

TABLE 6.—2003 GEAR SHARES AND CDQ RESERVE OF BSAI SABLEFISH TACS—Continued

[Amounts are in mt]

Subarea and gear	Percent of TAC	Share of TAC (mt)	ITAC (mt) ¹	CDQ reserve
Total	100	3,100	659	523

¹ Except for the sablefish hook-and-line and pot gear allocation, 15 percent of TAC is apportioned to the reserve. The ITAC is the remainder of the TAC after the subtraction of these reserves.

² The portion of the sablefish TAC allocated to vessels using trawl gear, one half of the reserve (7.5 percent of the specified TAC) is reserved for the CDQ program.

³ For the portion of the sablefish TAC allocated to vessels using hook-and-line or pot gear, 20 percent of the allocated TAC is reserved for use by CDQ participants. Regulations in § 679.20(b)(1) do not provide for the establishment of an ITAC for sablefish allocated to hook-and-line or pot gear.

Allocation of PSC Limits for Halibut, Salmon, Crab, and Herring

PSC limits for halibut are set forth in regulations at § 679.21(e). For the BSAI trawl fisheries, the limit is 3,675 mt of halibut mortality and for non-trawl fisheries, the limit is 900 mt of halibut mortality. For chinook salmon, regulations at § 679.21(e)(1)(vii) specify a scheduled reduction of the chinook salmon PSC limit until the final limit is reached in 2004. For 2003, the chinook salmon PSC limit for the pollock fishery is 33,000 fish. PSC limits for crab and herring are specified annually based on abundance and spawning biomass.

The red king crab mature female abundance is estimated to be 18.6 million king crab and the effective spawning biomass is estimated to be 37.7 million pounds (17,100 mt) from the 2002 survey data. Based on the criteria set out at § 679.21(e)(1)(ii), the 2003 PSC limit of red king crab in Zone 1 for trawl gear is 97,000 animals as a result of the mature female abundance above 8.4 million king crab and the effective spawning biomass estimate greater than 14.5 (6,577 mt) but less than 55 million pounds (24,948 mt).

Regulations at § 679.21(e)(3)(ii)(B) establish criteria under which NMFS must specify an annual red king crab bycatch limit for the Red King Crab Savings Subarea (RKCSS). The regulations limit the RKCSS to up to 35 percent of the trawl bycatch allowance specified for the rock sole/flathead sole/“other flatfish” fishery category and must be based on the need to optimize the groundfish harvest relative to red king crab bycatch. The Council recommended, and NMFS approves, a red king crab bycatch limit equal to 35 percent of the trawl bycatch allowance specified for the rock sole/flathead sole/“other flatfish” fishery category within the RKCSS.

Based on 2002 survey data, the *C. bairdi* crab abundance is estimated to be 464.9 million animals. Given the criteria set out at § 679.21(e)(1)(iii), the 2003 *C. bairdi* crab PSC limit for trawl gear is

980,000 animals in Zone 1 and 2,970,000 animals in Zone 2 as a result of the *C. bairdi* crab abundance estimate of over 400 million animals.

Under § 679.21(e)(1)(iv), the PSC limit for *C. opilio* crab is based on total abundance as indicated by the NMFS annual bottom trawl survey. The *C. opilio* crab PSC limit is set at 0.1133 percent of the Bering Sea abundance index. Based on the 2002 survey estimate of 1.49 billion animals, the calculated limit is 1,169,000 animals. Because this limit is less than 4.5 million, under § 679.21(e)(1)(iv)(B), the 2003 *C. opilio* crab PSC limit is 4,350,000 animals.

Under § 679.21(e)(1)(vi), the PSC limit of Pacific herring caught while conducting any trawl operation for groundfish in the BSAI is 1 percent of the annual eastern Bering Sea herring biomass. NMFS' best estimate of 2003 herring biomass is 152,574 mt. This amount was derived using 2001 survey data and an age-structured biomass projection model developed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Therefore, the herring PSC limit for 2003 is 1,526 mt.

Under § 679.21(e)(1)(i), 7.5 percent of each PSC limit specified for halibut and crab is allocated as a PSQ reserve for use by the groundfish CDQ program. Regulations at § 679.21(e)(3) require the apportionment of each trawl PSC limit into PSC bycatch allowances for seven specified fishery categories. Regulations at § 679.21(e)(4)(ii) authorize the apportionment of the non-trawl halibut PSC limit into PSC bycatch allowances among five fishery categories. The fishery bycatch allowances for the trawl and non-trawl fisheries are listed in Table 7.

Regulations at § 679.21(e)(4)(ii) authorize exemption of specified non-trawl fisheries from the halibut PSC limit. As in past years, NMFS, after consultation with the Council, is exempting pot gear, jig gear, and the sablefish IFQ hook-and-line gear fishery categories from halibut bycatch

restrictions because these fisheries use selective gear types that take few halibut compared to other gear types such as nonpelagic trawl. In 2002, total groundfish catch for the pot gear fishery in the BSAI was approximately 15,518 mt with an associated halibut bycatch mortality of about 8 mt. The 2002 groundfish jig gear fishery harvested about 172 mt of groundfish. Most vessels in the jig gear fleet are less than 60 ft (18.3 m) LOA and are exempt from observer coverage requirements. As a result, observer data are not available on halibut bycatch in the jig gear fishery. However, a negligible amount of halibut bycatch mortality is assumed because of the selective nature of this gear type and the likelihood that halibut caught with jig gear have a high survival rate when released.

As in past years, the Council recommended the sablefish IFQ fishery be exempt from halibut bycatch restrictions because of the sablefish and halibut IFQ program (subpart D of 50 CFR part 679). The sablefish IFQ program requires legal-sized halibut to be retained by vessels using hook-and-line gear if a halibut IFQ permit holder is aboard and is holding unused halibut IFQ. NMFS is approving the Council's recommendation. This action results in less halibut discard in the sablefish fishery. In 1995, about 36 mt of halibut discard mortality was estimated for the sablefish IFQ fishery. Estimates for 1996 through 2002 have not been calculated, however NMFS has no information indicating that it would be significantly different.

Regulations at § 679.21(e)(5) authorize NMFS, after consultation with the Council, to establish seasonal apportionments of PSC amounts in order to maximize the ability of the fleet to harvest the available groundfish TAC and to minimize bycatch. The factors to be considered are: (1) Seasonal distribution of prohibited species, (2) seasonal distribution of target groundfish species, (3) PSC bycatch needs on a seasonal basis relevant to