



B3 Cook Inlet Itr to NPFMC
April 2021

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

March 25, 2021

Simon Kinneen, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
1007 West Third, Suite 400
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Chairman Kinneen,

The purpose of this letter is to obtain Council clarification and concurrence with NMFS's understanding of the action the Council took in December 2020 concerning Amendment 14 to the Salmon FMP. When the Council recommended Amendment 14 for Federal management of the Cook Inlet EEZ, it did not specify a distinct annual catch limit (ACL), maximum sustainable yield (MSY), or Optimum Yield (OY). Under Section 303(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, these are required reference points necessary to implement the Council's recommended action.

Given the Council's management policy, NMFS understands the Council intent is for Amendment 14 to establish MSY and OY for Cook Inlet following the concepts developed under Alternative 2, with slight modifications to reflect the Council's management action to close the EEZ, consistent with Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements. Further, NMFS understands the Council intent is that under this approach, areas closed would not be subject to an annual harvest specifications process.

If the Council agrees that the agency's understanding of Council intent on these aspects of its December 2020 decision is accurate, NMFS would incorporate these clarifications into the draft FMP amendment text and the proposed rule. One result of this clarification is that MSY and OY would be separately specified for the Cook Inlet EEZ, reflecting the fact that Cook Inlet salmon stocks have historically been harvested in both state and federal waters.

The following is draft FMP amendment language that would be included to implement these clarifications.

Sincerely,

James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska
Region

Attachment

cc: David Witherell, Executive Director



Attachment

Draft FMP Language in Concept - ACL & MSY & OY for Cook Inlet:

MSY is established for the upper Cook Inlet salmon fishery based on State of Alaska escapement goals in Cook Inlet. This includes the use of indicator stocks to manage where escapement is not directly known. Escapement goals account for biological productivity and ecological factors.

For the Cook Inlet salmon fishery, several economic, social, and ecological factors are involved in the definition of OY. Of particular importance are the annual variations in the abundance, distribution, migration patterns, and timing of the salmon stocks; allocations by the Alaska Board of Fisheries; traditional times, methods, and areas of salmon fishing; and inseason indices of stock strength.

The OY range for the Cook Inlet salmon fishery is the combined catch from all salmon fisheries within Cook Inlet, which results in a post-harvest abundance within the escapement goal range for stocks with escapement goals, and below the historically sustainable average catch for stocks without escapement goals, except when management measures required to conserve weak stocks necessarily limit catch of healthy stocks. This OY is derived from MSY, as reduced by the relevant economic, social, and ecological factors. This OY ensures the Cook Inlet salmon fishery produces the greatest net benefit to the nation by maintaining an economically viable fishery while still providing recreational and subsistence opportunities, accounting for consumption of salmon by a variety of marine predators, and protecting weaker stocks.

The ACL for the Cook Inlet EEZ commercial salmon fishery is zero. This ACL reflects that OY is fully achieved in State waters of Cook Inlet by State salmon fisheries. In order to implement this ACL, NMFS prohibits commercial fishing for salmon in the Cook Inlet EEZ Area.