



**IFQ Committee
REPORT**

March 28, 2024; Virtual only Meeting

The IFQ Committee met to provide recommendations on the Area 4 Vessel Cap analysis for Initial Review.

Committee Members in attendance:

Karla Bush, *chair*
Jeff Farvour
Dave Fraser
Natasha Hayden

Jeff Kauffman
Linda Kozak
Buck Laukitis

David Little
Peggy Parker
Erik Velsko

Members absent: Brian Dafforn, Craig Evens, Shawn McManus, Michael Offerman

Others in attendance:

Anna Henry
Shannon Gleason
Michael Fey
Brian Brown
Kurt Iverson

Tom Meyer
Alicia Miller
Caleb Taylor
Bob Alverson
Kiril Basargin

Lauren Howard
Maddie Lightsey
Heather McCarty
Connie Melovidov
Mateo Paz-Soldan

The Chair opened the meeting with approval of the agenda and introductions.

Area 4 Vessel Caps

Anna Henry, Council staff, presented the Regulatory Impact Review (RIR) of the Area 4 Vessel Cap action that the Council is considering, which would create new vessel caps specific to IFQ regulatory Area 4. Existing vessel caps would remain in place for other IFQ areas. New vessel caps in Area 4 would be calculated at 4, 5, or 6% of the Area 4 halibut TAC or 150% of the coastwide halibut vessel cap based on the option selected. Sub-options to specify that halibut IFQ held by an Area 4B CQE does not accrue towards the Area 4 vessel cap; and to review this action three or five years after implementation or include it in the next halibut/sablefish IFQ Program Review are also considered.

Public Comment

The Committee received public comment on the Area 4 Vessel Cap action from Heather McCarty (Central Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association) and Bob Alverson (Fishing Vessel Owners Association). There was also a written comment from Linda Behnken (Alaska Longline Fishermen’s Association) that is linked on the [eAgenda](#).

Committee Discussion and Recommendations

The Committee discussion regarding Area 4 Vessel Caps focused mainly on the potential for different caps in Area 4 and Area 3 to affect the order in which vessels fishing in both areas must harvest quota to take advantage of the higher limit in Area 4. Vessel caps are a limit on the total coastwide harvest by a vessel operating in that area, and not a limit on the vessel's harvest from that specific regulatory area. To operate in any area, a vessel's overall annual catch to date must be less than that area's cap. Therefore, a vessel wanting to land up to the higher limit in Area 4 would have to harvest IFQ in Area 3 prior to harvesting in Area 4. If that same vessel were to first harvest IFQ in Area 4, all the Area 4 catch is counted toward the limit applicable in Area 3. The Committee agreed that higher vessel cap limits in Area 4 should not affect the order in which vessels have to harvest IFQ from different areas as this would be operationally challenging. There was some discussion that a potential solution could be that catch in Area 4 not be counted towards limits in other areas but there was also agreement that limits outside of Area 4 should not be adjusted.

The Committee also discussed continuing changes and uncertainty in processing availability and capacity in the IFQ fishery and recommended that these issues be expanded upon in the next version of the analysis including the incorporation of as much current data as possible. There was some acknowledgement that given current challenges in the fishery, vessel caps may not be the only adjustment necessary to increase harvest in Area 4, but no specific additional solutions were discussed. Some Committee members felt it would be useful if the analysis included a discussion of potential impacts on carbon footprint of the fishery.

Other business

The IFQ Report to the Fleet was linked on the Committee agenda. Committee members did not have any questions for NMFS or AKFIN staff regarding the report.

A Committee member raised an issue regarding NMFS Restricted Access Management (RAM) and the pace with which IFQ transfers and other applications are processed. Brian Brown (NMFS RAM) provided background information that RAM's standard is to process applications in 10 business days and that they are currently backlogged and working on applications received 13 business days prior. Many factors affect RAM's processing time. Transfers cannot be processed until IFQ is calculated and issued every year, and the annual IFQ issuance process is dependent on multiple authorizations, intensive data analysis, and complex calculations. There is an influx of transfers and hired master applications at the beginning of the season that may get backlogged due to the volume of requests, and there has been an increase in the number and complexity of transfers requested in recent years (i.e. Covid temporary transfers under past year emergency rules, increases in medical transfers, and an increase in Guided Angler Fish (GAF) transactions in recent years). RAM currently has four dedicated Permit Assistants and half of the permitting staff is solely dedicated to transfer transactions, but phone call volume also increases at the beginning of the year, requiring some personnel to answer phones, although they are supplementing with additional staff and new technology. System Reporting estimates that since 2024 IFQ was issued, RAM has processed over 250 transfer or hired master transactions, there are currently around 160 pending transfer or hired master applications, and GAF continues to show signs of an increase in application volume, with approximately 124 separate GAF transactions in the system.

The Committee noted that the IFQ Report to the Fleet shows that transfers have increased in recent years and recommended that the next Committee meeting include an agenda item to discuss how to increase efficiencies at RAM. NMFS commented that the recent increase in transfers may be partially due to the 2023 modification ([88 FR 12259](#)) that medical transfers approved in 2020, 2021, or 2022 do not count toward the restriction that limits the use of a medical transfer to three times in any seven-year period (679.42(d)(2)(iv)(C)). Persons who used a medical transfer in 2023, 2024, and 2025 would not be able to use a medical transfer in the 2026 fishing season, therefore the number of transfer requests may decline in future years.

There was some discussion about how and when the Committee may be considering new proposals for changes to the IFQ Program. The Council has not requested proposals and has generally used program reviews as the process to inform and address potential changes to management programs. The next IFQ Committee meeting will be held to review the draft IFQ Program Review prior to the Council review which is currently tentatively scheduled for the October 2024 meeting.