

# North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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## MINUTES Scientific and Statistical Committee April 10-11, 1989 Anchorage, AK

The Scientific and Statistical Committee of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council met April 10 and 11 at the Sheraton Hotel in Anchorage, Alaska. Members present were:

Richard Marasco, Chairman	Jack Tagart
Doug Eggers, Vice Chairman	Terry Quinn
Larry Hreha	Bill Aron
John Burns	Don Rosenberg
Bill Clark	

### C-7 REQUEST FOR IMMEDIATE COUNCIL ACTION ON GULF OF ALASKA GROUND FISH

The SSC was told by Council staff that industry has requested emergency action be taken to:

(a) Prohibit roe-stripping and require full utilization of pollock or all groundfish in the Western/Central Gulf of Alaska or in all waters under Council jurisdiction by 1990.

(b) Permit pollock bycatch to be retained up to 20% in other groundfish fisheries in the Western/Central Area throughout the rest of 1989.

Prohibit roe-stripping - As indicated in the action memorandum in the briefing document, the topic of pollock roe-stripping was the subject of a proposal contained in Amendment 11 to the BSAI, FMP. After reviewing the EA/RIR, the SSC concluded that there was no evidence of economic losses from roe-stripping operations under circumstances that existed at that time. It was also pointed out that there was a lack of scientific information indicating that the dumping of carcasses caused large scale biological problems. The SSC is prepared to review supportive documents if and when the Council decides to take action on this proposal.

Permit pollock bycatch to be retained - The SSC reviewed our past action on Pollock in the Gulf of Alaska and the projected bycatch needs for the flounder and Pacific cod fisheries made by the regional office. The SSC also received information from industry regarding how the flounder and Pacific cod fisheries would be prosecuted. The SSC

believes that projected bycatch in the flatfish and Pacific cod fisheries does not constitute a threat to the pollock resource at this time. It is recommended that bycatch be monitored.

D-1 SALMON FMP

The SSC recommends the plan go out for public review.

D-2(a) GULF OF ALASKA AND BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS  
GROUND FISH FMP

(a) Allocate sablefish total allowable catch in the BSAI.

The SSC believes that the current draft of the amendment package does not provide an adequate discussion of impact of the three alternatives identified. The SSC has provided guidance to the team that if followed will rectify this deficiency. Once these modifications are made the document should be released for public review.

(b) Establish a fishing season framework for all groundfish fisheries in the GOA and BSAI.

The SSC reviewed the fishing season framework proposal and expressed concerns that: (1) use of "windows" as proposed in Alternative 2 reduces the flexibility of the framework process; (2) proposed timing of public input is not synchronized with current Council request for public input; and (3) the amendment as proposed does not reflect the fishing industry's concerns that sudden changes in fishing seasons disrupt their planning activities.

The SSC's believes that if fishing seasons are frameworked the timing for setting them should correspond with that for TACS. The SSC recommends that this proposals be released for public review.

(c) Establish a Shelikof District in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.

The SSC reviewed the amendment to establish a Shelikof District of the Gulf of Alaska and recommends that it go out for public review.

(d) Establish a groundfish fishing closed zone near the Walrus Islands and Cape Peirce in the BSAI.

After review of this section of the amendment package the SSC concluded that, with minor editorial modification, it should be released for public review. Given the high abundance and widespread distribution of yellowfin sole, fishing for which could occur outside the alternatively proposed closed areas, the SSC does not consider the indicated changes of catch and revenue projections to be "foregone," but rather that catches and associated values could still be achieved outside of the proposed closed areas.

(e) Replace the king crab protection time/area closures around Kodiak Island and modify the halibut bycatch management regime for the GOA.

The SSC reviewed the amendment to replace the king crab protection time/area closures around Kodiak and modify the halibut bycatch management regime for the Gulf of Alaska. The SSC recommended a number of changes for purposes of clarification and that it be released for public review.

(f) Expand the Pacific cod trawl exemption zone in the BSAI.

The SSC noted that data confidentiality made it difficult for the team to evaluate the biological impacts of the alternatives. The team was required to use data from NMFS research surveys. The survey data are limited and therefore the analysis is not as insightful as it could have been. Nevertheless, the SSC recommends that this portion of the amendment package be released for public review.

(g) also (C-6) Implement a system of observer coverage and other data gathering and data reporting requirements for the groundfish fisheries of the GOA and BSAI.

The drafting committee has produced a comprehensive program that corrects deficiencies in present catch reporting procedures and outlines an observer program for obtaining biological data on domestic fisheries similar to the data that has been obtained in the past from foreign and joint venture operations.

Some of the data elements in the program will serve the needs of stock assessment, management planning, and other kinds of analysis. These elements include fishing effort and product data, which as a practical matter must be reported by operators rather than obtained by observers, and all of the biological data to be collected by observers, such as catch composition, age structures, etc.

Another set of data elements, with some overlap, will serve the needs of in-season management and regulation. Chief among these are the weekly reports of catch and effort. Aside from the weekly reports, the drafting committee has specified a set of records to be maintained and retained by operators for inspection by NMFS agents so that the accuracy of the weekly reports can be reasonably assured.

The SSC feels that both parts of the package are necessary and proper, and that on the whole the committee has done a sound and thorough job of designing a new system. It was clear from our discussion and some testimony, however, that the document could be improved by an introductory overview of the system's strategy, including:

- (i) The goals of the program.
- (ii) What data elements are required, and for what purposes.
- (iii) Why certain data are to be obtained from operators rather than observers.
- (iv) How the new system relates to existing and ongoing data collection programs, including the state fish ticket system.
- (v) How the fishery observer, record keeping and reporting program under consideration here will mesh with that required for marine mammals.

As regards specific data elements, the SSC recommends that gear depth as well as bottom depth be recorded for midwater tows. The drafting committee should also reconsider what sort of effort information should be recorded in the fishing log so that a good index of abundance can be calculated. For a fairly homogeneous fleet of bottom trawlers, towing time alone may be adequate, but for other operations it is necessary to have other details, depending on the operation, such as net type, net size or engine power, or searching time.

The program at present includes no mechanism for obtaining the tow-by-tow fishing log data recorded by operators. The SSC believes that it will be necessary for stock assessment and management planning to collect all or part of the fishing log data on a routine basis. It may be adequate to take copies of the logs of just those trips covered by observers, but even in that case there should be a mechanism for obtaining copies of logs from any trip if the need arises.

There was considerable discussion of the desirability of having operators record and report information on discards. The SSC is somewhat sympathetic to the idea that the exercise will serve to remind operators of discard problems. On the other hand, we do not expect the data so obtained will ever be useful for assessment or management, and we foresee some problems in requiring operators to record and report data that will never be used.

As regards the sampling design and level of coverage of the new observer program, the SSC notes that the observer data will have to provide estimates of a large number of parameters in a wide variety of operations. The most practical approach for obtaining an easily usable basic data set, consistent from one year to the next, will probably be to aim for observer coverage of an equal proportion of the catch or effort in all fisheries, areas, and seasons. This basic data set may be supplemented by special studies designed to meet one-time information needs.

The proper level of coverage is difficult to determine objectively. One consideration is obtaining enough data to reduce the variance of estimates to an acceptable level, or at least to a level where additional data does little to reduce the variance further. This is a straightforward exercise, illustrated with examples in the committee's draft. A much more difficult question is whether or not the data obtained from a sample of trips with observers aboard will be truly reflective of operations in general or biased in some way.

The SSC recommends that this amendment be sent out for public review.

(h) Clarify the Secretary's authority to split or combine species groups within the target species management category by a framework procedure for the GOA and BSAI.

The SSC recommends that this amendment be sent out for public review.

D-2(b) REDEFINE DIRECTED FISHING

The SSC received a report from NMFS Regional Office staff describing proposed changes to the existing definition of directed fishing. Review of the Regulatory Amendment indicted that an attempt was made to construct a definition that would result in distributing the harvest of bycatch over the fishing season more efficiently and minimize waste of species

in low abundance. The SSC was unable to determine if this represents the intent of the Council. Without a clear understanding of the Council's intent, we are unable to evaluate the merits of the proposed definition.

Table 1, page 6, contains recommended retention percentages, information is lacking that would allow the SSC examination of how they might affect operation of the fishery. Therefore, it was impossible to determine impacts. The SSC did note that some of the percentages are larger than allowed under the existing rule.