



C5 BSAI Groundfish Specifications

December 2025

Action Memo

- Council Staff: Dr. Diana Stram
- Other Presenters: Gretchen Harrington, Krista Milani (NMFS)
- Action Required: Recommend final 2026 and 2027 BSAI groundfish harvest specifications, including:
- Overfishing Level (OFL) and Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) for all stocks
 - Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for all stocks, taking into account the State waters Pacific cod and Sablefish fisheries
 - Annual ABC reserve for three flatfish species
 - Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits and season apportionments of Pacific halibut, red king crab, Tanner crab, *C. opilio* crab, and herring to target fishery categories
 - Halibut Discard Mortality Rates (DMRs)

BACKGROUND

At this meeting the Council will review available information to make final recommendations on groundfish harvest specifications, ABC reserves for three flatfish species, PSC limits, and DMRs to manage the 2026 and 2027 BSAI groundfish fisheries. Once published in the Federal Register, these final 2026/2027 harvest specifications will replace the 2026 harvest specifications implemented in March 2025 ([90 FR 12640](#)), and the 2027 specifications will be superseded in 2027 when the final 2027 and 2028 harvest specifications are published. The 2026 harvest specifications are set to expire March 18, 2026. The final 2026 and 2027 harvest specifications must publish before March 18, 2026 to prevent a lapse in specifications. The proposed rule which adopts the harvest specifications recommended by the Council in October, had not been published as of November 19, 2025, and is behind schedule due to the recent government shutdown.

OFLs, ABCs, TACs, and Apportionments

The lapse in Federal appropriations from October 1 - November 12, 2025, has impacted the information available for the Council's typical process, in that Federal stock assessment authors did not have the time to complete new groundfish assessments as planned, and the Council's Groundfish Plan Teams did not convene to review stock assessments and provide recommendations on harvest specifications. As a result, the BSAI Groundfish SAFE Report was not compiled this year. Instead, staff have identified in a [December 2025 process document](#) the information that is available to support for final 2026-2027 specifications this year, so that decisions remain consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), including National Standard 2, as well as the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) and other federal requirements.

[Catch reports](#) were prepared in November 2025 for all stocks. The Council's most recent and complete peer review process for groundfish assessments occurred in September-December 2024, with assessment products coming out of that process documented in the [2024 Groundfish SAFE Report](#).

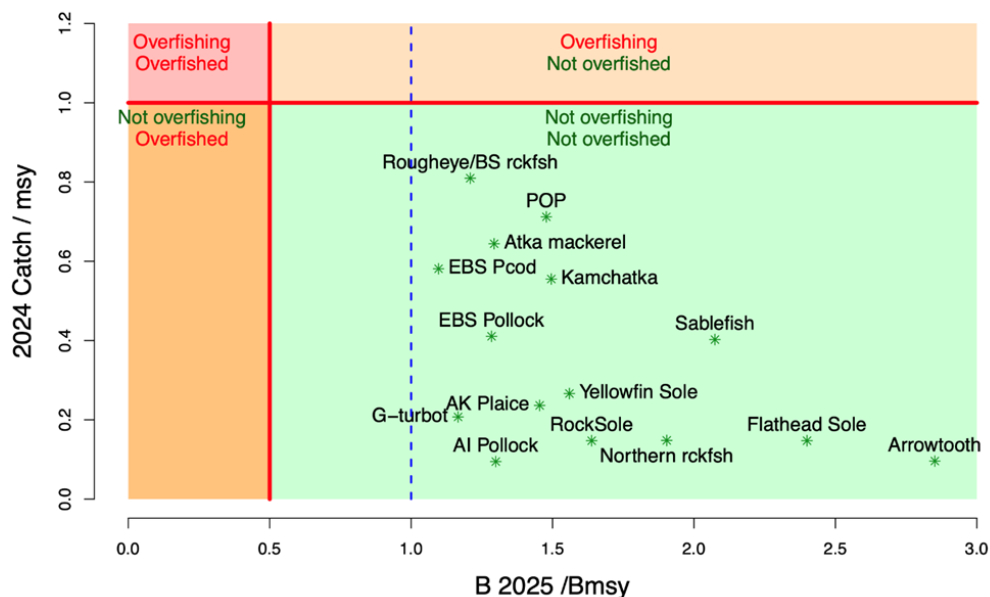
The SSC’s recommendations for *proposed* harvest specifications for 2026 and 2027 were based on the 2024 SAFE Report, and were adopted by the Council in their [October Council motion](#). OFLs, ABCs, TACs, and area apportionments from the recommendations in October are included in Table 1 (posted to the eAgenda). In December, the SSC will discuss available information (see [December 2025 process document](#)) and provide OFL and ABC recommendations to the Council during the meeting.

If no changes are recommended by the SSC, the sum of the 2026 and 2027 ABCs are compared to the sums of 2025 and 2024 ABCs below. These sums include the Alaska-wide sablefish ABC. The decrease in ABCs from 2025 to 2026 is driven largely by decreases in EBS pollock (16%), EBS Pacific cod (8%), and Atka mackerel (10%), balanced against some increases in some flatfish stocks (Yellowfin sole, Northern rock sole, and flathead sole). The 2027 OFLs and ABCs recommended in October mirror the 2026 values. The proposed specifications reflect maximum permissible ABC (maxABC)s for all stocks in 2026 and 2027, except for Greenland turbot and sharks.

2024	2025	2026	2027
3,476,077 t	3,588,066 t	3,188,585 t	3,188,585 t

As illustrated in Figure 2 (below) of the 2024 BSAI SAFE report introduction, the status of BSAI stocks as estimated for 2025 continues to appear favorable. All stocks are above B_{MSY} or the B_{MSY} proxy of $B_{35\%}$, which is indicated by the blue dotted line in the figure below. Therefore for those stocks for which status determination criteria are available (as shown in the figure), no stocks were overfished in 2024. The determination of overfishing is assessed for the previous year (e.g. in 2025 the determination for overfishing in 2024 is made). This is documented using the official catch estimate for the most recent complete year of catch (2024) in conjunction with the OFL for that year. Considering the information contained in Table 1, no stocks were subject to overfishing in 2024.

Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands



BSAI SAFE Report Introduction Figure 2: Summary of Bering Sea stock status in 2025 (spawning biomass relative to B_{msy} ; horizontal axis) and current year catch relative to fishing at F_{msy} (vertical axis) where F_{OFL} is taken to equal F_{msy} . Note due to model changes in 2024, Aleutian Island cod is not included in this figure.

In October 2025, the Council made a motion regarding [spatial apportionment of groundfish stocks](#). At that time, staff had indicated that resulting changes to harvest specifications tables and nomenclature (using the term “Biologically-informed Recommended Distribution, “BRD” to reflect spatial apportionments of a stock’s ABC) would be implemented in December 2025. Due to the shutdown of the federal government, these changes are delayed and will be implemented beginning in the fall 2026 harvest specifications cycle. All tables for December 2025 reflect the status quo rather than the new nomenclature.

TAC considerations for State waters Pacific cod and sablefish fishery

In setting TACs for 2026 and 2027, the Council accounts for Guideline Harvest Levels (GHLs) for groundfish fisheries in State waters. The Alaska Board of Fisheries took action in 2018 that modified how GHLs in the Bering Sea (BS) and Aleutian Islands (AI) are set for Pacific cod. The GHL in the AI will be set at 31% of the AI ABC, or a maximum of 4,022 t. This percentage was reduced from 35% in 2025 due to the fleet not reaching their GHL in 2024 or 2025. The BS GHL will be set at 13% of the EBS Pacific cod. An additional reduction of 45 t is taken from the remaining EBS Pacific cod maxTAC for the Area O jig fishery. Table 1 posted to the eAgenda of OFLs, ABCs and TACs for 2026 and 2027 based on the proposed specifications from October 2025 for accounts for the EBS GHL in setting the TAC but the reduction from 35% to 31% for the AI cod TAC is not incorporated (it is set based up the previous 35% GHL to the state waters AI fishery). The TAC listed for AI cod in Table 1 is based on the 35% GHL reduction resulting in a 2026 and 2027 TAC of 8,432 t. Using the reduced GHL of 31%, the AI TAC for 2026 and 2027 could be increased to 8,951 t.

The Board of Fisheries GHL for vessels using pot, longline, jig, and hand troll gear in State waters in the State’s Aleutian Islands (AI) state-waters sablefish registration area that includes all state waters west of Scotch Cap Light (164° 44.72’ W longitude) and south of Cape Sarichef (54° 36’ N latitude). The State’s sablefish GHL is set at 5 percent of the combined 2026 BS and AI ABC. The State’s AI sablefish registration area includes areas adjacent to parts of the federal Bering Sea subarea (BS) subarea. Based on the 2025 GHL sablefish catch, most of the State’s 2026 and 2027 GHL sablefish fishery is expected to occur in State-waters adjacent to the federal Bering Sea subarea. Therefore, the Council and Advisory Panel may recommend that the 2026 and 2027 sablefish TACs in the BS and AI account for the State’s GHLs for sablefish caught in State waters.

Flatfish flexibility ABC reserve

The Council annually recommends an ABC reserve for flathead sole, rock sole, and yellowfin sole, which will be allocated to CDQ groups and the Amendment 80 cooperative using the same formulas that are used in the annual harvest specification process. The ABC reserve for each species will be specified by the Council by evaluating the ABC surplus for the species (i.e., the differences between the ABC and TAC), and considering whether that amount needs to be reduced by a discretionary buffer based on social, economic, or ecological considerations. The Council will then designate some, all, or none of the ABC surplus as the ABC reserve. The Council should provide its rationale each year for setting the ABC reserve at a particular level for these three flatfish species.

During the NMFS Management Report (Agenda Item B2), NMFS will provide a report on flatfish exchanges by the Amendment 80 cooperative and CDQ groups this year. This informs the Council’s decision whether to establish a buffer reducing the amount of ABC reserve available to be exchanged by eligible entities. The report will include information on the number of vessels used to harvest cooperative quota, the number of and dates of flatfish exchanges, the types and amounts of cooperative quota and

Amendment 80 ABC reserves utilized. The report also includes the dates, types, and amounts of quota transfers.

Prohibited Species Catch limits

Apportionments of Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits are established for halibut, crab, and herring during the specifications process and are allocated between sectors and seasons as described below. PSC limit tables are attached to the eAgenda (Tables 16-19 in BSAI Groundfish Tables).

Crab PSC in Trawl Fisheries

Final BSAI harvest specifications include PSC limits for red king crab, Tanner crab, and *C. opilio* crab, which are established based on formulas in the FMP, and regulations. The Council recommends target fishery apportionments of these limits for the BSAI trawl limited access sector. The 2025 and 2026 crab PSC limits have been revised for 2026 and 2027 using the current crab biomass amounts.

Federal regulations at §679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)(1) state that the Red King Crab Savings Subarea is closed to nonpelagic trawl gear if Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) does not set a TAC for red king crab in the Bristol Bay area in the previous year. A GHL has been set for the 2025/2026 Bristol Bay red king crab season, thus the area will be open to nonpelagic trawl gear in 2026. The Council recommends the red king crab bycatch limit for non-pelagic trawl fisheries within the RKCSS up to 25 percent of the red king crab PSC allowance (see § 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B)(2)).

Herring

An overall herring PSC limit is established as 1% of the EBS herring biomass. This limit is apportioned to seven PSC target fishery categories. Herring PSC limits for 2026 are attached to the eAgenda (Table 14), based on the most current biomass estimates from the ADF&G that are available on the eAgenda.

Halibut PSC in Trawl Fisheries

The overall non-Amendment 80 trawl gear halibut PSC limit is fixed under BSAI Groundfish FMP apportioned as 745 t to BSAI Trawl Limited Access Sector, and 315 t to CDQ. Within the BSAI trawl limited access sector, the Council recommends apportionments of the halibut PSC limit to the trawl fishery categories. Additional reduction of 5% would occur if PSC limits are transferred from the BSAI trawl limited access sector to the Amendment 80 cooperative during a fishing year.

Amendment 122 implemented the Pacific Cod Trawl Cooperative Program which apportions the crab and halibut PSC limit for the Pacific cod fishery to the AFA catcher/processors, PCTC Program A and B season, and trawl catcher vessel C season.

Under Amendment 123 and its implementing regulations, the BSAI halibut PSC limit for the Amendment 80 sector will be based on the most recent halibut abundance estimates from the IPHC setline survey index and the NMFS AFSC Eastern Bering Sea shelf trawl survey index (87 FR 75570, December 9, 2022). The 2025 Eastern Bering Sea shelf trawl survey index estimate of halibut abundance is 133,705 mt and is below the threshold level of 150,000 mt in the low abundance state. The 2025 IPHC index estimate of halibut abundance for 2025 is 6,664 mt which is in the “low” abundance state. Therefore using Table 58 to part 679, the Amendment 80 PSC limit in 2026 and 2027 will be 1,309 t.

Halibut PSC in Hook-and-line Gear Fisheries

The 710 t non-trawl gear halibut PSC limit, which is established in the FMP, can be apportioned by fishery categories. The halibut PSC limit for the hook-and-line Pacific cod fishery is divided between the hook-and-line CP and CV sector. The Council can provide varying amounts of halibut PSC by season to each sector, tailoring PSC limits based on the factors to be considered below.

Seasonal apportionment of PSC limits

The Council may also seasonally apportion the PSC limits listed above for the hook-and-line gear and BSAI trawl limited access sector. Regulations require that seasonal apportionments of bycatch allowances be based on information listed below:

Factors to be considered for seasonal apportionments of bycatch allowances

1. Seasonal distribution of prohibited species;
2. Seasonal distribution of target groundfish species relative to prohibited species distribution;
3. Expected prohibited species bycatch needs on a seasonal basis relevant to change in prohibited species biomass and expected catches of target groundfish species;
4. Expected variations in bycatch rates throughout the fishing year;
5. Expected changes in directed groundfish fishing seasons;
6. Expected start of fishing efforts; and
7. Economic effects of establishing seasonal prohibited species apportionments on segments of the target groundfish industry.

Halibut Discard Mortality Rates

The recommended discard mortality rates for use in the BSAI for 2026-2027 are attached to the eAgenda (Table 20 in BSAI Groundfish Tables 15-20).