

information on Amendment 77, see the proposed rule at 68 FR 49416, August 18, 2003. A final rule implementing Amendment 77 was published on December 1, 2003 68 FR 67056 and will be effective by January 1, 2004.

#### Proposed Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) and TAC Specifications

The proposed ABC levels are based on the best available biological and socioeconomic information, including projected biomass trends, information on assumed distribution of stock biomass, and revised technical methods used to calculate stock biomass. In general, the development of ABCs and overfishing levels (OFLs) involves sophisticated statistical analyses of fish populations and is based on a successive series of 6 levels, or tiers, of reliable information available to fishery scientists.

The best information currently available is set forth in Appendix A of the final SAFE report for the 2003 BSAI groundfish fisheries dated November 2002 (*see ADDRESSES*). Information on

the status of stocks will be updated with the 2003 survey results and reconsidered by the Plan Team in November 2003 for the 2003 SAFE reports. The final harvest specifications will be based on the 2003 SAFE reports.

In October 2003, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Advisory Panel (AP), and Council reviewed the Plan Team's preliminary recommendations to project 2003 biomass amounts, as identified in the 2002 SAFE, for the proposed 2004 ABC, OFL, and TAC amounts. The SSC concurred with the Plan Team's recommendations, which estimates the proposed ABCs and OFLs by using a projection of 2003 groundfish harvest with the November 2002 SAFE report model projections of 2003 ABCs for groundfish stocks managed at tiers 1–3. The Council adopted the OFL and ABC amounts recommended by the SSC (Table 1). The Council also adopted the AP's recommendation that the 2004 proposed TACs be set equal to the 2003 TACs, except for sablefish, Pacific ocean perch, and Atka mackerel. Recognizing

anticipated changes in the ABCs for these species, the AP recommended and the Council adopted a decrease in the TACs for sablefish, Pacific ocean perch, and Atka mackerel. The Council adopted the AP's recommendation to use the 2003 PSC allowances for 2004. The Council will reconsider these amounts in December 2003, after the Plan Team incorporates new status of stocks information into a final SAFE report for the 2004 BSAI groundfish fishery. None of the Council's TAC recommendations for 2004 exceed the recommended ABC for any species category. Therefore, NMFS finds that the Council's recommendations for proposed 2004 OFLs, ABCs, and TACs are consistent with the best available information on the biological condition of the groundfish stocks.

Table 1 lists the proposed 2004 OFL, ABC, and TAC amounts for groundfish in the BSAI. The proposed apportionment of TAC amounts among fisheries and seasons is discussed below.

TABLE 1.—PROPOSED 2004 ACCEPTABLE BIOLOGICAL CATCH (ABC), TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH (TAC), INITIAL TAC (ITAC), CDQ RESERVE ALLOCATION, AND OVERFISHING LEVELS OF GROUNDFISH IN THE BERING SEA AND ALEUTIAN ISLANDS AREA (BSAI) <sup>1</sup>

[All amounts are in metric tons]

| Species and area                   | Overfishing level | ABC       | TAC       | ITAC <sup>2</sup> | CDQ reserve <sup>3</sup> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Pollock: <sup>4</sup>              |                   |           |           |                   |                          |
| Bering Sea (BS) <sup>2</sup>       | 2,636,000         | 2,127,700 | 1,491,760 | 1,342,584         | 149,176                  |
| Aleutian Islands (AI) <sup>2</sup> | 52,600            | 39,400    | 1,000     | 1,000             | .....                    |
| Bogoslof District                  | 45,300            | 4,070     | 50        | 50                | .....                    |
| Pacific cod: BSAI                  | 359,000           | 245,000   | 207,500   | 176,375           | 15,563                   |
| Sablefish: <sup>5</sup>            |                   |           |           |                   |                          |
| BS                                 | 3,818             | 2,658     | 2,658     | 1,131             | 265                      |
| AI                                 | 4,082             | 2,842     | 2,842     | 603               | 431                      |
| Atka mackerel:                     |                   |           |           |                   |                          |
| BSAI                               | 104,100           | 61,600    | 59,111    | 50,244            | 4,433                    |
| Western AI                         | .....             | 22,479    | 19,990    | 16,992            | 1,499                    |
| Central AI                         | .....             | 28,708    | 28,708    | 24,402            | 2,153                    |
| Eastern AI/BS                      | .....             | 10,413    | 10,413    | 8,851             | 781                      |
| Yellowfin sole: BSAI               | 130,000           | 109,600   | 83,750    | 71,188            | 6,281                    |
| Rock sole: BSAI                    | 119,400           | 99,900    | 44,000    | 37,400            | 3,300                    |
| Greenland turbot:                  |                   |           |           |                   |                          |
| BSAI                               | 16,755            | 6,900     | 4,000     | 3,400             | 300                      |
| BS                                 | .....             | 4,600     | 2,680     | 2,278             | 201                      |
| AI                                 | .....             | 2,300     | 1,320     | 1,122             | 99                       |
| Arrowtooth flounder: BSAI          | 175,800           | 142,200   | 12,000    | 10,200            | 900                      |
| Flathead sole: BSAI                | 74,100            | 61,100    | 20,000    | 17,000            | 1,500                    |
| Other flatfish: <sup>6</sup> BSAI  | 21,400            | 16,000    | 3,000     | 2,550             | 225                      |
| Alaska plaice: BSAI                | 166,300           | 138,200   | 10,000    | 8,500             | 750                      |
| Pacific ocean perch:               |                   |           |           |                   |                          |
| BSAI                               | 17,600            | 14,900    | 13,932    | 11,842            | 1,045                    |
| BS                                 | .....             | 2,378     | 1,410     | 1,199             | 106                      |
| Western AI                         | .....             | 5,773     | 5,773     | 4,907             | 433                      |
| Central AI                         | .....             | 3,296     | 3,296     | 2,802             | 247                      |
| Eastern AI                         | .....             | 3,454     | 3,454     | 2,936             | 259                      |
| Northern rockfish:                 |                   |           |           |                   |                          |
| BSAI                               | 9,468             | 7,101     | .....     | .....             | .....                    |
| BS                                 | .....             | .....     | 121       | 103               | 9                        |
| AI                                 | .....             | .....     | 5,879     | 4,997             | 441                      |
| Shortraker/rougheye:               |                   |           |           |                   |                          |
| BSAI                               | 1,289             | 967       | .....     | .....             | .....                    |
| BS                                 | .....             | .....     | 137       | 116               | 10                       |