

**Conference Board Report
91st IPHC Annual Meeting
January 26th – 30th 2015
Vancouver, B.C.**

United States	United States Continued
3b/4a Fishermen's Association	Trinidad Ranchera Tribe
Alaska Charter Association	Tulalip Tribes
Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association	United Cook Inlet Drift Association
Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association	West Brothers Group
Aleute Corp	Westport Charter Boat Association
Adak Community Development Corp.	Young Halibut Fishers of Western AK
APICDA Vessel Inc	
Area 4 Harvesters Alliance	
Cape Barnabus Inc.	
Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association	
Coastside Fishing Club	
Coastal Trollers Assn.	
Coastal Villages Regional Fund	
Deep Sea Fishermen's Union of the Pacific	
Edmonds Veteran Independent Longliners	
Fishing Vessel Owners Assoc	
Freezer Longliner Coalition	
Golden Gate Fishermen's Association	
Halibut Coalition	
Homer Charter Association	
Humbolt Area Saltwater Anglers	
Jamestown S' Klallum Tribe	
K Bay Fishermen's Association	
Kodiak Vessel Owners Association	
Kodiak Longline Assn.	
Lower Elwa	
Lummi Indian Nation	
Makah Fisheries Management	
N. Olympic Penn. Sportfishing Coalition	
North Pacific Fisheries Association	
Pacific Federation of Fishermen's Assn.	
Petersburg Vessel Owners Association	
Port Gamble S' Klallum Tribe	
Prince William Sound Charter Boat Assoc	
Quiiute Tribe	
Quinault Indian Nation	
Recreational Fishing Alliance-California	
Recreational Fishing Alliance-Oregon Chapter	
Seafood Producers Cooperative	
SE Alaska Fishermen's Alliance	
Sitka Halibut & Blackcod Marketing Assoc	
St. Paul Fishermen's Association	
Tribal Government of St. Paul	
	Canada
	Ahousaht Fishing Corporation
	Annieville Halibut Association
	Area F Troll Association
	A'Tlegay Fisheries Society
	BC Halibut Longline Fisherman's Assoc.
	BC Longline Fisherman's Association
	BC Tuna Fisherman's Association
	BC Wildlife Federation
	Canadian Sablefish Association
	Ditidaht First Nation
	F.A.S.
	Gulf Crab Fishermen's Assn.
	Gulf Trollers Assn.
	Council of Haida Nation
	Halibut Advisory Board
	Hook and Line Groundfish Association
	North Pacific Halibut Fisherman's Assn
	Northern Halibut Producer's Assoc.
	Northern Trollers Association
	Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council
	Pacific Cst. Fishing Vessel Owners Guild
	Pacific Trollers Association
	PHMA
	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - Main
	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - South
	Sport Fishing Advisory Board - North
	Steveston Halibut Association
	Sport Fishing Institute of BC
	South Vancouver Island Anglers Coalition Society
	Ucluelet First Nation
	UFAWU
	Vancouver Island Longline Assoc
	West Coast Guides Association

REVIEW CONFERENCE BOARD VOTING ROSTER

The United States section accredited 49 organizations for participation for the 2015 Conference Board proceedings.

The Canadian section accredited 33 organizations for participation for the 2015 Conference Board proceedings.

Conference Board welcomed 13 new member organizations

SELECT CHAIRPERSONS FROM CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

United States selected Linda Behnken as Co-Chair.

Canada selected Chuck Ashcroft as Chair.

CONFERENCE BOARD SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS TO IPHC

A. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALASKAN, CANADIAN WATERS, and Washington Treaty Nations:

The Conference Board recommends an opening date of March 14, 2015 and a closing date of November 15, 2015.

The following are comments from the Canadian and U.S. delegates regarding season dates:

Motion made for March 7-November 7 season. *Motion passed US section 22-15-8; failed Canada section 0-22. (Failed by majority)*

Motion made for March 14-November 15. *Motion passed US section 36-1-2; Canada 26-0.*

Discussion:

U.S. (Alaska representatives) indicated strong support for as long a season as possible. Many preferred an earlier opening of March 1 or 7th to maximize fresh market opportunities, distribute effort, and take advantage of favorable tides in Alaska. Representatives of western areas supported a late closure date to allow the sablefish season to extend until mid-November. Staff subsequently clarified that regulations could not be in place in time for a March 1 opening. March 14 provides favorable tides for Canada and Area 2A.

Canada: prefers a Saturday opening date. March 14 also allows spawning migrations to complete. Canada recommended a November 7 closing date but agreed to the November 15 date in order to have consensus for the March 14 opening.

B. SEASON DATE RECOMMENDATION 2A

The Conference Board supports the staff recommendations for the seven Area 2A commercial openings beginning on June 24 as outlined in Bluebook page 203:

“For the Area 2A directed commercial fishery, the staff recommends an opening pattern similar to 2014, starting the last week of June with a series of 10-hour periods, with fishing period limits. Therefore we recommend the following series for 2015: June 24, July 8, July 22, August 5, August 19, September 2, and September 16. The size of the fishing period limits will be determined when more information is available on fleet participation.”

Additionally, the Conference Board adopted the IPHC recommendation to endorse the CSP developed by the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) as described on page 203 of the 2015 Bluebook. Area 2A representatives advised the Conference Board that an allocation for Northern California has been included for Area 2A.

CATCH SHARING PLANS: Areas 2A, 2B, and 4CDE

2A CSP addressed above in the 2A directed fishery season recommendations.

Note: The CB considers the 2A, 2B, and 4CDE CSP to be domestic allocation issues that are the purview of their respective Countries and therefore are not be addressed by the Conference Board.

Area 2C/3A Catch Sharing Plan

Motion: Conference Board endorsed halibut charter management measures developed by the charter stakeholder committee and recommended by the NPFMC (Bluebook p. 205).

Area 2C Charters: One-fish daily bag limit, with a reverse slot limit allowing the retention of one fish, ≤ 40 inches or ≥ 80 inches in length, with head on.

If the final charter allocation is sufficiently higher than the Blue Line to accommodate a change in the reverse slot limit, the NPFMC recommends adjusting the size of the lower limit upward to meet the allocation.

Area 3A Charters: Two-fish daily bag limit. One fish of any size and a maximum size of the second halibut is 29 inches, with head on. There is an annual limit of five (5) fish. Each vessel is limited to one trip per calendar day. Charter fishing will be prohibited on Thursdays from June 15 – August 31. (NOTE August date correction from Bluebook page 204).

If the charter final allocation is sufficiently higher than the Blue Line; the NPFMC recommends adjusting the maximum size of the second fish upward to meet the allocation.

Guided sport regulatory changes:

- 1) NMFS and IPHC regulations currently state that if halibut are filleted at sea the entire carcass must be retained on board the vessel until all fillets are off-loaded. IPHC suggests removing from IPHC regulation to avoid duplication. This NMFS regulation would remain in effect with the new size restrictions.
- 2) Revise IPHC guide definition to be consistent with NMFS and ADFG definition. (Per Bluebook page 204)
- 3) NMFS proposed regulation change: Charter caught halibut must remain on board a vessel until completion of charter trip.
- 4) NMFS proposed regulation change: Charter guide is responsible for anglers' compliance with fishing regulations while that angler is on board the charter vessel.

Motion was made to address these issues individually by a member of the charter sector who supported 1 and 2 above but opposed conference board action on 3 and 4. This conference board member was concerned that regulations 3 and 4 were not yet in place therefore commenting was inappropriate; also that concerns relative to accommodating a vessel breakdown and removing halibut from a vessel under these conditions had not yet been addressed. NMFS stated these situations would be accommodated.

Motion: Support all guided sport/charter regulation changes described above. Motion passed US section 17-5-18; Canada abstained.

Recommendation to add California Department of Fish and Wildlife to the list of Authorized Officers defined in IPHC regulations and allowed to enforce IPHC regulations was unanimously supported by the Conference board.

CATCH LIMIT DECISIONS

The Conference Board majority adopted the following catch limits for 2015

2A	.96	million pounds
2B	7.038	million pounds
2C	5.0	million pounds
3A	10.10	million pounds
3B	2.65	million pounds*
4A	1.39	million pounds
4B	1.14	million pounds
4CDE	<u>1.285</u>	<u>million pounds</u>
Total	29.563	million pounds

*Canada did not support the 2.65 million pound catch limit for Area 3B. Canada stated concerns relating to the status of stocks in 3B reflected in low survey and commercial WPUE, high abundance/encounter rate on undersized halibut, and high uncertainty surrounding bycatch amounts and monitoring/accounting for bycatch (RARA p.318)

Spawner Potential Ratio: The Conference Board received additional explanation of the SPR from Dr. Ian Stewart for consideration during deliberations prior to discussing catch limits.

Rationale put forward by each area to support catch limit recommendations:

Area 2A: CB adopted .96 million pound catch limit. Proponents of the .96 million pound catch limit for Area 2A stated stocks are stable, allocations are strictly enforced, and harvesting opportunities critically important to tribes, sport, and commercial fishermen from Washington through California. Others noted treaty/trust responsibilities and the delicate balance underlying the CSP. One CB member noted that the dramatic reduction in Area 2A bycatch benefits halibut stocks. Also noted is that Northern California has been added as an active management area with no increase in the Area 2A catch limit relative to 2014. *Motion passed unanimously*

Area 2B: CB Adopted 7.038 million pound (combined commercial and recreational) catch limit. Canada notes that recent survey WPUE indices and commercial fishery WPUE indices in Area 2B are stable and increasing, respectively. Catch limit discussions are better grounded in these data, than in an apportionment scheme and outdated harvest policy that do not fit these data. Additionally, the CB was advised by Dr. Ian Stewart that apportionment simply provides a guide to distribution of the stock. Similarly, Canada has doubts that the current use of bottom area is an appropriate apportionment metric as not all bottom area is equal, and catchability is equally variable. Canada maintains that the data support a return to the 2012 and 2013 catch limit of 7.038 M lbs in Area 2B – and that the reduction taken in 2014 was unwarranted. Area 2B has reduced its trawl bycatch by 90% and all groundfish hook & line and pot incidental mortalities are accounted for under the directed fishery allowable harvest limit. Finally, a robust and comprehensive catch monitoring regime is in place in Canada's directed and bycatch fisheries that ensures halibut mortalities are estimated with a high degree of certainty. Some members of the U.S. section expressed their opposition to the continuing Area 2B harvests above the Blue Line.

Motion passed 28-11-7 on the US section; Unanimous on the Canada Section

Area 2C: CB adopted a 5.0 million pound (combined commercial and guided sport) catch limit. Proponents noted that dramatic catch limit reductions six years ago have worked to rebuild stocks. Area 2C has the highest survey WPUE, the (close) second to highest commercial WPUE, and the lowest bycatch at .01 million pounds net weight with no trawling allowed in the area. WPUE increased relative to last year in both the survey and the commercial fishery and the size distribution is relatively strong. Representatives noted that Area 2 now contains approximately 1/3 of the halibut biomass. Area 2C charter representative also supported the 5 million pound catch limit. Some Area 2C representatives supported a higher catch limit; one noted that both historic and current survey WPUE in Area 2C are comparable at 192 pounds per skate, but catch limits have been reduced from over 10 million pounds to less than 5 million pounds. Some CB members opposed exceeding the Blue Line. *Motion passed on the US section 40-3-3; Canada supported unanimously.*

Area 3A: CB adopted 10.10 million pound (combined commercial and guided sport) catch limit. Conference Board members noted that Area 3A took a 33% reduction last year after taking a significant reduction the year before and that this year's increase in survey WPUE might indicate last year's reduction was larger than necessary. Survey WPUE increased 8% this year indicating reductions have worked to promote rebuilding. Another CB member noted that Area 3A was one of few areas at the Blue Line last year and that the Blue Line this year seemed conservative but appropriate.

Motion passed on the U.S. Section 44-0-2; Canada supported unanimously

Area 3B: Conference Board adopted 2.65 million pound catch limit. Proponents of the Area 3B recommendation stated substantial reductions in recent years have imposed significant economic hardship on Area 3B IFQ holders. Area 3B catch limit was cut 30% last year and 76% since 2010. CB member noted that survey WPUE increased this year relative to last year and that commercial WPUE is strong on the south side of Area 3B while weak on north end due to localized depletion. One Area 3B fishermen noted that years of Area 2B catch limits above the Blue Line justified catch limits in Area 3B over the Blue Line. Canadian representatives noted that Area 3B has commercial WPUE of 99 pounds per skate, high encounter rate with undersized fish, along with inadequate bycatch monitoring (as stated on page 318 of the RARA).

Motion passed on the US section 35-4-7; Canada opposed 6-11-14

Area 4A: Conference Board adopted 1.39 million pound catch limit. CB supported the Blue Line for Area 4A noting the dramatic difference between the survey and the commercial catch WPUE: survey WPUE increased by 22% and commercial WPUE decreased by 18%. CB member cited pages 166 and 171 of the Bluebook noting that bycatch has been reduced in Area 4A and that this area has been below the target harvest rate for the past two years. Even with the survey increase WPUE remains low relative to historic levels and CB members considered the Blue Line catch limit appropriate.

Motion passed on the U.S. section 44-0-1; Canada supported unanimously

Area 4B: CB adopted 1.14 million pound catch limit. Representatives from this area stated that Area 4B is a distinct stock from the rest of the North Pacific with little exchange to other areas; hence any harvest over the Blue Line in Area 4B will not affect other areas. Area 4B representatives noted that climate change has changed halibut distribution, with more fish now in shallow waters. These shallow areas are not currently surveyed. Proponents identified that this higher catch limits is consistent with the coast-wide 2014 SPR.

Motion passed on the U.S. Section 41-3-1; Canada supported unanimously

Area 4CDE: Conference Board adopted 1.285 million pound catch limit. CB members stated that their willingness to support this motion was tied to previous CB action on bycatch (see Bycatch Motion below). The CB received significant information and comment on Area 4CDE. The survey WPUE has been relatively stable since 1995, with a 7% increase in 2014. Area 4CDE 2015 Blue Line catch limit reduction is the result of increased trawl bycatch in this area of 026 halibut. Area 4CDE is working hard to secure

bycatch reductions and has secured commitment from NMFS and State of Alaska that allocation inequity will be addressed. 238 small vessels fish this area and support 39 coastal communities. Although Area 4CDE represents 55% of halibut grounds, it has the fewest survey points of any area. The 2015 Blue Line would reduce FCEY by 86% from 2011 levels. Socioeconomic impact of 2015 Blue Line would be devastating. CBSFA provided a handout (Appendix I) documenting economic impacts and FCEY changes. Area 4CDE fishermen have secured commitments from some trawl sectors to voluntarily reduce bycatch in this area in 2015 by an amount comparable to the requested Blue Line overage (also on Appendix I hand out). The trawl industry has also committed that 70 mt of unused halibut Prohibited Species Catch cap that has been made available to other trawlers in recent years will be saved. Some Area 4E residents spoke to the inadequacy of their catch limit proportion and the dependency of their village (which has a 21% unemployment rate) on halibut fishing.

Canada supported the motion, however noted that it was a difficult decision, since they were supporting it on a promise. Canada has heard about voluntary measures introduced and voluntary measures to be introduced in the bycatch fisheries for a long time. Canada has heard from Alaska that bycatch will be addressed. By supporting the motion, Canada wants it to be clear: bycatch is a concern, and not just a concern in Area 4CDE. Moving bycatch from Area 4CDE to other parts of Area 4 or the Gulf is also not acceptable. Canada also wants to make sure that this is not just about responding to a “crisis” in Area 4CDE and dealing with an issue in that area. Canada expects the US to develop a long-term plan for addressing bycatch in Alaska, consistent with the wording in Magnuson – Stevens Act, specifically: What is the long-term plan to reduce bycatch “to the greatest extent practicable”?

Motion passed unanimously

The following Blue Line adjustment motion FAILED:

In consideration that both the PAG TCEY recommendation and the CB TCEY recommendation are significantly above the Blue Line TCEY of 25.22 million pounds: should the Commissioners select lower FCEYs, the CB recommends any reductions from the CB catch limit recommendations be adjusted proportionately downward from regulatory areas that have allocations above the Blue Line, except for Area 4CDE. *This motion failed 14-28-6 in the US section; failed unanimously in the Canadian section.*

Catch limit comments by stakeholders, both written and oral, were incorporated into the discussions and decision making process during this Conference Board session

INDUSTRY REGULATORY PROPOSALS 2015

Proposal I Lower minimum size limit to 30 inches

Motion: Request staff and MSAB continue to evaluate the benefits and risks associated with lowering the minimum size limit. *Passed without objection*

Motion: Recommend the IPHC lower the minimum size for retainable halibut in the directed commercial fishery to 30”

Proponents of lowering the minimum size to 30 inches noted that the 30 inch minimum size would reduce by 57% the handling of undersized halibut, which would reduce wastage. Because small fish are worth less per pound, the maker of the motion stated fishing behavior/selectivity would not change. Those opposing the change at this time noted the uncertainty surrounding impacts to the spawning biomass, the potential for growth and recruitment overfishing, and the inability to detect these potential impacts for a generation (11-15 years) without better at sea monitoring of commercial catch in Alaska. Others objected to the potential reallocation that could ensue and the likely result that Area 3B, with a 70% encounter rate on undersized fish, might be subjected to increased fishing pressure. Many stated stocks were too fragile, with a poor size distribution in many areas, to take risks with added pressure on small fish.

Motion failed US section 7-19-17; Canada 28 opposed 1 abstention.

Proposal 2: Establish a maximum size limit for Pacific Halibut that are to be caught and retained in Commercial and Recreational fisheries in Alaska: (size to be determined by IPHC). *The conference Board voted unanimously to **take no action**.*

Proposal 3: Absolute retention of the first 29” or less fish that is caught during a south central 3A halibut chartered trip. *The Conference Board voted to **take no action**, noting that this measure had been reviewed but not recommended by either the charter stakeholder group or the NPFMC.*

CB considered regulatory proposals #4 and #5 as comments, not proposed regulatory changes, therefore took no action.

CONFERENCE BOARD DISCUSSION ITEMS:

MISCELLANEOUS

Conference Board (RoP) discussion:

The Conference Board unanimously ratified the draft CB Rules of Procedure. We now provide them to the Commission for approval.

MSAB Update from CB MSAB Members:

MSAB has met four times and has had considerable discussion about management strategy and management objectives. Work is progressing but slowly. The MSAB spent considerable time on the proposed change to the minimum size limit. Members reported that the equilibrium model is now populated with actual halibut data, and that the “shiny app” is a useful tool.

BYCATCH ACTIONS:

Two motions were introduced and passed unanimously by the Conference Board

Bering Sea Bycatch Motion

- 1) Support industry efforts to secure BSAI halibut bycatch reductions through voluntary measures in 2015;
- 2) Urge the NPFMC to address BSAI halibut PSC cap reductions on a sector specific basis and to reduce BSAI halibut PSC caps by at least 50% in sectors that are responsible for the majority of the halibut BSAI bycatch;
- 3) Utilize all regulatory authority of the NPFMC and NMFS to implement BSAI halibut PSC reductions quickly.

General Bycatch Motion

The Conference Board recommends that management bodies continue to pursue bycatch reduction targets for Areas 3 and 4 that reflect the Magnuson-Stevens Act principle of reducing bycatch “to the extent practicable”. An appropriate means of defining “the extent practicable” would reflect alignment with the bycatch reductions achieved in other regulatory areas since 1991. For example, Area 2A has reduced its bycatch by approximately 70% since 1991; Area 2B has reduced its bycatch by approximately 90% since 1991. BSAI has currently reduced its bycatch by approximately 40-50% since 1991.

The Conference Board recommends that management bodies focus on bycatch reduction approaches that provide incentives for individual harvesters to reduce bycatch, as incentive based approaches have proven to be highly effective in reducing bycatch to a minimum. Critical elements of the incentive based approaches include individual responsibility for bycatch and comprehensive monitoring programs.

The Conference Board notes the uncertainty and risk to halibut conservation that results from the partial monitoring programs that exist for many bycatch fisheries and recommends that agencies take steps to implement robust monitoring programs that will provide reliable and accurate bycatch estimates.

There must be appropriate monitoring requirements to ensure bycatch mortalities can be estimated with a high degree of certainty. If bycatch mortality estimates within an area have a significant degree of uncertainty, the uncertainty must be accounted for in the area in question.

This year’s RARA includes summaries of the halibut discard mortality rates applied to different fisheries in Alaska. Noting the significant amounts of halibut bycatch in some of these fisheries and their different fishing practices (e.g., the Pacific cod fishery has a 9% DMR in the Bering Sea, 12% in GOA) – why are these lower than the 16% DMR applied to the directed halibut fleet? The Conference Board recommends that the IPHC work with NMFS to review the discard mortality rates to ensure that bycatch mortality is being accurately estimated for these fisheries.

Appendix I Attached

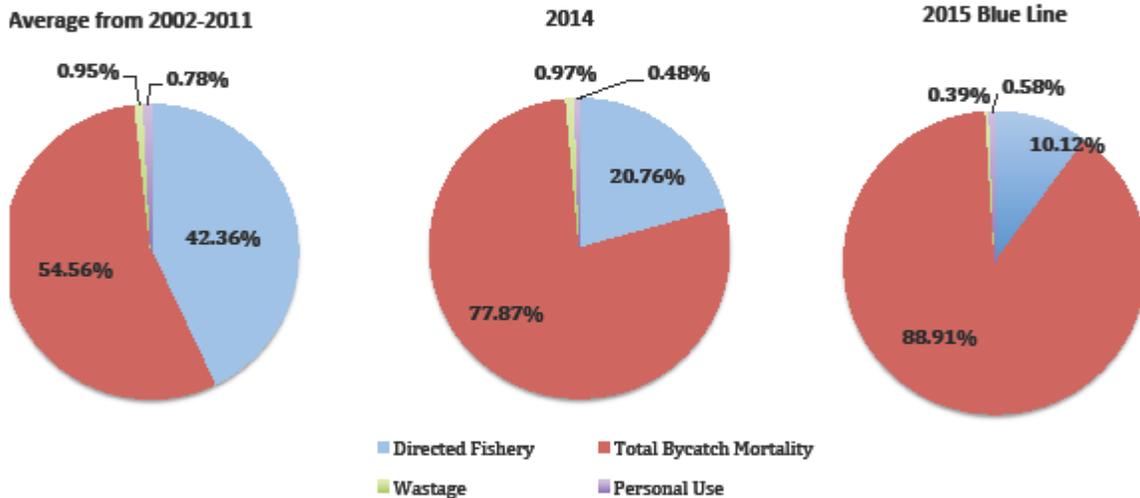
Appendix I

Economic Impact in Area 4CDE (Millions of pounds, net weight)

Year	TCEY	Total O26 non-FCEY		FCEY	Ex-vessel Value
		Commercial Wastage, Personal Use	O32/O26 Bycatch Mortality		
2011	6.50	0.23	2.475	3.72	\$24,068,400
2014	3.58	0.09	2.23	1.29	\$7,363,050
2015 Blue Line	3.48	0.05	2.91	0.52	\$2,979,600
% Change from 2014	-2.8%	-44.4%	30.5%	-59.5%	-59.5%
% Change from 2011	-46.5%	-78.3%	17.6%	-86.0%	-87.6%

Area 4CDE has shown improvements in the stock assessment, but the directed fishery cannot benefit from those improvements because of the increase in bycatch.

Comparison of Total Removals



Bycatch Mortality Savings

-274 MT savings of bycatch mortality in Area 4CDE has been committed.
 -In 2014, IPHC estimated that 64% of total Area 4CDE bycatch was O26.
 -Those savings make available 290,000 lbs of O26 bycatch mortality, increasing the Area 4CDE FCEY to 810,000 lbs.
 $(274 \text{ MT Round} \times 2204.62 \times .75) = 453,049 \text{ Net Pounds}$
 $(453,045 \text{ Net Pounds} \times .64) = 290,000 \text{ Net Pounds of O26 Mortality}$
 $(290,000 \text{ Net Pounds of Savings} + 520,000 \text{ 4CDE Blue Line}) = 810,000 \text{ 4CDE FCEY}$

Bycatch Cap Reduction

The current bycatch cap in the BSAI is 4,426 MT.
 A 50% reduction to the cap reduces it to 2,213 MT, or 3,660,000 net pounds.
 Of that, 2,900,000 net pounds is estimated will be taken from Area 4CDE, of which 1,849,000 will be O26.

Based on the current TCEY, this reduction of bycatch results in an Area 4CDE FCEY of 1.58 M lbs.

These figures are based on NMFS and IPHC numbers that report where bycatch occurred in the BSAI and the size composition of that bycatch.