

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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NEWSLETTER

4/21/89

Groundfish Amendment Proposals Approved for Public Review

At its April 11-14 meeting the Council reviewed and approved for public review several proposed changes to the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Fishery Management Plans. A Notice of Availability for the proposed amendments is included with this newsletter. The Council will take final action in June and submit those approved for Secretary of Commerce review and implementation. The Council also released to public review a revised salmon plan, a comprehensive data gathering program, and revisions to the Council's Statement of Organization, Practices and Procedures. The Council withdrew the proposed January 16, 1989 cut-off date for vessels entering the sablefish, groundfish, halibut, and crab fisheries, but will continue to move ahead with the development and analysis of future management alternatives. The Council directed its plan team to prepare an amendment to the groundfish plans that would prohibit roe-stripping in the pollock fishery. Details of these and other items are in this newsletter.

June Council Meeting Scheduled in Anchorage

The Council will meet June 20-23 at the Anchorage Sheraton to review public comments on amendments proposed to the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Fishery Management Plans and determine which to send forward for Secretary of Commerce review and implementation. The Council will also review a draft amendment to prohibit roe-stripping in the pollock fishery, review draft alternatives to address full utilization of groundfish resources, and finalize technical descriptions of controlled access alternatives for sablefish. The Council will receive a revised status of stocks report for Gulf of Alaska pollock and determine if sufficient evidence exists to warrant increasing the Total Allowable Catch for the remainder of 1989. The Scientific and Statistical Committee and Advisory Panel will meet at the hotel June 18-19. A more detailed agenda should be available by June 2.

Council Sets Meeting Dates for 1990

The Council approved the following meeting dates for 1990, all to be held in Anchorage:

Week of January 15
Week of April 23
Week of June 25
Week of September 24
Week of December 3

The remaining 1989 meetings, scheduled at the Anchorage Sheraton Hotel are:

June 19-23, 1989
September 25-29, 1989
December 4-8, 1989

**Council Withdraws Controlled Access Cut-off Date:
Moves Forward with Future Management Planning**

The Council heard considerable public testimony against the January 16, 1989 cut-off date proposed at its January meeting. Industry voiced concern over the meaning of the cutoff and its impacts on their position in the fisheries and ability to obtain financing for ongoing or planned vessel construction or modification. The Council then voted to withdraw the proposed January 16, 1989 cut-off date but to continue with its previously adopted schedule of comprehensively considering alternative management regimes for the sablefish, groundfish, halibut, and crab fisheries. That schedule was published in the January newsletter and provides for the Council to make final decisions on sablefish this coming December, halibut next April, and groundfish and crab in December 1990.

Between now and the June Council meeting, the technical teams and Fisheries Planning Committee will further refine the design of two alternative management systems for sablefish and halibut: a license limitation system and individual fishing quotas. The workgroup will also complete a detailed projection of the fisheries and their management as they may evolve under continued open access.

The Council is scheduled in June to put final touches on the sablefish alternatives so the technical team can fully analyze them this summer. The sablefish alternatives and the analyses now are scheduled to be available for public review between the September and December Council meetings. The Fishery Planning Committee tentatively is scheduled to meet next in Juneau on May 18 and 19. Please contact the Council office for the exact time, location, and agenda.

Gulf of Alaska Pollock Issues

The Council heard extensive testimony from the commercial fishing industry about the practice of roe-stripping in Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea groundfish fisheries. While this practice is not now prohibited, many in industry strongly oppose the waste of fish carcasses discarded after the roe is removed. The issue was exacerbated by the rapid harvest of the Gulf of Alaska pollock quota which closed the fishery on March 23 for the rest of 1989. Without additional pollock quota, representatives from Kodiak testified they will be unable to fully utilize shoreside processing capacity later this year. In addition, fishermen voiced concern that pollock taken as bycatch in cod or flounder fisheries must be treated as a prohibited species and discarded, a further waste of the pollock resource.

Recognizing the importance of this issue, the Council directed its plan team to develop for initial review in June an amendment to ban pollock roe-stripping in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries. A final Council vote on the ban will be scheduled for September following public review this summer. Any action the Council takes on the roe-stripping issue is intended to be in place by January 1, 1990.

Industry also requested that the Council take emergency action to increase the pollock Total Allowable Catch (TAC) in the Gulf of Alaska to allow retention of bycatch that will inevitably be taken in the Pacific cod and flatfish fisheries later this year. The bycatch is estimated to range from 3,000 mt to 11,000 mt. However, the Council decided to postpone consideration of this request until June when the results of the 1989 NOAA pollock survey and a report from State/Federal domestic observer programs will be available. There is serious concern over the health of the pollock stock in the Gulf and the Council wants to ensure that increasing the TAC will not harm this valuable resource. The industry testified that only minimal amounts of pollock will be taken between April and June so the delay would not greatly affect Kodiak processors. It's the Council's intent to take emergency action on the retention issue in June if an increased TAC can be supported by the new stock status information.

The Council also directed its plan teams to develop alternatives and a work schedule for prohibiting roe-stripping in groundfish fisheries other than pollock in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and for requiring full utilization of all species of fish under the Council's jurisdiction. The Council will review these alternatives in June and give instruction to the plan teams for further development. As with the ban on pollock roe-stripping, the Council plans on taking action in time to affect the 1990 fishing year.

**Offshore - Inshore Groundfish Priorities to be Examined:
Council Calls for Industry Solutions**

The rapid harvest of pollock in the Gulf of Alaska this year has heightened the controversy over inshore-offshore priorities to the groundfish resource and the Council voted in April to schedule a discussion on this issue at its June meeting.

The Council is soliciting proposals from industry on resolving the problem of mobile harvesting and processing operations competing on the more limited fish grounds available to stationary inshore operations. Proposals are due at the Council office by June 9.

At its June 20-23 meeting the Council will give direction for further development of the proposals received.

Directed Fishing/Bycatch Definition Adopted for Groundfish Species

In January the Council requested NOAA Fisheries to develop a draft regulatory amendment to replace an emergency rule that is in effect from March 28 to June 26, 1989. The emergency rule bases enforcement of bycatch limitations on retention and prescribes the following limits on the percentage that a bycatch-designated species can contribute to the overall catch on board the vessel:

- (a) 20% for all groundfish except sablefish in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutians.
- (b) 4% for long line sablefish in the Gulf of Alaska.
- (c) 20% for trawl caught sablefish in Gulf of Alaska.
- (d) 1% of groundfish/10% of Greenland turbot and Pacific ocean perch for sablefish in the Bering Sea and Aleutians.

The draft regulatory amendment presented by NOAA at the Council's April meeting based the enforcement of bycatch on retention from each haul and from the vessel's total catch. The draft regulatory amendment also prescribed new bycatch limits as a percentage of the catch. These were derived by NOAA based on past performance of the individual groundfish fisheries.

Based on suggestions from the Advisory Panel, the Council requested the Regional Director to refine the draft regulatory amendment such that it provides for enforcement based on sorted, retained catch on a tow basis and the amount of fish or fish products onboard. Retention would be defined as fish that has been sorted, is in any stage of processing, or has been preserved. To prevent "topping off" the Council recommended that enforcement of bycatch percentages be based on fish taken and retained within a trip or following any offloading. The Council's intent is to have bycatch rates sufficiently low to prevent "topping off" and yet not so low that true bycatch needs to be discarded and thus wasted. The Council's intends that the regulatory amendment be drafted in such a manner as to stop a vessel from accumulating catch from one area and using it in another to calculate the retainable amount of bycatch.

The current emergency rule will remain in effect until supplanted by the regulatory amendment. The Council approved extending the existing emergency rule for another 90 days through late September to accommodate the time needed to implement the regulatory amendment. When the regulatory amendment finally takes affect, "bycatch only" species will be retainable only in amounts equal to or less than the percentages of other species on board as shown in the accompanying tables. For example, if sablefish is designated bycatch in the trawl fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska, it can be retained up to an amount that is 5% of the pollock, Pacific cod, or flounder target fisheries or up to 15% of the rockfish fishery. In the Bering Sea and Aleutians trawl bycatches of sablefish are allowed up to 1% of the flatfish, Pacific cod, yellowfin sole, and pollock fisheries, and up to 10% for Greenland turbot and rockfish. The Council intends that the Regional Director be provided the leeway to adjust percentages within the range of 1% to 5% for sablefish taken while trawling for Gulf pollock.

GULF OF ALASKA

Allowable Bycatch as a Percentage of Target Species On Board (in round weight equivalents)

		Target Species Fishery				
Gear	Bycatch Species	Flounder	Rockfish	Pollock	P. Cod	Sablefish
Trawl	Sablefish	5*	15	5**	5	--
	Other species	20	20	20	20	20
H & L	Sablefish	4	4	4	4	--
	Other species	20	20	20	20	20
Pot	Sablefish	N/A (sablefish may not be taken by pots)				
	Other species	20	20	20	20	20

*Allowable sablefish bycatch is 15% of Dover sole and Rex sole.

**The RD can adjust sablefish bycatch in pollock fisheries from 1% to 5%.

BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

Allowable Bycatch as a Percentage of Target Species On Board (in round weight equivalents)

		Target Species Fishery						
Gear	Bycatch Species	Other Flatfish	Pacific Cod	YFS	Pollock	Greenland Turbot	Rockfish	Sablefish
Trawl	Pollock	20	20	20	--	1	1	1
	Yellowfin sole	20	1	--	1	1	1	1
	Other flatfish	--	10	20	10	1	1	1
	Pacific cod	20	--	20	20	1	1	1
	Sablefish	1	1	1	1	10	10	--
	Greenland turbot	1	1	1	1	--	1	25
	Rockfish	1	1	1	1	1	--	15
H & L	Sablefish	1	1	1	1	10	10	--
	Pacific cod	1	--	1	1	1	1	1
	Greenland turbot	1	1	1	1	--	1	20
Pot	Sablefish	1	1	1	1	1	1	--
	Pacific cod	1	--	1	1	1	1	1

Proposed Groundfish Amendments Released for Public Review

The Council reviewed and approved for public review several proposed changes to the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Fishery Management Plans. The Council will take final action in June and send those amendments that are approved on for Secretary of Commerce review and implementation in late 1989.

Amendment 18 to the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP and Amendment 13 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish FMP address the following issues:

1. Allocate sablefish total allowable catch in the BSAI.
2. Establish a fishing season framework for all groundfish fisheries in the GOA and BSAI.
3. Establish a Shelikof District in the Central Regulatory Area of the GOA.
4. Establish a groundfish fishing closed zone near the Walrus Islands and Cape Peirce in the BSAI.
5. Replace the king crab time/area closures around Kodiak Island and modify the halibut bycatch management regime for the GOA.
6. Expand the Pacific cod trawl exemption in the BSAI.
7. Implement a system of observer coverage and other data gathering and data reporting requirements for the groundfish fisheries of the GOA and BSAI.
8. 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.

Members of the staff and plan teams will edit the environmental and regulatory analyses associated with Amendment 18 and Amendment 13 and incorporate suggestions of the Council, Scientific and Statistical Committee, and Advisory Panel, to the extent possible, before sending the package out for public review. The public review period will commence May 3 with written comments due in the Council's offices June 2. A Notice of Availability is included at the end of this newsletter.

Comprehensive Data Gathering Program Will Require Observers

The Council approved for public review a proposed amendment to its groundfish plans that would establish a single, comprehensive data gathering program. It will apply to all fisheries within the Council's jurisdiction and require record keeping, reporting, and domestic observers. The amendment contains several options on the actual percentage of observer coverage, whether funding is to be voluntary or mandatory, and on overall management of the program. The Council specifically requests public comment on these alternatives as well as all other aspects of the proposed program. Members of the staff and plan team will incorporate Council, SSC, and AP suggestions and the data gathering amendment will be sent out with the other groundfish amendments described in the Notice of Availability at the end of this newsletter. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this program in June.

Industry-Supported Observer Program Gets Underway

NOAA Fisheries reported on their initiation of a domestic observer program funded in part by voluntary contributions from the fishing industry. By the April meeting four observers had been placed on vessels in the Bering Sea groundfish fisheries. A fund raising drive has been organized by the Alaska Factory Trawlers Association (AFTA) which has so far generated over \$105,000. NOAA Fisheries has also contributed \$125,000

in matching funds bringing the total to over \$230,000. AFTA has challenged others in the fishing industry to contribute by agreeing to match dollar for dollar all contributions up to a total association contribution of \$400,000. NOAA Fisheries encourages the fishing industry to participate in this fund raising drive.

The NOAA observer program is but one of several small domestic observer programs currently being conducted. The Council, through its programmatic funds, has supported a domestic pilot program since 1987 and though the contract is nearing a close, observers should be available through the spring for both Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska deployment. Another observer program is being run by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Kodiak and they are fielding observers on both domestic trawl and longline vessels in the Gulf of Alaska. This program is being funded by both industry contributions and State appropriations. The Council strongly encourages vessel owners and operators to participate in these observer programs.

Persons interested in contributing to the NOAA observer program should contact Ted Evans at (206) 285-5139. Vessels interested in taking observers should contact the following individuals:

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|---|---|
| NOAA Observer Program - Contact: | Angela Luis, Seattle coordinator
(206) 526-4195 |
| NPFMC Pilot Observer Program - Contact: | Tyson Vogeler, Kodiak coordinator
(907) 486-6034 |
| ADFG Domestic Observer Program - Contact: | Peter Craig, Kodiak coordinator
(907) 486-4791 |

Groundfish Harvests in 1989

U.S. industry harvested and processed 403,197 mt of groundfish off Alaska by April 13. The catch in the Gulf of Alaska was 85,657 mt including 66,837 mt pollock, 13,606 mt Pacific cod, 683 mt sablefish, 1,741 mt rockfish, 2,086 mt flounders, and lesser amounts of other species. The catch in the Bering Sea and Aleutians was 317,540 mt including 246,332 mt pollock, 31,522 mt Pacific cod, 29,510 mt rock sole, 2,710 mt yellowfin sole, 490 mt sablefish, and lesser amounts of other species.

In addition, joint ventures caught 245,599 mt, all from the Bering Sea and Aleutians. The catch included 66,166 mt pollock, 120,179 mt yellowfin sole, 33,915 mt Pacific cod, 12,918 mt rock sole, and lesser amounts of other species. The joint venture season went quickly with NOAA Fisheries taking the following inseason actions since January 1:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| January 21: | Closed directed joint ventures for Bering Sea pollock. |
| February 11: | Closed directed joint ventures for Bering Sea and Aleutians Pacific cod. |
| February 21: | Closed directed joint ventures for Bering Sea and Aleutians rock sole. |
| March 1: | Closed directed joint ventures for Bering Sea and Aleutians yellowfin sole. |
| March 8: | Rock sole was designated as a prohibited species for joint ventures in the Bering Sea and Aleutians. |
| March 12: | Closed all joint ventures in Bering Sea and Aleutians because the JVP for yellowfin sole was exhausted. |

Salmon Fishery Management Plan Approved for Public Review

A revised management plan for salmon fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off Alaska was approved for public review. The plan is being revised to conform with the Pacific Salmon Treaty and management of inshore salmon fisheries by the State of Alaska. There are two major options for management: (1) defer regulations to the State of Alaska, or (2) retain status quo with Council and NOAA Fisheries management in the EEZ under Federal regulations. The plan also requests public comment on whether to extend jurisdiction of the plan west of 175° East longitude. The Council is scheduled to take final action on the revised plan at its September meeting. The public comment period will begin May 15 and a Notice of Availability is included at the end of this newsletter.

Council Endorses Voluntary Herring Bycatch Plan

The Council received recommendations from an industry Ad Hoc Herring Bycatch Workgroup on a five-point plan to reduce herring bycatch in the Bering Sea trawl fisheries. The workgroup is composed of individual representing Western Alaska communities and local fisheries, representatives of the domestic and joint venture trawl industry, and members of ADF&G's Central and Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim staff. The recommendations of the workgroup are presented below:

Herring Stock Composition Study. In order to assess the impacts of herring bycatch on discrete stocks, ADF&G and the NOAA Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center have designed a herring stock composition study. Although the Center has agreed to instruct its observers to collect scale samples, there may not be enough observers to adequately cover the fleet. Some vessels without observers may be willing to collect whole fish samples in accordance with the appropriate sampling guidelines and ADF&G has agreed to perform the scale analysis if funding is available.

Communications System for Yellowfin Sole Trawlers Near Togiak. ADF&G has agreed to broadcast daily updates on the general location and migration patterns of herring in the Bristol Bay/Togiak area. The updates will be issued at 6:30 p.m. on UHF 7, single side band. More detailed information on school size and location, will be available on other frequencies. The domestic trawl industry operating in that area has voluntarily agreed to monitor the ADF&G reports and avoid areas and migration corridors where concentrations of herring are reported.

Local Observers Aboard Trawl Vessels in the Togiak Area. The domestic trawl industry has voluntarily agreed to accept Western Alaska representatives as observers to view their operations in the Togiak area. The domestic vessels will provide reasonable transportation to and from their vessel. Western Alaska representatives have developed a list of people willing to serve as observers.

Education Program for Trawl Skippers. The Alaska Factory Trawlers Association has agreed to develop and provide a herring identification and avoidance education program for trawl skippers. The program will initially be available this spring and will be expanded next year.

Full Accounting of Herring Bycatch. The workgroup agreed there needs to be full accounting of all herring bycatch taken, regardless of area and vessel type. Those vessels which do not have observers on board should report the amount, area, and time of herring bycatch.

The Council endorsed the recommendations of the Workgroup and encourages the domestic and joint venture trawl fleet to follow the plan. A full report on the Workgroup's Herring Bycatch Plan is available upon request by contacting Steve Davis at the Council office.

Council Operating Procedures Available for Public Review

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has revised their Statement of Organization, Practices and Procedures (SOPP) to comply with regulations and guidelines published by NOAA in the January 17, 1989 Federal Register. The North Pacific Council is requesting public comment on its revised SOPP before final approval at their June 20-23, 1989 meeting in Anchorage. A copy of the SOPP can be obtained for review after May 5 by contacting the Council office at (907) 271-2809. Comments must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. (ADT), June 9, 1989.

Oil Spill and Habitat

The Council received a status report on efforts to contain and clean up the oil spill in Prince William Sound from Under Secretary William Evans, Administrator of NOAA, and voiced its concern over the potentially far-ranging impacts on the fisheries inside and beyond the Sound. The Council encouraged NOAA to take all actions necessary to address this problem and appointed a Committee under its Habitat Policy to meet with State and Federal agencies to discuss the spill and its potential impacts. The Committee will report their findings to the Council in June. The Council also reaffirmed its opposition to oil and gas leasing activities in Bristol Bay because of the abundant fisheries and wildlife resources.

ADF&G Reports on Oil Spill-Related Closures

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game reported to the Council its decision to close several commercial fisheries in Prince William Sound as a result of the oil spill. Both the herring and pot shrimp fisheries were closed until further notice. The sablefish fishery conducted within State waters was delayed until August 15 unless changed by emergency order. Other fisheries, including the salmon fishery may also be closed depending on the amount of oil contamination in the area at the time of the scheduled opening. The industry will be notified by ADF&G as soon as these decisions are made.

Coast Guard Reports on Enforcement Activities

From January 1 to March 31, the Coast Guard used two high endurance cutters, two medium endurance cutters, four patrol boats, a C-130 aircraft and H-3 helicopters for enforcement activities in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off Alaska. Their main emphasis was to detect and deter poaching by foreign fishing vessels, enforce regulations for joint venture and domestic fisheries, and to enforce crew citizenship requirements established by the Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Anti-Reflagging Act. Of the 663 foreign vessels sighted during the three-month period, 66 were boarded, and 21 violations detected. Nineteen violations were issued to domestic vessels during a total of 187 boardings.

The Japanese tanker ORIENTAL CRANE was seized for conducting fisheries support operations (selling fuel to U.S. fishing vessels) in the EEZ without a joint venture support permit. The vessel also was found to be conducting fisheries support operations within territorial waters (selling fuel to four fishing vessels while anchored in English Bay, St. Paul Island) and violating the Jones Act by engaging in coastwise trade. The Coast Guard also boarded a Soviet trawler, the MYS SHELIKOVA, after it was sighted along with other Soviet vessels in the U.S. EEZ near the US/USSR disputed area. Although the Coast Guard suspected the vessel was preparing to fish, there was no evidence of fishing activity. The MYS SHELIKOVA returned to Soviet waters after the boarding.

The Coast Guard also reported that on April 1 the Japanese Maritime Safety Agency seized the entire 255-ton catch of Atka mackerel and rockfish from the Japanese trawler KOEI MARU NO. 51 because the Agency suspected the fish were caught in the Aleutian Islands after completing joint venture fishing for rock sole, Pacific cod, and pollock in the U.S. EEZ. The vessel was boarded by the U.S. Coast Guard on February 16 and issued

reports of violation for having no permit on board and not sending weekly reports of receipts. The master of the vessel indicated that February 18 would be his last day of fishing before returning to Japan. The Japanese Maritime Safety Agency is investigating. Boardings of domestic vessels found only six in violation of the Commercial Fishing Industry Vessel Anti-Reflagging Act which requires that at least 75% of the unlicensed seamen on board be U.S. citizens or resident aliens.

The Coast Guard also pointed out that bycatch limits, now based on fish and fish products retained on board, will be enforced using the bycatch limits of the area where a vessel is fishing, regardless of where the vessel claims the bycatch species were caught. And because domestic vessels are not required to maintain daily catch logs, it will not be possible to establish whether a groundfish species found on board, which at the time of boarding was prohibited from being retained, was caught before or after being placed in a prohibited species category. Therefore, any vessel found fishing with a prohibited species on board will automatically be issued a violation. The Coast Guard will thoroughly count all product on board to determine if any prohibited species was caught and retained after the closure. NOAA has advised vessels to offload product for any groundfish species before fishing in an area where that species is prohibited.

Legislative Update

Fisheries and ocean-related issues continue to occupy an important spot on the Congressional agenda this year with 14 bills being introduced to date. Several bills and legislative issues are of particular interest to this Council and North Pacific fisheries:

Magnuson Act Reauthorization. The current authorization period for the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MFCMA) expires on September 30, 1989. No reauthorization bills have been introduced yet and Congress will begin its hearings on May 2 in Washington, D.C. Congressman Studds, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Fisheries and Wildlife Conservation and the Environment, has invited North Pacific Council Chairman John Peterson and other Council Chairmen to provide testimony. Other public hearings have been scheduled tentatively for Seattle on August 8 and Kodiak on August 11.

Marine Resources Support Act. On March 21, 1989 Congressman Don Young introduced H.R. 1554 which will provide an alternative source of funds for implementation of the MCFMA and the Marine Mammal Protection Act by authorizing the regional fishery management councils to require resource users to pay fees as part of a fishery management plan. Those fees along with the civil penalties collected for enforcement of the MCFMA, will be put into a separate fund in the Treasury for fisheries research, management, and enforcement. The bill also makes explicit the Council's authority to require onboard observers if necessary for proper fisheries management.

Fishermen's Protective Act. Congressman Young also introduced H.R. 132 which would expand the President's authority under the "Pelly Amendment" to embargo any products of a nation found to be subverting international fishery conservation agreements. Current law limits any embargo to fishery products only.

Biodegradable Plastic. On March 15, 1989 H.R. 1939 was introduced that would require that certain plastic articles be made of naturally biodegradable material. The articles would include containers for food, drugs, packing material, "six pack" rings, and disposable diapers. The article must begin to degrade within 180 days of discard and be reduced to an environmentally benign substance within two-years of discard.

Meetings

Fisheries Planning Committee Technical Workgroup Meeting	April 24-25 1:00 p.m.	NWAFC, Seattle Bldg. 4, Rm 2079
Groundfish Plan Team Meeting	April 26-28	NWAFC, Seattle Bldg. 4, Rm 2079
Fisheries Planning Committee	May 18-19	Juneau
Habitat Committee	May 18	Juneau
Groundfish Plan Team	June 6-7	Seattle (tentative)
Groundfish Data Committee	June 19	Sheraton Anchorage
Council/AP/SSC Meetings	Week of June 19	Sheraton Hotel Anchorage

For further information on exact times and locations, please contact the Council office at (907) 271-2809.

NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR GROUND FISH OF THE
GULF OF ALASKA

AMENDMENT 18

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR GROUND FISH OF THE
BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

AMENDMENT 13

NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has directed the Groundfish Plan Teams for the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands to prepare Amendments 18 and 13, respectively, and supporting documentation for management of the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish fisheries. The Council has identified the issues and problems to be addressed by Amendments 18 and 13 but has not yet chosen preferred solutions. The Plan Teams have reviewed the issues and identified and analyzed the biological, socioeconomic, and management impacts of various alternative solutions for public and Council consideration based on all information available to it at this time. These issues and alternative solutions are listed and briefly described in the attached summary.

A draft Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (EA/RIR/IRFA) was reviewed by the Council at their April 11-14 meeting and approved for public distribution. This document, which includes both Amendment 18 and 13, is available upon request by calling the Council staff at (907) 271-2809.

The Council requests that anyone having additional information pertaining to the amendment, its alternatives, or the EA/RIR/IRFA, submit it to the Council during the 30-day public comment period which commences May 3. All new information will be summarized and included when possible in the final documents. Due to the time constraints imposed by the annual management cycle and Council meeting schedule, it will not be possible to include information received after the close of the comment period at 5:00 p.m. on June 2.

The Council is also asking for the opinions of the fishing community and other affected individuals regarding which alternatives the Council should approve. It is hoped that the draft EA/RIR/IRFA will help the public provide meaningful and constructive feedback to aid the Council in their deliberations.

At their June 19-23 meeting in Anchorage, the Council will make their final decision and submit the amendment and supporting documentation to the Secretary of Commerce for implementation. The Council will accept oral testimony at the June meeting; however, such testimony should be limited to clarification of earlier written comments and recommendations about the Council's choices rather than submission of new information.

SUMMARY
GULF OF ALASKA AMENDMENT 18
AND
BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS AMENDMENT 13
ISSUES AND ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

1. Allocate Sablefish Total Allowable Catch in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

Alternative 1: Maintain the status quo (i.e. do nothing).

Alternative 2: Determine expected bycatch, and allocate the remaining sablefish TAC to the directed fishery.

Alternative 3: Allocate the sablefish TAC between the fixed and trawl gear groups.

2. Establish a Fishing Season Framework for all Groundfish Fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

Alternative 1: Maintain the status quo (i.e. do nothing).

Alternative 2: Establish a framework procedure for the annual setting of fishing seasons (date specific) for any of the managed groundfish species using a rule related notice procedure for implementation.

Alternative 3: Establish a procedure for the annual setting of fishing seasons (date specific) for any of the managed groundfish species using a regulatory amendment procedure for implementation.

3. Establish a Shelikof District in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska.

Alternative 1: Maintain the status quo (i.e. do nothing).

Alternative 2: Establish a Shelikof Strait management area.

4. Establish a Groundfish Fishing Closed Zone near the Walrus Islands and Cape Peirce in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

Alternative 1a: Maintain the status quo (i.e. do nothing).

Alternative 1b: Maintain the status quo, but develop a cooperative program, involving all concerned parties, with voluntary guidelines to minimize disturbance to walrus.

Alternative 2: Establish 12-mile radius trawl closure zones around walrus haulout sites with seasonal closures.

Alternative 3: Seasonal trawl closure north of a line from Cape Constantine to the southernmost tangent of a 12-mile radius around Cape Peirce.

5. Replace the King Crab Protection Time/Area Closures Around Kodiak Island and Modify the Halibut Bycatch Management Regime for the Gulf of Alaska.

a. Implement a Revised Time/Area Trawl Closure Plan to Protect King Crab Around Kodiak Island.

Alternative 1: Status quo (i.e. do nothing).

Alternative 2: Extend existing time/area closure measures for another three years.

Alternative 3: Implement a modified time/area closure scheme for bottom trawling for three years.

b. Amend the Halibut PSC Framework for the Gulf of Alaska.

Alternative 1: Status quo (i.e. do nothing).

Alternative 2: More fully implement the existing halibut PSC framework and/or permit limited retention of halibut bycatch. This alternative is an unspecified combination of measures including permitting use of pot gear that minimizes halibut bycatch, setting halibut PSC limits for each major gear group, apportioning PSC limits of each gear group by target fishery, setting a PSC reserve for vessels whose bycatch rates are low, and permitting limited halibut bycatch retention.

6. Expand the Pacific Cod Trawl Exemption Zone in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

Alternative 1: Status quo (i.e. do nothing).

Alternative 2: Extend the northern boundary of the exemption zone as defined under Amendment 10 to a line approximating the 30 fathom isobath.

Alternative 3: Extend the northern boundary of the exemption zone as defined under Amendment 12a to a line approximating the 30 fathom isobath.

7. Implement a System of Observer Coverage and Other Data Gathering and Reporting Requirements for the Groundfish Fisheries of the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

a. Recordkeeping and Data Reporting Requirements.

Alternative 1: Status quo (i.e. do nothing).

Alternative 2: Change recordkeeping requirements to provide better fishery management information.

b. Observer Program.

Alternative 1: Status quo (i.e. do nothing).

Alternative 2: Implement mandatory fixed percentage observer coverage (0%-100%).

Alternative 3: Implement mandatory observer coverage that is frameworked to allow less than 100% coverage.

8. Clarify Secretary's Authority to Split or Combine Species Groups Within the Target Species Management Category by a Framework Procedure for the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

Alternative 1: Take no action to clarify the status quo, which might cause future confusion as to the appropriate procedure for splitting additional species within the target species category.

Alternative 2: Clarify the Secretary's authority to split or combine species groups within the target species category by a more timely framework procedure.

NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

**FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN
FOR THE SALMON FISHERIES IN THE EEZ OFF THE COAST OF ALASKA**

NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council announces the availability of a revised fishery management plan (FMP) for salmon fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off the coast of Alaska. This revised plan provides for setting annual catch levels based on Pacific Salmon Commission recommendations, and season and inseason management measures compatible with the State of Alaska. The plan also updates various biological sections and catch statistics.

The Council's Plan Team has identified the issues and analyzed the biological, socioeconomic, and management impacts of various alternative solutions for public and Council consideration based on all available information. These issues and alternative solutions focus specifically on: (1) deferring regulations to the State of Alaska, or (2) retaining status quo with Council and NOAA Fisheries management in the EEZ under Federal regulations. The plan also requires the Council to decide whether to extend jurisdiction of the plan west of 175° East longitude. The Council requests the public be aware of and comment on the unresolved issue in this plan of how extending Council jurisdiction west of 175° East longitude would impact future management of high seas salmon by the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission.

A draft Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (EA/RIR/IRFA) was reviewed by the Council at their April 11-14 meeting and approved for public distribution. This document and the new plan are available upon request by calling the Council offices at (907) 271-2809 or by contacting the Fishery Management Division, Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service, P.O. Box 021668, Juneau, Alaska 99802, (907) 586-7228.

The Council requests that anyone having additional information pertaining to the proposed FMP, its alternatives, or the EA/RIR/IRFA, submit it to the Council during the public comment period which commences April 24. All new information will be summarized and included as appropriate in the final documents. The comment period closes at 5:00 p.m. on September 1.

The Council is also asking for the opinions of the fishing community and other affected individuals regarding which alternatives the Council should approve. It is hoped that the draft EA/RIR/IRFA will help the public provide meaningful and constructive feedback to aid the Council in their deliberations.

At their September 25-29 meeting in Anchorage, the Council will make their final decision and submit the FMP and supporting documentation to the Secretary of Commerce for implementation. The Council will accept oral testimony at the September meeting; however, such testimony should be limited to clarification of earlier written comments and recommendations about the Council's choices rather than submission of new information.