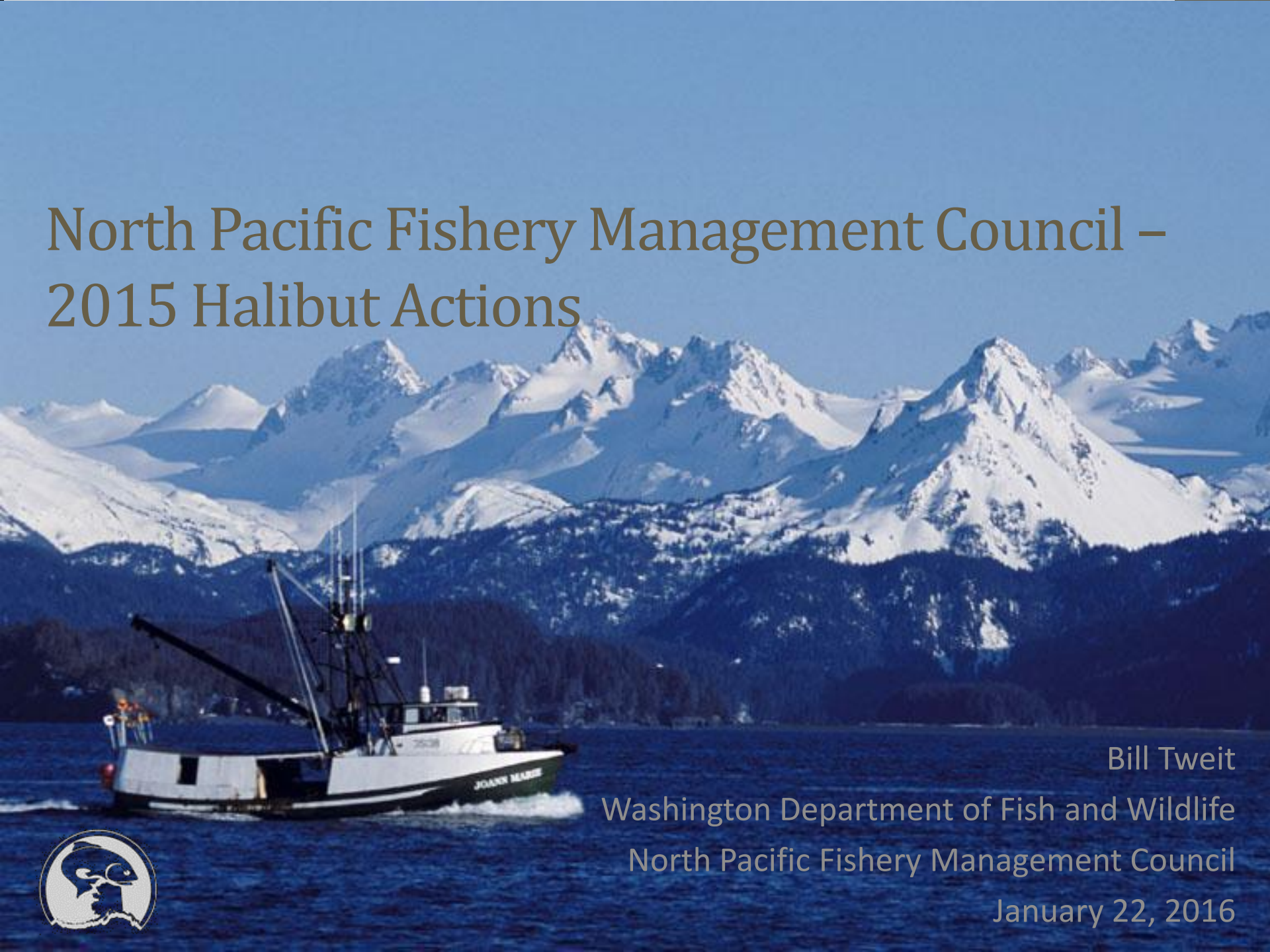
North Pacific Fishery Management Council – 2015 Halibut Actions



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North Pacific Fishery Management Council
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NPFMC 2015 Halibut Actions

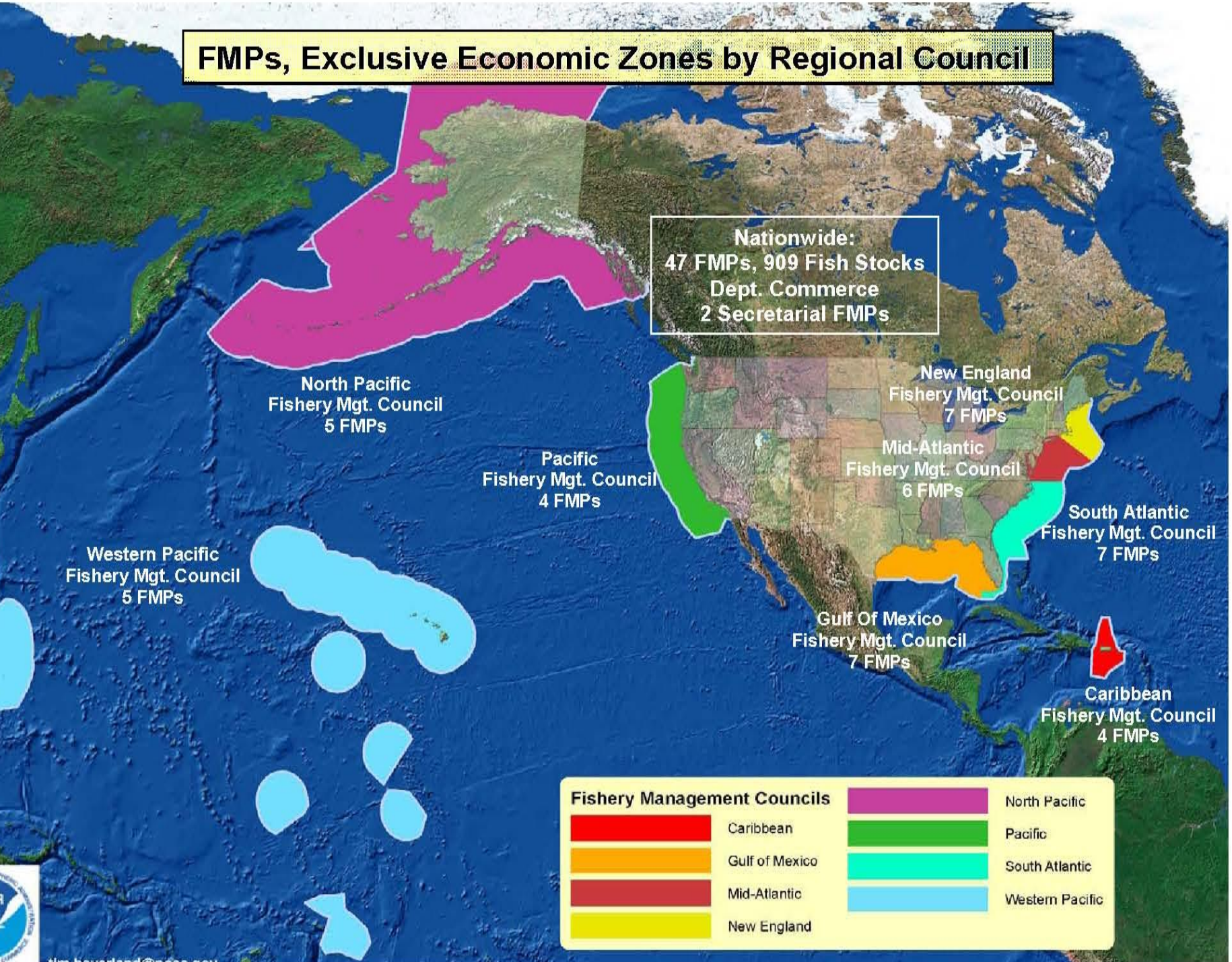
1. Background on NPFMC
2. Overview of 2015 Bering Sea Halibut Actions
3. Focus on Bering Sea bycatch reductions
    1. Hard Caps
    2. Next steps

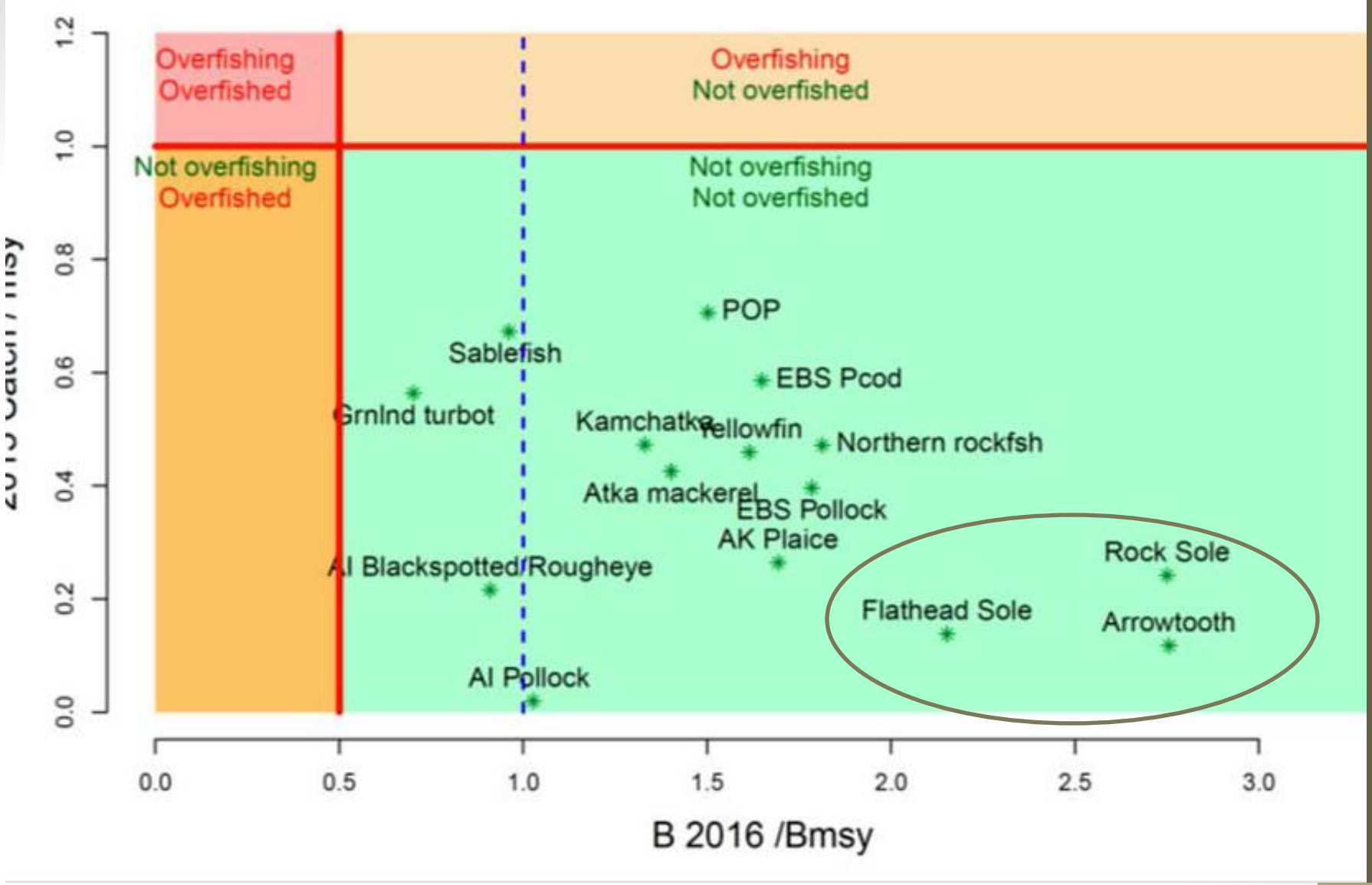
Photo of F/V Aleutian from Lokken collection, FVOA

What is the Council?

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS):

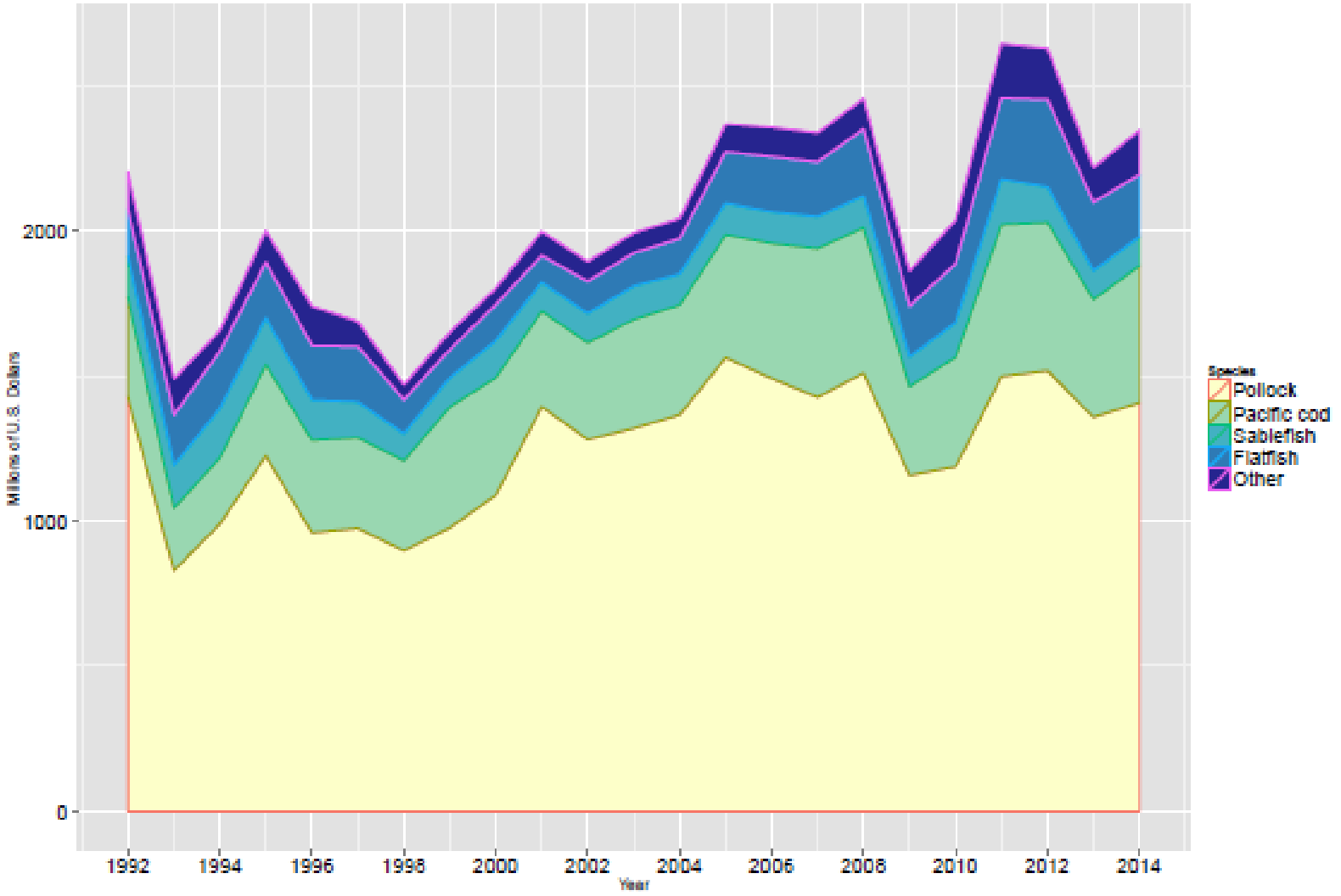
- Together manage U.S. Federal fisheries off Alaska (3-200 miles)
- Management is coordinated (and in some cases jointly managed) with the State of Alaska
- Council makes recommendations to NMFS
- NMFS approves, implements, and enforces them


FMPs, Exclusive Economic Zones by Regional Council
Nationwide:
47 FMPs, 909 Fish Stocks
Dept. Commerce
2 Secretarial FMPs
North Pacific
Fishery Mgt. Council
5 FMPs
Pacific
Fishery Mgt. Council
4 FMPs
Western Pacific
Fishery Mgt. Council
5 FMPs
New England
Fishery Mgt. Council
7 FMPs
Mid-Atlantic
Fishery Mgt. Council
6 FMPs
South Atlantic
Fishery Mgt. Council
7 FMPs
Gulf Of Mexico
Fishery Mgt. Council
7 FMPs
Caribbean
Fishery Mgt. Council
4 FMPs
Fishery Management Councils
Caribbean
Gulf of Mexico
Mid-Atlantic
New England
North Pacific
Pacific
South Atlantic
Western Pacific



2015 Bering Sea Groundfish Stock Status

- No stocks are overfished or subject to overfishing
- Major flatfish stocks with large biomass are underfished.



NPFMC Groundfish Gross Product Value

- $2.3 billion in 2014.
- Puget Sound labor value is $1.3 billion annually.
- 60% of US Commercial landings in 2014.

Magnuson Act National Standards

1. Prevent overfishing while achieving OY
2. Measures based on best scientific information
3. Stocks managed as a unit throughout range
4. Allocations shall: be fair and equitable, promote conservation, and avoid excessive shares.
5. Consider efficiency in utilization
6. Allow for variations and contingencies
7. Minimize costs and avoid duplications.
8. Provide for the sustained participation of fishing communities
9. Minimize bycatch
10. Safety at sea

How the NPFMC Estimates and Manages Halibut bycatch

- Observer Program provides estimates of halibut bycatch.
  - Factory trawlers are 200% observed
  - Trawl catcher vessels are generally 100% observed in the Bering Sea
  - Other fishing vessels are 15-30% observed.
  - Observers estimate numbers of halibut caught, and their probability of survival when they are discarded.

Council establishes hard caps on halibut mortality for most bycatch fisheries, and NMFS management closes those fisheries if hard caps are reached.

NPFMC 2015 Halibut Actions

- February – Held joint meeting with IPHC, approved Decksorting EFP
- June – Adopted halibut bycatch hard cap reductions in the Bering Sea; began work on other measures.
- October – Release draft halibut management framework for review
- December – Review framework and Amendment 80 sector halibut avoidance plan

Bycatch hard cap reductions in Bering Sea

- Range of options was 0-50%.
- Council adopted reductions of:
  - 25% for Amendment 80 sector,
  - 20% for CDQ, and
  - 15% for cod freezer longliner and trawl limited access sectors.
- Three rationalized sectors (A80, CDQ, FL) apportion hard cap reductions by coop, and then to vessels. Net result is "compounded buffering" to avoid a single vessel or coop shutting down a sector. 25% reduction becomes approx. 30% reduction.

Amendment 80 Sector Halibut Avoidance Plan

- Formal plan, adopted by both coops and all companies, presented to Council for 2016.
- Elements include:
  - Annual Outlier Test
  - Fourth Quarter Test
  - Tier 2 Quarterly Outlier Test

  - Penalties of $50-100k per vessel for each test failed.
  - Annual Avoidance Plan evaluation and reporting.

Amendment 80 Best Practices

- Adopted in 2015 resulted in additional savings, 20% below 2014 levels.
- All companies and vessels agree to adopt.
- Elements are:
  - Continuous information exchange
  - Test tows prior to fishing
  - Voluntary movement from areas with high halibut rates
  - Use of excluders

Amendment 80 Decksorting

- Objective is to retain high percentage of halibut to the water while they are still in good condition
- Standard practice is to retain all halibut onboard until enumerated by fishery observers as they enter the factory on conveyor belts. After enumeration, they are removed and discarded, usually with low chance of survival.
- Preliminary results show that halibut returned to the water shortly after the cod end is spilled on deck have a much higher rate of survival.
- Challenge is to develop methods to sort the halibut from the rest of the catch quickly and return them to the water while still accurately enumerating them and assessing viability.
- Hope to have operational in another year or two.
- Cost to industry is additional observer, cameras, increased crew time and slower fishing operations.

NPFMC Halibut Management Framework

- Establishes management objectives
  - Manage consistent with MSA conservation objectives
  - Balance needs of directed users and bycatch users
  - Pursue abundance-based tools for management
  - Recognize sustained participation
  - Monitoring and catch accounting
- Increased focus on halibut research
- Improved coordination with IPHC

Halibut Outlook -- Beyond 2016

- Bering Sea halibut bycatch will be reduced significantly, and industry is now incentivized to continually develop new approaches to further reduction.
- NPFMC coordination with IPHC will continue to improve, reducing management surprises and conflicts.
- Ecosystem level understanding of halibut population dynamics will continue to improve.
- Balancing the MSA National Standards will continue to be challenging for the NPFMC, as bycatch will still be sizeable compared to some directed fisheries. *Even a small percentage of a very large number is still a large number.*