

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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#5-92

NEWSLETTER

10/09/92

North Pacific Fishery Management Council Met September 22-27

The Council's three-page September agenda kept them busy for over six days. Action items included setting of preliminary groundfish harvest levels for the 1993 fisheries, approval for public review of several amendments to the groundfish management plans, final approval of a performance-based pelagic trawl definition and "fair start" regulations for hook and line longline gear, to name a few. The Council also received the preliminary 1993 Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation reports for the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries, and several other status reports on issues of interest to the Council and fishing industry. Details of these and other items are found in this newsletter. The Council will meet next the week of December 7, 1992 at the Hilton Hotel in Anchorage, Alaska.

Council Chairman and Vice Chairman Re-elected

By unanimous consent, Council members reappointed Rick Lauber and Bob Alverson to serve as Chairman and Vice Chairman, respectively, for another one-year term. Mr. Lauber, appointed to the Council in January 1991, was first elected Chairman in March of that year after Don Collinsworth of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game left the Council. Until his appointment to the Council, Mr. Lauber had been a member of their Advisory Panel since its inception in 1976. He is a representative of the Pacific Seafood Processors Association.

This will be Bob Alverson's fourth term as Vice Chairman of the Council. He also served on the Council's Advisory Panel before his appointment to the Council in 1988. Mr. Alverson is the Executive Director for the Fishing Vessel Owners Association.

New Council Appointments Effective August 11

The Secretary of Commerce recently appointed Linda Behnken and Ron Hegge to three-year terms on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. This is Mr. Hegge's second three-year term. He is a longtime participant in the Alaska longline fisheries. This will be Ms. Behnken's first term on the Council. She is also a longliner, based in Sitka, Alaska, and a representative for the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association.

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Council Loses Some, Gains Some

So long to Joe Blum, Larry Cotter, and Commander Joe Kyle; welcome to Alan Millikan, Rear Admiral Roger Rufe, and Captain Bill Anderson. Alan Millikan will represent the Washington Department of Fisheries on the Council. Filling the Coast Guard's Council seat after the recent retirement of Commander Joe Kyle, will be Captain Bill Anderson. Admiral Rufe has indicated he will also attend meetings when possible. Joe Blum and Larry Cotter, whose Council term expired in August, found themselves on the other side of the 10-minute light providing a good example for others by completing their testimony with time to spare.

Nominations Due For Advisory Panel and Scientific and Statistical Committee

One-year terms of the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) and Advisory Panel (AP) members expire in December. The SSC advises the Council on scientific and other technical matters relating to Council functions and the AP is composed of representatives of the major segments of the fishing industry. Members of these panels are expected to attend up to six meetings, three to four days in length, per year.

Resumes for persons who wish to be considered for either of these committees should be sent to the attention of Judy Willoughby, North Pacific Fishery Management Council, P.O. Box 103136, Anchorage, AK 99510, to arrive no later than 5:00 p.m., November 13, 1992. Appointments will be announced at the Council's December 8-12 meeting at the Hilton Hotel in Anchorage, and will become effective in January 1993. For more information, contact Judy Willoughby at the Council office.

CDQs May Be On For 1992

Draft regulations to implement pollock community development quotas (CDQs) for disadvantaged communities in Western Alaska are out for public comment. The comment period ends for the 1992-93 program on October 23, and on the 1994-95 program on November 16. Copies of the regulations may be requested from the Council office, or by contacting the National Marine Fisheries Service in Juneau at (907) 586-7228. The draft regulations specify the criteria that will be used to judge community development plans, how to apply, how the programs will be monitored, and other details of implementation.

The State will solicit proposals from disadvantaged communities in early November on the day the final rule is published by NMFS implementing the program. By mid- to late November, it is anticipated that the Governor of Alaska will have reviewed the proposals, and then will consult with the Council. The State hopes to forward the recommended choices to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce by Thanksgiving. Summaries of the proposals will be available for review at sites in Juneau, Seattle, and Anchorage, and the Council will hold a special teleconference for the consultation. If all goes as expected, pollock CDQs amounting to just over 100,000 mt may be available late this year.

In December the Council will advise NMFS on CDQ user compliance with other management measures for the pollock fisheries such as abiding by the roe and non-roe seasonal allocation of pollock total allowable catch, seasons, and use of the Catcher Vessel Operational Area (if approved for 1993-1995 as part of the Council's inshore-offshore amendment). The Council is seeking public comment at their December meeting on the appropriateness of requiring all CDQ operations to comply with other pollock management restrictions.

Gulf Of Alaska Groundfish Specifications For 1993

Preliminary groundfish specifications for the upcoming 1993 fisheries were approved by the Council. They include initial recommendations for Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs), Total Allowable Catches (TACs), and Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits. Twenty-five percent of the preliminary TACs will go forward, on an interim basis, to govern fisheries during the first of the fishing year until superseded by the final specifications published in late January. The final specifications will be determined at the Council's December meeting.

The Council-recommended preliminary ABCs and TACs for the Gulf of Alaska are in Table 1. They are based on the most current stock assessment information contained in the preliminary Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) document which the Council has released for public review. The Council is seeking comment from the public and industry on the preliminary specifications before they set final specifications at the December meeting. Written comments are due by November 30, 1992 in order to be copied and distributed to the Council; they should be addressed to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, P.O. Box 103136, Anchorage, AK 99510. Please contact the Council office for copies of the preliminary SAFE document. The final SAFE document will be completed in November and will provide the basis, along with industry input, for the final specifications. Additional stock assessment information will be incorporated into the final SAFE and may change the biomass and ABC estimates for some species or species groups. For example, the preliminary ABC recommendation for sablefish is based on last year's assessment; the 1992 longline survey information will be available by November and may change this estimate.

Specifications for rockfish species in the Gulf will be the focus of close attention by the Council in December. The depleted status of some of these stocks, notably Pacific ocean perch (POP) and shortraker/rougheye rockfish, has prompted the Council to consider reduced quotas for the purpose of stock rebuilding. Setting TACs at some level below ABCs and putting some species, such as POP, on a bycatch only status are two measures the Council will be considering in December. The Council has established a Gulf Rockfish Committee composed of industry representatives which will be meeting prior to the December Council meeting and may provide some recommendations to the Council at that time. This Committee will be reviewing information furnished by the Plan Team and other rockfish stock assessment scientists. Pending additional stock assessment information, the Council has at this time recommended a range of ABC values for POP and thornyhead rockfish.

The Council also wishes to notice the public and industry that black rockfish will be broken out from the pelagic shelf rockfish complex and managed as a separate species beginning in 1993. This is to prevent potential localized overharvests of this nearshore species; TAC levels for each management area in the Gulf will be determined in December.

The Council will be managing the 'other species' category in 1993 by management area as opposed to Gulfwide. This TAC is set as 5% of the subtotal of all other target groundfish species. In 1992 a directed fishery for Atka mackerel in the Western Gulf resulted in the initial Gulfwide TAC being exceeded. Separate TACs by management area will be set for 1993, and the Council is pursuing a plan amendment which will separate Atka mackerel from the 'other species' category for 1994 and beyond. Alaska Department of Fish & Game will be consulted on this issue to ensure coordination with State of Alaska definitions for species in this group.

The PSC limits for halibut in the Gulf of Alaska are set by gear type and may be apportioned seasonally over the fishing year. For purposes of public comment, the Council is recommending the same PSC limits as were established in 1992.

Preliminary Halibut PSCs Proposed for 1993

| <u>Trawl Gear</u> | | <u>Hook and Line Gear</u> | |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| 1st quarter | 600 mt | 1st trimester | 150 mt |
| 2nd quarter | 600 mt | 2nd trimester | 550 mt |
| 3rd quarter | 400 mt | 3rd trimester | 40 mt |
| 4th quarter | <u>400 mt</u> | <u>DSR fishery</u> | <u>10 mt</u> |
| TOTALS | 2000 mt | | 750 mt |

Of the 750 mt total for the hook and line fisheries, 10 mt is set aside specifically for the demersal shelf rockfish (DSR) fishery in Southeast Alaska. The bulk of the remaining 740 mt is apportioned in the second trimester, which begins on May 15 with the opening of the directed sablefish fishery. Pot gear would again be exempted from halibut PSC limits.

The groundfish Plan Teams will be reviewing an analysis on assumed discard mortality rates for halibut at their November meeting in Seattle. Based on this analysis, recommendations for revised assumed mortality rates by gear type and by target fishery may be forthcoming, for both Gulf and Bering Sea fisheries.

Public comments will be accepted for 30 days following the publication of these preliminary specifications in the *Federal Register*. This will likely occur sometime in late October. Comments should be forwarded to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, P.O. Box 103136, Anchorage, AK 99510, for both the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands specifications.

Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Specifications For 1993

The Council adopted for public review preliminary Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs), Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and bycatch allowances of Prohibited Species Catches (PSCs) for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries. As with the Gulf of Alaska, twenty-five percent of the initial specifications will go forward as interim specifications for management of the 1993 groundfish fisheries.

The recommended preliminary ABCs and TACs and seasonal apportionments of the pollock fishery are presented in Table 2. These recommendations are based on the most current stock assessment information contained in the preliminary Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report which the Council has released for public review. New data from the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish trawl survey was not available at this time to reassess the status of stocks and provide new biomass estimates. This information is currently being analyzed and will be reviewed and incorporated into the final SAFE document by the Plan Team in mid-November. Incorporation of new survey information may change the final groundfish specifications. This will be presented at the December Council meeting and provide the Council with the latest information on which to base the final ABCs and TACs.

Generally, abundance of the species managed under the BSAI Groundfish Management Plan remain fairly stable. Accordingly, the Council adopted similar ABCs and TACs for 1993 as were set for 1992, adopted last year's 40/60 split for the seasonal apportionment of pollock in the EBS for the roe and non-roe seasons, and adopted last year's pollock TAC for the Bogoslof District (518) of 1,000 mt, reaffirming the

TABLE 1: GULF OF ALASKA
1993 Council Preliminary Recommendations for ABC, TAC, and Apportionment

26-Sep-92

All Values in Metric Tons

| Species | Area | Council | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | | ABC | TAC | DAP JVP |
| Pollock | W/C | 111,000 | 111,000 | 111,000 |
| | Shelikof | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | E | 3,400 | 3,400 | 3,400 |
| | Total | 114,400 | 114,400 | 114,400 |
| Pacific Cod | W | 18,700 | 18,700 | 18,700 |
| | C | 35,200 | 35,200 | 35,200 |
| | E | 2,800 | 2,800 | 2,800 |
| | Total | 56,700 | 56,700 | 56,700 |
| Flatfish, Deep | W | 2,020 | 2,020 | 2,020 |
| | C | 35,580 | 35,580 | 35,580 |
| | E | 7,930 | 7,930 | 7,930 |
| | Total | 45,530 | 45,530 | 45,530 |
| Flathead sole | W | 12,580 | 12,580 | 12,580 |
| | C | 31,830 | 31,830 | 31,830 |
| | E | 5,040 | 5,040 | 5,040 |
| | Total | 49,450 | 49,450 | 49,450 |
| Flatfish, Shallow | W | 27,480 | 27,480 | 27,480 |
| | C | 21,260 | 21,260 | 21,260 |
| | E | 1,740 | 1,740 | 1,740 |
| | Total | 50,480 | 50,480 | 50,480 |
| Arrowtooth | W | 38,880 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| | C | 253,330 | 15,000 | 15,000 |
| | E | 29,080 | 5,000 | 5,000 |
| | Total | 321,290 | 25,000 | 25,000 |
| Sablefish | W | 2,500 | 2,500 | 2,500 |
| | C | 9,570 | 9,570 | 9,570 |
| | W. Yakutat | 3,740 | 3,740 | 3,740 |
| | E. Yak./S.E. Out. | 4,990 | 4,990 | 4,990 |
| | Total | 20,800 | 20,800 | 20,800 |
| Pacific Ocean Perch | W | 800-1620 | 720 | 720 |
| | C | 1,230-1,720 | 1,107 | 1,107 |
| | E | 2,690-2,390 | 2,421 | 2,421 |
| | Total | 4,720-5,730 | 4,248 | 4,248 |
| Shortraker/Rougheye | W | 100 | 90 | 90 |
| | C | 1,290 | 1,161 | 1,161 |
| | E | 570 | 513 | 513 |
| | Total | 1,960 | 1,764 | 1,764 |
| Other Slope | W | 1,390 | 1,390 | 1,390 |
| | C | 6,510 | 6,510 | 6,510 |
| | E | 6,160 | 6,160 | 6,160 |
| | Total | 14,060 | 14,060 | 14,060 |
| Rockfish (Pelagic Shelf) | W | 1,210 | 1,210 | 1,210 |
| | C | 4,400 | 4,400 | 4,400 |
| | E | 1,280 | 1,280 | 1,280 |
| | Total | 6,890 | 6,890 | 6,890 |
| Rockfish (Demersal Shelf) | S.E. Out. | 800 | 720 | 720 |
| Thornyhead | G W | 1,500-1,834 | 1,500 | 1,500 |
| Other Species | G W | 0 | 19,577 | 19,577 |
| GULF OF ALASKA TOTAL | | 689,924 | 411,119 | 411,119 |

Table 2. Preliminary 1993 Council Recommendations for BSAI Groundfish Specifications (mt)

| Species | Area / Seasons\1 | 1992 ABC | 1993 Preliminary Recommendation | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| | | | ABC\2 | TAC | Seasonal Allowance | ITAC\3 |
| Pollock | EBS | 1,490,000 | 1,690,000 | 1,300,000 | | 1,105,000 |
| | Roe (1/20-4/15) | | | | 40% | 442,000 |
| | Non-Roe (6/1-12/31) | | | | 60% | 663,000 |
| | AL | 51,600 | 67,000 | 51,600 | | 43,860 |
| | 518 | 25,000 | 33,000 | 1,000 | | 850 |
| Pacific Cod | | 182,000 | 178,000 | 178,000 | | 151,300 |
| Yellowfin sole | | 372,000 | 372,000 | 200,000 | | 170,000 |
| Greenland turbot | | 7,000 | 7,000 | 7,000 | | 5,950 |
| Arrowtooth flounder | | 82,300 | 68,000 | 10,000 | | 8,500 |
| Rock sole | | 260,800 | 311,000 | 40,000 | | 34,000 |
| Other flatfish | | 199,600 | 226,000 | 79,000 | | 67,150 |
| Sablefish | EBS | 1,400 | 1,400 | 1,400 | | 1,190 |
| | AL | 3,000 | 3,000 | 3,000 | | 2,550 |
| POP complex | | | | | | |
| True POP | EBS | 3,540 | 2,100 - 3,540 | 2,100 | | 1,785 |
| Other POP Complex | EBS | 1,400 | 1,400 | 1,400 | | 1,190 |
| True POP | AL | 11,700 | 11,700 - 14,800 | 11,700 | | 9,945 |
| Sharp/Northern | AL | 5,670 | 5,670 | 5,670 | | 4,820 |
| Short/Rougheye | AL | 1,220 | 1,220 | 1,220 | | 1,037 |
| Other rockfish | EBS | 400 | 400 | 400 | | 340 |
| | AL | 925 | 925 | 925 | | 786 |
| Atka mackerel | BS/AI | 43,000 | 117,100 | 32,000 | | 27,200 |
| Squid | | 3,600 | 3,400 | 2,000 | | 1,700 |
| Other Species | | 27,200 | 26,600 | 20,000 | | 17,000 |
| BS/AI TOTAL | | 2,773,355 | 3,126,915 - 3,131,455 | 1,948,414 | | 1,656,153 |

/1 Seasonal allowances of pollock TAC are made after deduction for reserves

/2 Preliminary specifications subject to change upon incorporation of 1992 groundfish survey data

/3 Recommended TAC less 15% reserve

Council's intent of conservative management of Aleutian Basin/Bogoslof pollock. This amount will serve as bycatch in non-pollock fisheries. One change from last year is the Council's recommendation to initiate a plan amendment that would allow TACs to be allocated by sub-area within the Aleutian Islands management district. Specifically, the Council recommended that an analysis be conducted to examine establishing a split in the TAC for sablefish, Atka mackerel and rockfish, and that the geographic division occur at 178° West Longitude. The Council's concern is that the harvest of these species be distributed over the range of the stocks in proportion to the distribution of their biomass.

Regarding apportionment of PSCs in the groundfish fisheries, the Council adopted last year's bycatch allowances for Pacific halibut, herring, red king crab and Tanner crab for public review. In the BSAI, PSC caps for halibut, and crab may be seasonally apportioned to six different trawl fisheries. Herring PSC may be apportioned into seven trawl fisheries (Table 3). The total is based on 1% of the estimated biomass and may change in 1993 when more updated biomass estimates become available.

At the June 1992 meeting, the Council recommended changes to the halibut PSC management in the BSAI trawl fisheries. Specifically, the Council adopted a 3,775 mt halibut mortality limit for BSAI trawl fisheries. Assuming a 75 percent mortality, the Council's recommendation of 3,775 mt mortality equates to this year's 5,033 mt PSC limit of handled halibut caught by trawl gear. Table 3 reflects the change in halibut accounting to mortality. In November, the IPHC is expected to provide its most recent research into halibut mortality rates in the groundfish fisheries.

At this meeting, the Council took final action on the portion of Amendment 21 that would establish a halibut PSC limit for the non-trawl fisheries. The Council recommended a 900 mt halibut mortality cap for the non-trawl fisheries, with 825 mt for the Pacific cod hook and line fishery and 75 mt for other non-trawl fisheries including sablefish and rockfish longline and jig (Table 4). The 825 mt cod cap was further apportioned seasonally 536 mt for January 1 - May 14, 83 mt for May 15 - August 31, and 206 mt for September 1 - December 31 (65/10/25% split). Like the trawl PSC program, the Council will continue to apportion the non-trawl PSC cap during the September - December specification process. The Council also recommended that groundfish pot gear be exempt from the non-trawl halibut PSC program for 1993. Note that these apportionments are preliminary, and could be changed by the Council at the December meeting. Amendment 21 is going forward for review by the Secretary of Commerce sometime in early 1993.

Bycatch rate standards for the vessel incentive program (VIP), for the first half of 1993, will be set by the Council in December. Current rate standards will be adjusted as necessary by the NMFS Regional Director prior to the start of the 1993 trawl fisheries.

Table 3. Council Recommended Preliminary Prohibited Species Bycatch Allowances for the BSAI Trawl Fisheries

| Fishery Group | Halibut, Primary | Halibut, Secondary | Herring | Red King Crab | C. bairdi | C. bairdi |
|--|------------------|------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| | (mt Mortality)* | (mt Mortality)* | (mt) | Zone1 | Zone1 | Zone2 |
| Yellowfin sole May 1 - Aug. 2 Aug. 3 - Dec. 31 | 557 | 637 239 239 | 391 | 75,000 | 100,000 | 1,225,000 |
| Rocksole/other flatfish Jan. 1 - Mar. 29 Mar. 30 - June 28 June 29 - Sept. 27 Sept. 28 - Dec. 31 | 495 | 566 425 71 remainder | 0 | 85,000 | 700,000 | 300,000 |
| Turbot/arrowtooth/sablefish Jan. 1 - Dec. 31 | 0 | 0 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Rockfish Jan. 1 - Mar. 29 Mar. 30 - June 28 June 29 - Sept. 27 Sept. 28 - Dec. 31 | 131 | 150 15 45 90 remainder | 10 | 0 | 0 | 50,000 |
| Pacific cod Jan. 1 - June 28 June 29 - Sept 27 Sept. 28 - Dec. 31 | 1,007 | 1,153 976 177 remainder | 29 | 10,000 | 75,000 | 712,500 |
| Pollock/mackerel/"o. species" Jan. 1 - April 15 April 16 - May 31 June 1 - Dec. 31 | 1,109 | 1,269 916 0 353 | 210 | 30,000 | 125,000 | 712,500 |
| 7 MW Pollock (Herring) | n/a | n/a | 1,668 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| TOTAL | 3,300 | 3,775 | 2,308 | 200,000 | 1,000,000 | 3,000,000 |

* Based on IPHC halibut mortality estimate for Trawl Gear of 75%

**Table 4. Council Recommended Preliminary 1993
PSC Bycatch Allowances for the BSAI Non-Trawl Fisheries**

| Fishery Group | Halibut** (mt) | Seasonal Apportion | |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------|
| | | % | (mt) |
| Pacific Cod | 825 | | |
| Jan 1 - May 14 | | 65% | 536 |
| May 15 - August 31 | | 10% | 83 |
| Sept. 1 - Dec. 31 | | 25% | 206 |
| Other Non-Trawl* | 75 | | |
| Groundfish Pot | Exempt | | |
| TOTAL | 900 | | |

* Includes Hook & Line Sablefish, Rockfish and Jig

** Assumes IPHC mortality estimate for Hook and Line Gear of 16%

Crab Management

Though the "Report to Industry on the 1992 Eastern Bering Sea Crab Survey" will not be available until sometime in October 1992, Dr. Bob Otto from NMFS in Kodiak provided the following summary of this year's Bering Sea crab survey and guideline harvest levels (GHL).

Red King Crab (*Paralithodes camtschatica*) All districts combined

Legal Males: 5.8 million crabs; decrease of 52.1% (statistically non-significant - NS)
Pre-recruits: Decrease of 14.0% (statistically significant - Sig)
Large Females: 6.3% increase (NS)
Outlook: Population is low and declining. Significant recruitment of juveniles in recent years
GHL: 10.3 million lbs

Pribilof Islands Blue King Crab (*P. platypus*) Pribilof district

Legal Males: 1.0 million; No significant change
Pre-recruits: 13.5% increase (NS)
Large Females: 26.8% decrease (NS)
Outlook: Population low stable. Trends not detectable
GHL: Fishery closed for 1992

St. Matthew Blue King Crab (*P. platypus*) Northern district

Legal Males: 2.3 million; 6.1% increase (NS)
Pre-recruits: 3.6% decrease (NS)
Large Females: 92% increase (NS)
Outlook: Population at average levels and stable
GHL: 3.1 million lbs (2.5 million lbs landed)

Tanner Crab (*Chionoecetes bairdi*) Eastern district

Legal Males: 41.8 million; significant increase of 16.0%
Pre-recruits: 3.3% decrease (NS)
Large Females: 45.3% decrease (NS)
Outlook: Population moderately high and stable. Expect future downturn as strong year class expires
GHL: 39.2 million lbs

Snow Crab (*C. Opilio*) All districts combined

Large Males: 256.4 million; 47% decrease (NS)
Pre-recruits: 52% decrease (Sig)
Large Females: 47% decrease (NS)
Outlook: Population high but declining due to passage of strong year class. Expect future near-term declines followed by another increase in 3-5 years as another strong year class matures.
GHL: 207 million lbs

Hair Crab (*Erimacrus isenbeckii*)

Large Males: 300,000 crabs; 54% decrease (NS)
Large Females: 58% decrease (NS)
Outlook: Population low and declining suddenly due to unknown causes. Strong recent landings may have contributed to decline.
GHL: None Projected

On another crab issue, this spring the Alaska Board of Fisheries decided to implement a pot limit for the Bering Sea king and Tanner crab fisheries. The Board recommended a 250 pot limit for Area T, the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery, and Area J, the Bering Sea Tanner crab fishery (both *C. opilio* and *C. bairdi*). It also recommended a 100 pot limit for the smaller Bering Sea crab fisheries in Area Q (Norton Sound, St Mathew and the Pribilof fisheries).

On June 30, 1992, the NMFS received an appeal from a group of Bering Sea crab fishermen regarding the Board's decision to limit the number of pots in the Bering Sea crab fisheries. The crab FMP authorizes this appeal and requires that the Crab Interim Action Committee (CIAC) convene to consider this appeal and forward its recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce. The CIAC met in Juneau on August 26, 1992 to address the pot limit appeal and presented its report to the Council at this meeting. The CIAC's report did not present a unanimous recommendation, but presented individual member's positions on the crab pot issue. The report, along with the NMFS Regional Director's recommendation, will be sent to the Secretary of Commerce for her review. After this review, the Secretary could agree with the Board of Fisheries' decision, or implement an emergency rule to supersede the State's pot limit regulations. This could happen prior to the November opening of the Bristol Bay king crab fishery.

The Council was scheduled to review the draft analysis (EA/RIR) to reevaluate the optimum yield (OY) for *C. opilio*. The analysis was not complete in time for Council review. Coincidentally, *C. opilio* abundance information from the EBS crab survey prompted the State of Alaska to set a Guideline Harvest Level below the 333 million pound OY at 207 million pounds. With a change in OY less urgent, initial Council review of this amendment will occur at the January meeting.

Marine Mammals and Groundfish Fishery Activities

Marine mammal researchers from NMFS have completed their summer survey work and presented an overview of the results from the 1992 Steller sea lion research program to the Council. Initial results indicate the decline in abundance since 1980 is continuing, but at a slower rate. Researchers estimate that on a state-wide basis, abundance of Steller sea lions declined 4.7 percent from 1991 to 1992. The following table summarizes the trend information on Steller sea lions off Alaska as provided by NMFS marine mammal researchers. Note that this is an index estimate, not an actual estimate of abundance.

| <u>Area</u> | <u>1991</u> | <u>1992</u> | <u>% Change 1991 -1992</u> |
|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
| SE Alaska | 7715 | 7557 | -2.1 |
| Eastern Gulf (includes PWS) | 4596 | 3738 | -18.7 |
| Central Gulf | 6273 | 5719 | -8.9 |
| Western Gulf | 3734 | 3718 | -0.4 |
| Eastern Aleutians | 4231 | 4839 | 14.4 |
| Central Aleutians | 7499 | 6396 | -14.7 |
| Western Aleutians | <u>2411</u> | <u>2868</u> | <u>19.0</u> |
| TOTAL | 36459 | 34835 | -4.7 |

At this meeting NMFS presented a proposed regulatory amendment to the recently enacted measures prohibiting trawling within 10 nautical miles of designated sea lion rookeries, and 20 nautical miles around three rookeries during the pollock "A" season. The amendment would add the Ugamak Island Steller sea lion rookery to the 20-mile no trawl zones during the pollock "A" season. The Council recommended that this regulatory amendment go forth, but only for the 1993 fishing season.

Update Of The Council's Halibut and Sablefish IFQ Program

NMFS is currently putting the final touches on the proposed regulatory rules for the Council's halibut and sablefish individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. Due to the very complicated nature of the program the rule-writing process has taken more time than usual. However, given the consequences of such a dramatic change from the status quo, NMFS believes the extra time is well spent. The package, including the proposed rule and the "Supplementary Analysis" of the IFQ programs, will be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce as soon as possible. When the proposed rule is published in the *Federal Register* a public comment period on the IFQ program will begin. Requests for the Proposed Rule and any other associated IFQ documents may be made to the Council or NMFS. Comments should be addressed to: Steve Pennoyer, Director, NMFS-Alaska Region, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802. The Secretary of Commerce's final decision will come no later than 95 days following her receipt of the proposed action.

Council Hears Reports on 1,000 lbs. Minimum IFQs and Block Proposals

The Council received reports on the advantages and disadvantages of proposals to restrict future IFQ transfers to blocks of shares, and to issue a minimum of 1,000 lbs. when distributing halibut IFQs. These proposals would modify the halibut and sablefish IFQ plans now being prepared for Secretary of Commerce review. The block proposals would limit transfers of future IFQs; only "blocks" of IFQs could be traded. This differs from the Council's current plans which would allow IFQs to be transferred in any increment of quota shares, i.e., a person could choose to transfer 100, 1,000, any, or all shares.

The 1,000 lb minimum proposal would issue a minimum of 1,000 lbs. of IFQs to all IFQ recipients in the initial allocation regardless of the amount they would receive in the Council's current IFQ proposal. The report shows that while clearly benefitting those who would receive the least IFQs, each person who would have otherwise received halibut IFQs greater than 1,000 lbs. will have to give up some amount of their allocation. The specific amount varied across fishing area and the size of the individual's allocation.

The Council voted to release the reports to the public as discussion documents, and ask for comments on the appropriateness of the proposals and on any possible changes which could be made to the proposals. The Council intends to examine public comments on these issues at their January 1993 meeting, and at that time decide whether or not to develop the proposals into regular plan amendments. These documents are available from the Council office.

Council Forgoes Look at Interim Halibut and Sablefish Management Measures

The Council received a proposal from the Kodiak Island Borough to implement interim management measures in the sablefish and halibut fixed gear fisheries. The proposal contained a suite of traditional management measures including the following: gear limits, trip limits, exclusive registration areas, and time-area closures. The proposers stated that steps were necessary to improve management of the fisheries until such time as the Council's IFQ plan was implemented. The Council decided not to pursue these measures after considering that their IFQ plan was being prepared for Secretarial review and that such an analysis would consume significant staff time and resources.

Observer Program

The Council reviewed a draft analysis (EA/RIR/IRFA) for proposed changes to the existing Observer Plan for groundfish fisheries under the Council's jurisdiction. These changes would:

1. Reduce the lower length limit for 100% observer coverage from 125' to 115'.
2. Reduce the lower length limit for 30% coverage from 60' to either 55' or 57'.
3. Change the requirement for observer coverage from fishing trip days to fishing days and define a fishing day.
4. Change the 30% coverage requirement from a quarterly to a monthly requirement, possibly by target fishery.
5. Allow for reduced coverage level requirements for vessels fishing with pot gear.
6. Revise conflict of interest standards for certified observers and observer contractors.
7. Allow for multiple observers on some vessels and processing plants.
8. Require 30% category longline vessels that fish in Southeast Alaska to carry some of their coverage while fishing in that area specifically.

The Council has approved this analysis for public review and will take final action this December. The document will be available from the Council office in late October. If approved, these changes would take effect sometime in 1993, and would remain so until implementation of the North Pacific Fisheries Research Plan (Research Plan). NMFS has proposed these changes to correct deficiencies in the current Observer Program. The Council's Observer Oversight Committee, comprised of industry representatives, helped formulate the proposals and analysis.

The Research Plan was approved by the Council last June and will be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for approval in late October. If approved, the Research Plan will replace the current funding mechanism for observer coverage by imposing a fee (up to 2% of exvessel value) on all groundfish, halibut, and crab landings. Collection of this fee may begin in early 1993. Details on the specifics of the fee collection process will be forthcoming.

Groundfish Management For 1993

Proposed Trawl Closure in the Eastern Gulf

The Council took no action on a proposed amendment to ban trawling in the Eastern Gulf of Alaska. Though the Council felt that the available information did not warrant an outright prohibition on trawling, there was considerable discussion on the issue of rockfish stock status and potential habitat damage by fishing activities. The Council will be closely examining rockfish concerns during the specifications process this fall and may incorporate explicit stock rebuilding schedules when setting quotas for some of these species. Habitat concerns, and the dependence of rockfish on specific habitat types, will continue to be a major focus of the Council in the future. The Alaska Fisheries Science Center has established a Rockfish Working Group to examine these issues and to gain a better general understanding of rockfish biological parameters. The Council has also established an industry Rockfish Committee to help them in

development of long-range, comprehensive management strategies for these long-lived, slow growing species.

Trawling May Be Restricted Around Pribilof Islands

The Council approved for public review an analysis of proposed trawl restrictions around the Pribilof Islands to minimize impacts of groundfish fishing on blue king crabs. Alternatives include closing IPHC area 4C to either bottom trawling or all trawling, closing a 25 nautical mile area surrounding the Islands to either bottom trawling or all trawling, or closing the IPHC area 4C up to 169°W Longitude to either bottom trawling or all trawling. The analysis is available for public review now and the Council will decide the issue in December. Copies of the analysis may be obtained from the Council office.

Pollock "B" Season Delay and Exclusive Registration for Groundfish Vessels

Last April, the Council requested staff to prepare an amendment package with alternatives to establish exclusive registration for groundfish vessels and postpone the opening date of the BSAI "B" season pollock fishery. The draft analysis for these two proposals was presented to the Council at this meeting. The Council recommended separating the two issues and sending them out for public review between now and the December meeting, when a final decision will be made.

Under the exclusive registration proposal, which would require a plan amendment, registration areas would be designated as either the Gulf of Alaska or the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands. A vessel would have to register for a fishing year in only one area and could not fish in the other. Alternatives analyzed include exclusive registration for trawlers only or all gear types for: (1) all groundfish, (2) pollock, or (3) Pacific cod. For the season delay in the BSAI "B" season pollock fishery the following alternatives are considered: (1) the status quo (i.e., June 1 start date), (2) July 1, (3) August 1, and (4) September 1. Both documents will be available from the Council office by the end of October.

Inshore/offshore CDQ Bycatch Amendment

Last June, the Council requested staff to prepare an analysis of alternatives to allocate prohibited species catch (PSC) limits among the separate pollock fisheries established under the inshore/offshore/CDQ program (Amendment 18 to the BSAI FMP). The problem being addressed is that the ability to take each of the three pollock allocations in a cost effective manner may be diminished by PSC induced closures. A draft analysis was presented to the Council at this meeting and recommended for public review. Final action on this issue will occur at the December meeting.

Gangion Cutting/Careful Release of Halibut PSC

The Council received a proposal from the IPHC suggesting a requirement for longline vessels to release halibut by cutting gangions at the hook, thereby decreasing halibut discard mortality. The IPHC believes that gangion-cutting could reduce discard mortality from 16% to between 5-11% depending on how fishermen react. The Council discussed this proposal and recommended that NMFS develop a regulation for the BSAI Pacific cod fishery requiring mandatory gangion cutting or, in the case of observed vessels, a combination of gangion cutting and an approved careful fish removal technique. The Council may take final action in December on this proposal.

Preferential Allocation and/or Seasonal Apportionment of Pacific Cod

Last January the Council requested staff to proceed with an amendment analysis for preferential allocation of BSAI Pacific cod to gear types which exhibit low bycatch rates. Currently, there is no explicit allocation of the BSAI Pacific cod TAC between the trawl and non-trawl groundfish fisheries. The analysis evaluates the potential biological and socioeconomic impacts of establishing a fixed allocation of the Pacific cod TAC between the trawl and non-trawl fisheries. The Council, AP and SSC reviewed the initial analysis and decided to postpone this issue until the April meeting. This will allow staff to further develop the analysis. In addition, the Council had previously requested analysis on seasonally apportioning the Pacific cod TAC. The analysis to be presented to the Council in April will consider both seasonal and gear allocations for the BSAI Pacific cod fishery. Final action on this issue would be scheduled for June of 1993.

Bycatch Cap Committee

In August the Council established an industry committee to review the halibut PSC caps and assumed mortality rates, the validity of the data used by managers, and the equity of the caps to different gear types. The Committee met in Seattle on September 11 and again in Anchorage during the Council meeting. John Roos, chairman of the "Bycatch Cap Committee," presented the Committee's report to the Council, which included some immediate and longer-term considerations to bycatch problems. The Committee will meet again in Anchorage on November 5-6 to review information on bycatch which has been requested from staff. They will further define their recommendations for addressing problems associated with the current bycatch management regime.

Prior to the Bycatch Cap Committee meeting, the Council will be holding a salmon bycatch workshop to discuss issues specific to the bycatch of salmon in the groundfish fisheries. This workshop will be held on the afternoon of November 4. Please see list of upcoming meetings (page 19) for details.

Pelagic Trawl Definition

The Council reviewed a proposed performance-based pelagic trawl definition from NMFS. A previously approved redefinition based on gear configuration is going forward for Secretarial review. This was approved by the Council in April of 1992 and that description is contained in the April newsletter. One addition to that definition is that lifting devices on the net will be prohibited.

That definition of a pelagic trawl, based on gear configuration, will now be accompanied by a performance-based standard which will kick in when on-bottom trawling is prohibited for PSC closure reasons. Simply stated, this definition is based on whether or not the trawl picks up crabs.

The Council approved this amendment and it will be forwarded directly to the Secretary for approval; the Council will review the Proposed Rule in December. The Council and industry representatives were concerned about the enforcement standards which would be used to implement this rule. For example, how would the presence of regurgitated crabs be differentiated from crabs which were caught by the trawl directly? NMFS will be consulting with industry in developing the enforcement standards for this rule and the Council will review these standards in December.

Fair Start Regulations for Hook and Line Fisheries

During the 1992 sablefish fisheries, there were reported instances of vessels setting gear on the grounds prior to the opening of the directed sablefish fishery on the pretext of fishing for miscellaneous finfish. Many of these vessels were in fact participating in the directed sablefish fishery and getting a jump on the other fishery participants. To remedy this situation NMFS is preparing a regulatory amendment which will prohibit vessels from setting longline gear 72 hours prior to an opening for a directed fishery in which they intend to participate. This will be the same as current regulations governing the halibut fishery. The Council approved this amendment and it will be completed and forwarded to the Secretary for approval. The Council and industry may comment on the Proposed Rule in December. This rule would be in effect for the 1993 sablefish opening.

Legal Gear Types

Currently, the regulations governing the groundfish fisheries list illegal gear types, and if a gear type is not listed it may be used. This situation allows for the use of undesirable gears such as sunken gillnets, or longline configurations which could be fished after a closure for bycatch reasons. NMFS intends to remedy this problem by amending the regulations to list only those gear types which are legal. If a gear type is not listed, it would not be permitted. This will not prohibit the development of new gear types in the future, through experimental permits for example. The regulations could then be amended to add a new gear type. The Council requested NMFS to complete this amendment, submit it for public review this fall, and will take final action at the December meeting.

Delay of the 2nd Quarter Pollock Opening in the Gulf of Alaska

The Council reviewed a proposal from the Alaska Groundfish Data Bank asking for a delay of the 2nd quarter pollock opening in the Gulf of Alaska. Currently, that season is scheduled to open on April 1. Reasons for the proposed delay include increased recovery rates, reduced salmon bycatch, and a decrease in the discard of undersized pollock. The Council voted to proceed with this amendment in order to get such a delay in place in time for the 1993 fisheries. An amendment will be prepared and forwarded to the Secretary this fall, and the Council may comment on the Proposed Rule at their December meeting. Under this amendment, the 2nd quarter opening would be delayed until the Monday nearest June 1.

Committee To Study A "Comprehensive Rationalization Program" Is Formed

When the Council initially approved the Inshore/Offshore allocation in June 1991, it stated its intent to pursue a "Comprehensive Rationalization Program." The focus of the Comprehensive Rationalization Program to date has been the potential for implementing IFQs in all fisheries under their jurisdiction. In forming a committee-of-the-whole of Council members, the Council hopes to be able to concentrate on that issue, to develop alternatives, and monitor progress. The committee will have its first meeting in Seattle on November 12, beginning at 1 p.m., and lasting through the next day. The meeting will be at the Red Lion Hotel, near SeaTac International Airport.

The Council also received and released to the public, a discussion paper by Dr. Russell Harding entitled "A Review of Management Options." This paper focuses on the problems facing the North Pacific groundfish fisheries, the Council's management goals and objectives, and how well particular management alternatives address the issues. The Council requests that the industry and public closely review this document as it may pertain to groundfish and crab, and come forward with their suggestions on how to best manage the fisheries into the future. The Committee will review these comments in November and discuss them further with industry. The Comprehensive Rationalization Program will be a major topic on the Council's January 1993 agenda. It is the intent of the Council to narrow the potential list of

management alternatives in January and focus analytical resources on those alternatives most likely to address the problems facing these fisheries.

NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY

Council Solicits Comments On Several Issues

At their September 22-27 meeting the Council released several documents for public comment. Some are available immediately while others will be released after revision. Following is a list of documents with a brief summary of their content. Copies of these documents can be obtained by calling the Council office at 907-271-2809. The deadline for comments will be specified in a cover letter accompanying each document.

Pribilof Island Trawl Closure. The purpose of the proposed action is to eliminate bottom trawl activities in the IPHC Area 4C to assist in rebuilding blue king crab and Korean hair crab stocks and to protect seabird and marine mammal populations. The document discusses the seven alternatives to be considered by the Council at their December 7-12 meeting in Anchorage. The document will be available by October 23rd.

Pollock "B" Season Delay. The analysis contains alternatives to establish a opening date in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands "B" season pollock fishery ranging from July 1 through September 1. The document should be available by the first week of November.

Exclusive Registration Areas. This analysis explores the possibility of requiring pollock and cod harvesting vessels to register to fish in either the Gulf of Alaska or the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands for the entire year. The document should be available by the first week in November.

Prohibited Species Catch Allowances for Inshore/Offshore and Community Development Quota Programs. The analysis explores alternatives to allocate the pollock fishery prohibited species catch limit allowances among the three pollock allocation fisheries (inshore/offshore/CDQ) established by Amendment 18 and Revised Amendment 18. The document should be available by the end of October.

Other Regulatory Amendments. There are also several regulatory amendments the Council will consider for final approval in December. They include (1) changes to the Observer Program for 1993; (2) a proposal to amend the groundfish fishery management plans to include definitions of legal gear (they now only describe illegal gear); and (3) regulations to require cutting of gangions and/or careful release methods to reduce halibut bycatch mortality. The analysis for proposed changes to the Observer Program will be available in late October. For more information on these issues, please contact the Council office.

Discussion Papers. The Council is also seeking comment on four discussion papers. Three of the papers deal with proposals submitted for possible amendments to the Sablefish/Halibut Individual Fishing Quota program. Two "block" amendments are described. The proposals advocate issuing quota shares in blocks; several block sizes are discussed. Another paper discusses a proposal that would set 1,000 lbs. as the minimum amount of quota share a recipient would receive in the initial allocation. The last discussion paper, "North Pacific Groundfish: A Review of Management Options," was prepared for use by the Council as they begin to develop a comprehensive rationalization program for the groundfish and crab fisheries in the Alaska EEZ. These discussion papers should be available by October 16.

Secretarial Review Period Begins On Several Amendments

Public comment is being requested by the National Marine Fisheries Service on the following proposed rules:

Revised Amendment 18 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish FMP. The proposed rule for the inshore-offshore allocation of pollock in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands for 1993-95 has been published in the *Federal Register*. The formal 30-day Secretarial comment period ends on November 4. Copies of the revised analysis and the proposed rule for the amendment are available from the Council office. Comments should be submitted directly to: Steve Pennoyer, Director, NMFS-Alaska Region, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802.

Community Development Quota Criteria and Procedures. There are two comments periods on the proposed rule. The first, ending on October 23, requests comments on the program to be implemented for 1992 and 1993. Comments on implementation of the program for 1994 and 1995 will be accepted until November 16. Copies of the proposed rule can be obtained from the Council office. Comments on the proposed rule should be directed to NMFS Regional Director Steve Pennoyer at the address noted above.

Amendment 26 to the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. The proposed rule for Amendment 26, which would permanently implement current king crab protection zones near Kodiak Island, will be published shortly. The analysis of the amendment and the proposed rule can be obtained from the Council office. Comments should be directed to NMFS Regional Director Steve Pennoyer. The deadline for comments will be determined at the time of publication in the *Federal Register*.

**NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
MEETING UPDATE**

| Meeting | Date/Time | Location |
|--|--|--|
| Lowell Wakefield Symposium- Management Strategies for Exploited Fish Populations | Oct. 21-24, 1992 | Hilton Hotel Anchorage, AK |
| N.P.F.M.C. Salmon Bycatch Workshop | 1:00 PM Nov. 4, 1992 | Hilton Hotel Denali Room Anchorage, AK |
| N.P.F.M.C. Bycatch Cap Committee Meeting | 9:00 A.M. Nov. 5-6, 1992 | Hilton Hotel Denali Room Anchorage, AK |
| N.P.F.M.C. Comprehensive Rationalization Planning Committee | Starts 1:00 P.M. Nov. 12, 1992 8:30 A.M. on Nov. 13, 1992 | Red Lion - SeaTac Airport Seattle, WA (206/246-8600) {When calling for reservations, mention you are attending the N.P.F.M.C. meeting} |
| N.P.F.M.C. Groundfish Plan Teams | Nov. 16-20, 1992 | Alaska Fisheries Science Center Seattle, WA |
| Pacific Fishery Management Council | Nov. 18-20, 1992 | Seattle, WA |
| Pacific Marine Expo | Nov. 19-21, 1992 | Seattle, WA |
| North Pacific Fishery Management Council Meeting Week | Week of Dec. 7, 1992 | Hilton Hotel Anchorage, AK |
| N.P.F.M.C. Gulf Rockfish Committee | Tentative for Nov. 23-24, 1992 in Seattle | (Exact time and location yet to be determined) |

Tentative Council Meeting Schedule for 1993-94

| 1993 | | 1994 | |
|----------------|---------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Week of | Location* | Week of | Location* |
| January 17**** | Anchorage, Alaska | January 10 | Anchorage |
| April 19 | Anchorage, Alaska | April 18 | Anchorage |
| June 21 | Kodiak, Alaska | June 20 | Sitka |
| September 20 | Anchorage, Alaska | September 19 | Seattle |
| December 6 | Seattle, Washington | December 5 | Anchorage |

*Anchorage meetings will be held at the Anchorage Hilton Hotel. Out-of-town meeting locations have not yet been determined.

******NOTE: THE JANUARY 1993 COUNCIL MEETING HAS BEEN CHANGED TO THE WEEK OF JANUARY 17. THE AP AND SSC WILL BEGIN ON SUNDAY, JANUARY 17; THE COUNCIL WILL BEGIN ON MONDAY, JANUARY 18.**