

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

James O. Campbell, Chairman
Jim H. Branson, Executive Director

411 West 4th Avenue
Anchorage, Alaska 99510



Mailing Address: P.O. Box 103136
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

Telephone: (907) 274-4563
FTS 271-4064

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NEWSLETTER

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Major Overhaul Scheduled for Gulf Groundfish Plan

The Council met last week in Girdwood, Alaska, to review problems in the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and provide direction for its revision. This was the Council's first plan developed under the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and it has been amended fourteen times since being implemented on December 1, 1978. The plan has proven to be administratively cumbersome and many of its amendments could have been avoided if the plan were properly restructured. The groundfish fisheries off Alaska have changed dramatically with the growth of domestic fisheries and displacement of foreign fleets, and the FMP, its objectives, and management measures are no longer appropriate in many ways.

The Council reviewed a proposal by the plan team to framework many of the management measures and to use a modified Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands FMP approach for the setting of harvest levels. The plan team was directed to develop procedures that would set a single Gulfwide optimum yield with individual harvest levels for each species or species complex and account for both directed and incidental fishery removals from a resource. In addition the team will framework procedures for apportioning harvest between fully domestic and joint venture fisheries, for setting bycatch limits and fishing seasons, and for using field orders to resolve inseason fishery problems. The remainder of the plan will be reworked and streamlined making the document easier to read and understand. A Council workgroup will work closely with the team on drafting new objectives for the plan.

All these changes will increase the Council's ability to address problems in the fishery more quickly without resorting to the lengthy formal amendment process. Problems such as gear conflicts or allocations between gear types will still be processed as formal plan amendments.

Council Elects Officers

James O. Campbell and Rudy Petersen were re-elected to serve as Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council for the next 12 months. Jim Campbell, a member of the Council since 1978, is the President of the Alaska Division of Spenard Builders Supply and has served as President of the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, Anchorage Businessmen's Association, and the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce. Rudy Petersen hails from Seattle and has been on the Council for three years. He is a member of the Highliners Association and has broad experience in Northwest and Alaska fisheries.

Council and Advisory Panel Appointments

The Secretary of Commerce has appointed Oscar Dyson from Kodiak to a three-year Council term. Mr. Dyson, a commercial fisherman with 40 years' experience, has also been active in fishery management as a member of the Alaska Board of Fish and Game and was involved in developing the 12-mile and 200-mile U.S. fishing zones. In addition, Jim Campbell, Anchorage, and Rudy Petersen, Seattle, were reappointed to the Council for three more years.

Mark Pedersen, the newly designated alternate for the Director, Washington Department of Fisheries, was welcomed to the Council. He has had extensive experience with groundfish in the Pacific Northwest and will be an asset to the Council in their deliberations on the groundfish resources off Alaska.

On recommendation of the Council's Advisory Panel Nominating Committee, Thorn Smith, manager of the North Pacific Fishing Vessel Owners' Association, was appointed to fill the vacancy on the Advisory Panel created by the resignation of Barry Collier. His term and those of the other AP members will expire this coming December. All members may be reappointed for subsequent terms.

Gulf Groundfish Plan Rewrite to Dominate Amendment Cycle

According to the Council's annual groundfish amendment cycle, public proposals for regulatory changes ordinarily would be called for next month and due by the end of the December Council meeting. This year the Council will concentrate its efforts on revising the Gulf Groundfish Plan during the annual cycle. Proposals will not be requested for the Gulf Plan. They would be based on the old FMP and would no longer be relevant following the plan rewrite. As is customary, emergency action on critical groundfish issues can be taken by the Council at any time. The plan will be revised on the following schedule:

August 1985	Begin plan rewrite; prepare outlines for frameworked management measures.
September 9-13	Gulf of Alaska Plan Team Meeting - Seattle. Continue development of framework measures.
December 9-13	Present working draft to SSC and AP for initial review and comment.
January 12-16, 1986	Present working draft to Council for initial review.
March 19-21	Council approves draft FMP and supporting analyses for public review.
April	Public review.
June 22-26	Council final approval.
November	Implement revised FMP.

These changes in procedure are for this year and the Gulf Groundfish Plan only. Bering Sea and Aleutians groundfish proposals will be processed on the regular annual cycle.

Gulf Pollock Resource Continues Decline

Preliminary results from the 1985 Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center hydroacoustic survey indicate that the pollock resource has continued to decline and biomass levels are much lower than expected. In 1981 estimated pollock biomass was approximately 3 million mt (the largest on record), and scientists indicated a decline was in store for the resource. By 1984 the pollock biomass had fallen to 1.5 million mt and the 1985 forecast was for 1 million mt. Results from this year's survey indicate a biomass of only 700,000 mt. The primary cause for the decline is thought to be a failure of the 1981-83 year classes which are in very low abundance. Very young and very old fish now are contributing most of the current biomass.

Analysis of the survey results are continuing with a full report on the status of pollock and other groundfish resources scheduled for the Council's September meeting. The above 1985 biomass estimate may change as a result of this analysis. If the final biomass estimate remains low, it is likely that there will be a reduction in OY which will probably constrain the joint venture fishery in 1986.

Gulf of Alaska Plan Team to Meet in Seattle

The Council's Gulf of Alaska plan team will meet in Seattle September 9-13 to review 1985 survey results, prepare a status of stocks document, and work on revision of the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. The meeting is set to begin at 9:00 a.m. on Monday, September 9, in Room 2079, Building 4, of the Northwest & Alaska Fisheries Center, 7600 Sand Point Way N.E. For further information please contact Steve Davis on the Council staff.

Groundfish to Highlight September Council Meeting

The Council will meet in Anchorage on September 24-26 at the Sheraton Hotel. The main agenda items will include status of stock reports for groundfish off Alaska, projected harvest ceilings, and initial apportionments to fully-U.S. fisheries, joint ventures, and foreign fisheries for 1986. Following the meeting the estimated harvest levels and apportionments will be sent to public review. Final determinations will be made in December. The Council will also hear reports on this year's fisheries and may review a Chinese request for joint venture and directed fishing allocations for the rest of 1985. The Council will also hear a report on the results of the 1985 Bering Sea/Aleutians crab survey by NMFS. The Council's AP and SSC will meet on Monday and Tuesday, September 23-24.