, halibut directed fishery catch limits have been reduced significantly in recent years. In the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) halibut management areas, the halibut catch limits established by the IPHC were reduced by approximately 30 percent from 2013 to 2014, with additional declines expected next year. These additional declines may result in insufficient allocations for the directed halibut fishery to occur, which would have significant negative economic impacts on directed halibut fishermen and coastal communities in Alaska.

At its February meeting, the Council also heard testimony from a number of BSAI groundfish sector participants. A majority of these participants have developed cooperative structures for

their fishing operations, in which harvesters coordinate fishing activities to improve efficiency, increase economic value from the fishery, and reduce bycatch and discards. In recognition that fishery participants may be able to use their cooperative structures to further reduce halibut bycatch, the Council requested that the BSAI groundfish sectors (American Fisheries Act (AFA) catcher/processors, AFA catcher vessels, Amendment 80, Freezer Longline, Western Alaska Community Development Quota) move forward with measures in their cooperative and/or inter-cooperative agreements to minimize halibut bycatch, including:

- ◆ Development of effective and verifiable measures for halibut avoidance
- ◆ Individual accountability and use of incentives to reduce halibut bycatch

Current regulations do not require BSAI sector participants to report measures in their cooperative and/or inter-cooperative agreements to minimize halibut bycatch to the Council or the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Therefore, the Council requested that sector participants provide the Council with this information voluntarily. Receiving this information from groundfish sector participants will enable the Council to make informed decisions about the most effective regulatory management measures that might be used in conjunction with non-regulatory measures to meet the Council's objective to reduce bycatch to the extent practicable.

Several BSAI groundfish sector participants indicated their willingness to provide this information to the Council by the requested deadline. These fishery participants specifically requested that the Council consider and recognize non-regulatory measures as an important component of reducing halibut bycatch, because the measures are likely to provide the fleet with more flexibility to adapt fishing operations to changing environmental and market conditions than regulatory measures.

A. JUSTIFICATION

1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary.

The Council passed a motion in February 2014 requesting that each sector in the BSAI groundfish fisheries voluntarily provide a report to the Council on progress for implementing measures in their cooperative and inter-cooperative agreements to minimize the incidental catch of halibut. These progress reports are to be provided to the Council at its June 2014 meeting.

2. 1Explain how, by whom, how frequently, and for what purpose the information will be used. 1If the information collected will be disseminated to the public or used to support information that will be disseminated to the public, then explain how the collection complies with all applicable Information Quality Guidelines.

a. Progress report from BSAI cooperatives

The purpose of the report is for each sector in the BSAI groundfish fisheries inform the Council of their progress on voluntary, non-regulatory methods they are using within their fishery cooperatives to avoid halibut bycatch in the BSAI groundfish fisheries. The Council is currently considering regulatory revisions to provide additional incentives for the fleet to reduce halibut bycatch in these fisheries.

In February 2014, the Council received testimony from a number of BSAI groundfish industry participants describing measures their fleets or cooperatives are currently developing or have already undertaken to reduce halibut bycatch. The Council would like to gather more information on these measures as it considers how it may best meet its objective to reduce halibut bycatch to the extent practicable.

The report should describe the development of effective and verifiable measures for halibut avoidance, and individual accountability and use of incentives to reduce incidental catch of halibut in the groundfish fisheries. There is no minimum length specified for the report.

Participants are:

AFA Catcher/Processor sector - 1 report

AFA Catcher Vessel sector - from 1 to 7 reports (probably likely to do one, combined sector report, but there are 7 cooperatives within the sector)

AFA Mothership sector - 1 report

Amendment 80 sector - 2 reports

Freezer longline sector - 1 report

Western Alaska Community Development Quota (CDQ) sector - 1 report

The report would be provided by electronic or paper submittal, perhaps with an additional oral presentation. This report will be submitted only to the Council.

Cooperative PSC Progress Report, Respondent	
Number of respondents	6
Total annual responses	6
Frequency of response = 1	
Total burden hours	30 hrs
Time per response = 5 hr	
Total personnel cost (\$37/hr)	\$1,100
Total miscellaneous cost (8.45)	\$8
Postage cost (.45 x 1 = .45)	
Fax (\$6 x 1 = 6)	
Email 0.05 x 4 = 0.20)	
Photocopy cost (6 x 6 pp x 0.05 = 1.80)	

Cooperative PSC Progress Report, Federal Government	
Total annual responses	0
Total burden hours	0
Total personnel cost	0
Total miscellaneous cost	0

It is anticipated that the information collected will be disseminated to the public or used to support publicly disseminated information. The Council will retain control over the information and safeguard it from improper access, modification, and destruction, consistent with National

Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) standards for confidentiality, privacy, and electronic information. See response to Question 10 of this Supporting Statement for more information on confidentiality and privacy. The information collection is designed to yield data that meet all applicable information quality guidelines. Prior to dissemination, the information will be subjected to quality control measures and a pre-dissemination review pursuant to [Section 515 of Public Law 106-554](#).

3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological techniques or other forms of information technology.

Instructions will be posted on the region's Web site. The Cooperative Progress Report may be submitted to the Council electronically as an attachment to an email; it also could be submitted by courier, mail, or fax.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication.

This information collection is part of a specialized and technical program that is not like any other.

5. If the collection of information involves small businesses or other small entities, describe the methods used to minimize burden.

Cooperatives are not small businesses or small entities; thus this information collection does not impose a significant impact on small entities.

6. Describe the consequences to the Federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently.

If the collection were not conducted or conducted less frequently, the information needed by the Council regarding progress on minimizing incidental catch of halibut detailing measures would not be available and the problems of incidental halibut catch would not be solved.

7. Explain any special circumstances that require the collection to be conducted in a manner inconsistent with OMB guidelines.

No special circumstances exist.

8. Provide information on the PRA Federal Register Notice that solicited public comments on the information collection prior to this submission. Summarize the public comments received in response to that notice and describe the actions taken by the agency in response to those comments. Describe the efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.

A [Federal Register](#) Notice was published (79 FR 12469, March 5, 2014) to solicit public comments. No comments were received.

9. Explain any decisions to provide payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

No payment or gift is provided under this program.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

This information is voluntary and is required to manage commercial fishing efforts under [50 CFR part 680](#), under section 402(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (16 U.S.C. 1801, et seq.) and under [16 U.S.C. 1862\(j\)](#), North Pacific Fisheries Conservation. The Council is not requesting that any confidential information be included in the report. The reports will be posted on the Council's Web site.

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private.

This information collection does not involve information of a sensitive nature.

12. Provide an estimate in hours of the burden of the collection of information.

Estimated total respondents: 6. Estimated total responses: 6. Estimated total burden: 30 hrs. Estimated total personnel costs: \$1,100.

13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to the respondents or record-keepers resulting from the collection (excluding the value of the burden hours in Question 12 above).

Estimated total miscellaneous costs: \$8.

14. Provide estimates of annualized cost to the Federal government.

The Federal government will not incur any costs or burden.

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments.

This is a new program.

16. For collections whose results will be published, outline the plans for tabulation and publication.

NMFS will not publish any results from this program.

17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons why display would be inappropriate.

Not Applicable.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.

Not Applicable.

B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS

This collection does not employ statistical methods.