North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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#1-98 **NEWSLETTER** 2/13/98

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February Council Meeting - 131th Plenary Session

The February Council meeting saw mild weather in Anchorage and a relaxed atmosphere. The week began with a joint meeting between the Council and the Board of Fisheries. The Council took final action on a new Observer Program structure, reviewed preliminary analyses of the BSAI pollock inshore/offshore allocations, and initiated potential amendments to the license limitation program. Details inside!

The Council's next meeting will be at the Anchorage Hilton Hotel, beginning on Wednesday, April 22. Items tentatively on the agenda are shown in the three-meeting outlook towards the end of this newsletter. The meeting will be a long one, running at least through Sunday, April 26, or even into Monday. The Scientific and Statistical Committee and Advisory Panel will begin meeting on Monday, April 20.

SSC Holds Election of Officers

The SSC elected Dr. Richard Marasco as Chair. He is the Director of Resource Ecology Fisheries Management at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center in Seattle and has been on the SSC since September 1979. Dr. Jack Tagart, a member of the SSC since December 1988, was reelected to his third term as Vice-Chair. Dr. Tagart is a Research Scientist for the Marine Resources Division in the Fish Management Program of the Department of Fish and Wildlife in Olympia, Washington.

BSAI Shortraker/Rougheye Allocations

The Council approved BSAI Plan Amendment 53 which would allocate shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Aleutian Islands subarea between fixed gear and trawl fisheries. The TAC would be allocated 30% to non-trawl gear and 70% to trawl gear If approved, this action would be effective by July 1, 1998. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

IN THIS NEWSLETTER

Scallop Management

Amendment 3 to the scallop fishery management plan was adopted by the Council back in December 1997. Amendment 3 will delegate to the State authority to manage all aspects of the scallop fishery in Federal waters off Alaska except limited access (moratorium, licenses, etc.). At the February meeting, the Alaska Board of Fisheries and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game indicated that they would formally accept management of the scallop fishery.

Amendment 4 has been proposed to establish a license limitation system for the scallop fishery to replace the Federal vessel moratorium, which is scheduled to expire in the year 2000. At its February meeting, the Council reviewed participation and other data from the scallop fishery and developed a problem statement and alternatives for analysis. These alternatives are as follows:

Alternative 1: Status quo. The scallop vessel moratorium would expire in 2000 [open access].

Alternative 2: Vessel owners who qualify for Federal moratorium permits would receive a license [18 licenses total].

Alternative 3: Vessel owners who qualify for State moratorium permits would receive a license [10 licenses total].

Alternative 4: Holders of either Federal or State moratorium permits that used their moratorium permits to make legal landings of scallops in 1996 or 1997 would receive a license. The federal or state moratorium qualification period would serve as the historic qualifying period and the years 1996 and 1997 would serve as the recent qualifying period.

Option 1 Area Endorsements (applicable to Alternatives 2-4):

- **A**: Separate endorsements for Cook Inlet and statewide areas. Must have a legal landing of scallops in each area during the qualifying period to receive an endorsement in that area.
- **B**: No area endorsement. All licenses are statewide.
- **C**: No area endorsements. All licenses are statewide. However, license holders who never made a legal landing of scallops from outside Cook Inlet during the qualifying periods would be restricted to a single 6 ft dredge in all areas (e.g., restricted and unrestricted licenses).

Option 2 Vessel Reconstruction and Replacement (applicable to alternatives 2-4):

- **A**. No restrictions on reconstruction or replacement.
- **B**: Maximum length overall (LOA) would be equal to 120% of the length of the vessel on January 23, 1993 (maximum LOA under Federal moratorium).
- **C**: Maximum vessel length would be restricted to 120% of the LOA of the vessel on which the permit was used in 1996 or 1997 on or before December 31, 1997. If a permit was used on more than one vessel in 1996 or 1997, maximum LOA would be calculated using the longest vessel.

Option 3 License Recipient (applicable to alternatives 2-4):

- **A**: Licenses would be issued to current owners of vessels that fished in qualifying years 1996 or 1997.
- **B**: Licenses would be issued to current moratorium permit holders for those permits that were fished in qualifying years 1996 or 1997.

Note that participation in 1998 will not be considered for qualifying under these alternatives. Analysis of license limitation for the scallop fishery will be ready for initial review in October, with final action scheduled for February 1999. The Council will work closely with the Alaska Board of Fisheries commencing with the meeting of the joint Board/Council Committee in July, in developing a system that is acceptable to both management bodies. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Essential Fish Habitat

The Magnuson-Stevens Act amendments emphasized the importance of habitat protection to healthy fisheries and strengthening the ability of NMFS and the Councils to protect and conserve habitat of finfish, mollusks, and crustaceans. This habitat is termed essential fish habitat (EFH), and is broadly defined to include "those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity." The Councils are required to amend their fishery management plans by October 1998 to:

- identify and describe EFH for species managed under a fishery management plan;
- describe adverse impacts to that habitat from fishing activities;
- describe adverse impacts to that habitat from non-fishing activities; and
- recommend conservation and enhancement measures necessary to help minimize impacts, protect, and restore that habitat.

Once the FMPs are amended with this EFH information, NMFS and the Councils can be more proactive in protecting habitat areas by alerting other federal and state agencies about areas of concern. Federal agencies engaging in activities that may adversely affect EFH must consult with NMFS regarding those activities. NMFS and the Council may make suggestions on how to mitigate any potential habitat damage.

Over the past year, Council staff has worked closely with NMFS and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to prepare preliminary EFH reports for groundfish, crab, salmon, and scallops, which were released for public review in December. These reports will form the basis of preliminary NMFS EFH recommendations in April, when the Council is scheduled to initially review the analysis. Final approval of the EFH amendments is scheduled for June 1998.

Although EFH can only be defined for target species defined in FMPs (a NOAA GC opinion based on the Magnuson-Stevens Act and EFH guidelines), habitat information for prohibited species (such as herring, halibut, GOA crab) will be included as an appendix in the final groundfish plan amendment package. The Council recommended that NOAA GC review their opinion on EFH species designation, as there was concern about not designating EFH for prohibited species.

At this time, one management measure is proposed to address the impacts of fishing gear on habitat. A 4-mile by 4-mile pinnacle area off Sitka has been proposed as a no fishing area to protect habitat important for juvenile rockfish and lingcod. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Bycatch Amendments

In this past summer's annual call for proposals, we emphasized the need for additional bycatch management measures to comply with the provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. At the September meeting, the Council initiated development of several of the proposals received. These include:

- a plan amendment to eliminate non-pelagic trawling for pollock in the BSAI, and to explore other options for the GOA.

- a plan amendment to further control bycatch of chinook salmon taken in BSAI trawl fisheries. The PSC limit of 48,000 chinook salmon could apply to the entire year (currently just through April 1), or be reduced to 36,000 salmon.

- create an individual checklist program, similar to harvest priority, where participating vessels would have access to special harvest amounts.

- create a halibut mortality avoidance program through trawl towing protocols and regulated deck sorting, and re-evaluate methods for estimating halibut mortality including development of regulations for quick release of halibut to reduce mortality.

The Council reviewed a discussion paper prepared by staff detailing proposed alternatives to be examined, an analytical time line, and an overview of questions and issues relating to each proposal. The Council added an additional alternative for analysis of the chinook salmon bycatch proposal. This alternative would prohibit trawling on a year-round basis in an area(s) with historically high bycatch rates of chinook salmon.

The first two of the above few potential amendments will be developed for review by the Council in April 1998. The remaining proposals would be developed over a longer time period, given their complexity. The Council will establish a committee to further develop the halibut mortality avoidance program and the individual checklist program. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Western/Central Gulf Groundfish Management

The Council approved Plan Amendments 52/52 which contained two separate actions to address at-risk fisheries in the Western and Central Gulf. The Council directed NMFS to develop a **vessel registration program** for "at risk" fisheries which meet certain criteria. NMFS will report back to the Council at a later meeting. The Council also approved a **stand-down requirement**, as described below, for vessels transiting between the BSAI and GOA. If approved, implementation of the stand-down would be planned for the pollock B season in September 1998. The vessel registration would take additional time for development and would be implemented at a later date.

Stand-down requirements ** SEE CORRECTION ATTACHED

Vessel and gear: all trawl catcher vessels only, including an exemption for trawl catcher vessels delivering to at-sea processors in the GOA Pacific cod offshore fishery.

Fishery: all target fisheries when pollock and Pacific cod fisheries are open in the Western and Central GOA.

Length of stand-down period: 72 hours between BS and Area 610 and 630 in the GOA, and 48 hours between BS and Area 620 in the GOA, in each direction.

Beginning and ending of stand-down period: begins on the date of delivery and fishing may resume in the new area at 12 noon, Alaska local time, 48 or 72 hours as noted above, after the date of delivery.

The Council also expanded the charter of the previous GOA Trip Limit Committee to a ***Western/Central Gulf Committee*** to form a consensus on management of at-risk fisheries through trip limits, vessel allocations, exclusive registration, staggered openings, subarea reserves, and possibly IFQs. The committee will also address observer and enforcement issues and the efficacy of the recently approved stand-down and vessel registration programs, once implemented. A revised membership will be appointed by the Council Chairman in the near future. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Western/Central Gulf Pollock Seasonal Allocations

The Council approved a regulatory amendment to revise the Western and Central GOA pollock trimester apportionments to address the large increase in the 1998 GOA pollock ABC and TAC due to an above-average 1994 pollock year class. Concern expressed by scientists, industry, and the public over pollock

availability for endangered Steller sea lions in the GOA led to this action. The trimester apportionment revision would redistribute the pollock TACs so that increases in projected pollock removals during the second season would occur during a potentially less stressful foraging period for sea lions. The benefit to sea lions comes as both potential increase in available forage and shorter fishing duration in the third quarter. The Council reapportioned 10 percent of the pollock TAC in the W/C Regulatory Areas from the third season (September 1) to the second season (June 1) resulting in a 25/35/40 split. The Council did not approve an associated plan amendment that would framework a process whereby the percentage of pollock TAC apportioned to each season would be specified during the annual harvest specification process. Also, the Marine Mammal Lab scientists will continue to investigate the relationship between fishing effort and the Steller sea lion population decline. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

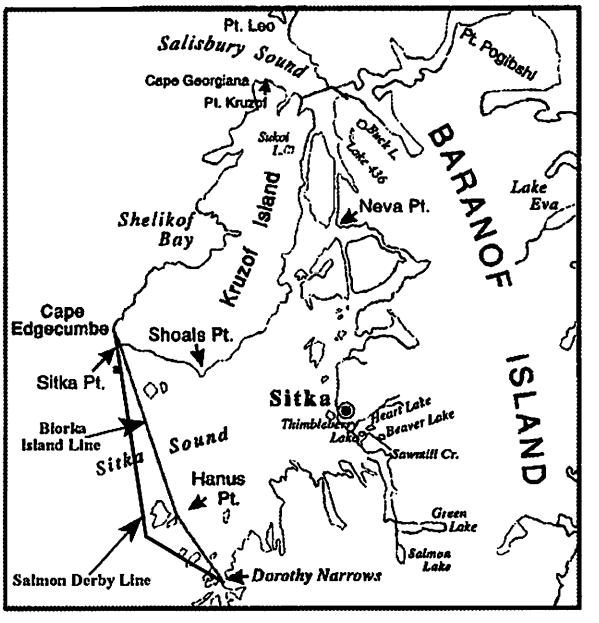
Sitka Sound Halibut Management Plan

The Council approved the Sitka Sound local area halibut management plan. The plan was a cooperative management effort between the Council and the Alaska Board of Fisheries, its local fish and game advisory committee and Halibut Task Force. This plan would create a local area management plan for Sitka Sound with the following provisions. The boundaries are depicted in the map below and will be specified by latitude and longitude in the regulations.

(1) Halibut longliners larger than category "D" (> 35 ft LOA) would be prohibited from harvesting halibut in the Sitka Sound area, defined as a line across Kakul Narrows at the Green Buoy and from a point on Chichagof Island to Kruzof Island adjacent to Sinitsin Island, on the North to the Sitka Salmon Derby Boundary on the South.

(2) Halibut longliners in category "D" would be prohibited from harvesting halibut in the Sitka Sound area, same boundaries for larger vessels in the North, and inside of a line from Sitka Pt. to Hanus Pt. (14450 Loran Line) and from Hanus Pt. to the Green Marker in Dorothy Narrows and Across to Baranof Islands in the South (Biorka Island Line) in June, July, and August. During open periods, category "D" vessels fishing in Sitka Sound may have on board no more than 2,000 lb of halibut. Halibut catch in Sitka Sound will be monitored for growth rate.

(3) Charter vessels would be prohibited from fishing in the same areas as defined for category "D" vessels during June, July, and August.



Additionally, the Council and Board adopted a *protocol* (Attachment #1) for the development of future local area management plans for groundfish and halibut. All community-based local area management plan proposals should be submitted during the Board's call for proposals. When the proposal is found to meet all the requirements stated in the call for proposals and the protocol, the halibut portion of the proposal will be forwarded to the Council for review and action. Staff contacts are Jane DiCosimo (Council) and Doug Vincent-Lang (ADF&G-Anchorage at (907) 267-2339).

Inshore/Offshore 3

The Council received a staff presentation on the status of the Inshore/Offshore 3 (I/O 3) analysis. A copy of the document that was presented may be requested from the Council office, noting that information from that document will be included in the overall analysis scheduled for initial review in April. A final decision is still on track for the June meeting in Dutch Harbor. The primary goal at this meeting was to provide an opportunity for the Council, and the fishing industry, to review the information compiled to date and provide any feedback to the analysts on the data and assumptions to be used in the analysis. Staff had hoped to present all of the baseline information that will be used in the analysis at this meeting. However, they have been unable to obtain employment and price data for the offshore fleet which would be comparable to that which exists for the onshore sector.

To address this situation, the At-sea Processors Association (APA) has volunteered to help supply price and employment data. Because the data will be obtained in a manner that is outside of normal methods, the Council has appointed a small Committee to develop Agreed-Upon-Procedures (an accounting terminology) which will then be used by an independent accounting firm (to be selected by the Council) in their review of the information submitted. The Agreed-Upon-Procedures will outline the types of data that will be collected and the verification process that will be employed by the CPA firm checking the data. The purpose of defining those procedures is to provide members of the analytical team and industry a greater comfort level with the data submitted. Data which is derived through this process will be clearly identified in the analysis.

At this time, APA has already began compiling such information. While we do not wish to exclude participation by other industry sectors, or other at-sea companies not affiliated with APA, we do wish to point out two important considerations: (1) the information being submitted is to specifically fill existing gaps in our analytical information on at-sea employment and at-sea fish prices; and, (2) the timeline for incorporating this information is very short (less than one month). If other companies wish to supply this type of information, they would be required to conform to the Agreed-Upon-Procedures, and hire an accounting firm of the Council's choosing (at their expense), all within the one month time frame.

The Council also developed a list of changes and additions to the analysis being prepared, based on recommendations from the AP and SSC. These are detailed in the AP minutes and are not listed here. To the extent possible, those changes will be incorporated in the initial review draft of the analysis.

During their upcoming meeting in April, the Council is scheduled to undertake an initial review of the entire I/O 3 package, including the Council staff analysis and related studies being conducted by the State of Alaska (relative to the CDQ program impacts) and Impact Assessment, Inc. (contracted by the Council for social/community impact analysis). If the Council determines that the document is adequate, it will be released to the public for comment so a final decision can be made at the June meeting in Dutch Harbor. This tight time line is necessary so that the Council's I/O 3 program can be in place when the current allocation expires on December 31, 1998.

The Council also passed a motion to begin a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) amendment that would require industry to report price and cost data. This effort will be coordinated with other related data collection efforts of the Alaska Fisheries Science Center and Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. Council staff contacts for this issue are Chris Oliver and Darrell Brannan.

License Limitation Program

The Council received a staff report on proposed amendments to the license limitation program (LLP) which were raised by the Council or its Advisory Panel (AP) at the December 1997 meeting. While the Council did not proceed with consideration of recent participation requirements for the groundfish fisheries, they did proceed with development of an amendment package which includes recent participation requirements for the BSAI crab fisheries. Gear crossover restrictions are also being considered. While the LLP program has been approved by the Secretary of Commerce, it is not expected to be implemented until January 2000; therefore, the Council also initiated an extension of the vessel moratorium currently in place. These and other proposed amendments are summarized below:

1. Prevent transfer of permits from vessels that never held a federal fishery permit during the LLP qualifying period and prohibit transfers of fishing histories and subsequent licenses as of February 7, 1998, (applies to all vessels).

2. Prohibit licenses and fishing histories earned by vessels employing non-trawl gear to be used on vessels employing trawl gear and licenses and fishing histories earned by vessels employing trawl gear to be used on non-trawl gear vessels (i.e., if a vessel never used trawl gear during the original qualification periods, that license could not be converted for using trawl gear, and vice-versa).

    a. Grandfather rights only to persons who can demonstrate <u>significant</u> financial commitment to apply a non-trawl license or fishing history to a trawl operation (and the reverse) as of February 7, 1998, with the following suboptions:

        (i) has made a landing with trawl gear (or the reverse, non-trawl) by February 7, 1998;
        (ii) has made a significant investment in conversion of a vessel to deploy trawl (or the reverse, non-trawl) gear by February 7, 1998.

3. Rescind the CDQ vessel exemption portion of the LLP, with grandfather rights to any vessels currently built or operating in an existing CDP under this provision.

4. Clarify that catch history transfers would be recognized, except those occurring after June 17, 1995, <u>and</u> where the <u>owner</u> of the vessel at that time was unable to document a vessel under Chapter 121, Title 46, U.S. Code.

Initiate an amendment (possibly a trailing amendment) to the Crab LLP to include a recent participation clause, with the following options:

a. Crab landings in:
    i. 1995
    ii. 1996
    iii. 1997
    iv. through February 7, 1998
    v. any combination of the above (any combination of those single or multiple years)

b. Analysis will consider:
    i. all vessels
    ii. vessels under 60 ft.
    iii. vessels 60-125 ft.
    iv. vessels over 125 ft.

- The recent participation requirement would apply to the general umbrella license only (i.e., if a vessel satisfies the recent participation criteria chosen, it would receive its original umbrella license and species/area endorsements under that umbrella — new species/area endorsements could not be 'earned' during the new qualification period).

- This amendment is not to impede or delay implementation of the LLP program.

- The amendment/regulations should be structured such that interim permits could be issued for the Crab LLP if these changes cannot be fully implemented when the LLP program takes effect, and structured such that permanent permits could then be issued without additional amendments to the plan.

- Council serves notice that the above dates for meeting performance standards are very firm. The Council may examine more recent participation than February 7, 1998, in making its final decision (such as date of final Council action), but cannot now foresee any extraordinary circumstances that would allow the cut-off dates to be advanced past those shown above.

The Council's intent is that these proposed amendments be analyzed and brought back to the Council for initial review at the June meeting (Dutch Harbor) if possible. It is likely that some of these, if approved, can be in place in time for the year 2000 target implementation date. Others may be developed as 'trailing' amendments and would come in place as soon as possible, if approved. Again, the current schedule is for initial review in June with a final decision scheduled for the October meeting in Seattle.

It is still anticipated that the new BSAI crab CDQ program would be implemented by mid-year, and the multi-species groundfish CDQ program in late 1998. Staff contact for these issues is Chris Oliver.

Streamlining of Groundfish TAC Specifications

The Council approved sending Amendments 48/48 out for public review. Their objective is to streamline the current groundfish quota specification process. First, publication of proposed and interim specifications in the *Federal Register* would be eliminated. Final specifications are effective unless modified, superseded, or rescinded. Allowable Biological Catches (ABCs) and Total Allowable Catches (TACs) would remain unchanged from year to year until revised in a subsequent final rule. Second, obsolete references to foreign and joint venture fishery management measures would be omitted from the FMPs. Third, NMFS in-season management authority would be revised to allow for continued flexibility in adjusting TACs. As a result, the annual specifications would become more succinct and easier to understand. The public review draft will be available in early March.

The Council also approved a list of research priorities to forward to NMFS for use in preparing its annual budget. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Observer Program

The Council approved the third-party, joint partnership agreement (JPA) observer program structure, whereby the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) would become the source for procuring all observers, beginning in 1999. The existing program, with industry obtaining observers directly from the contracting companies, will continue through 1998. Remaining details of the JPA program will be worked out by NMFS and PSMFC with input from the Council's Observer Advisory Committee (OAC), which will likely meet sometime in March and provide a progress report at the April Council meeting in Anchorage. Staff is also tasked with re-developing a fee system to fund the observer program. This will occur over the next two years, also with the assistance of the Council's OAC. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

Catch Estimation and Weight Measurement

New requirements in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act require the North Pacific Council to ensure total catch measurement of target species, economic discards, and regulatory discards, and to submit requirements for weighing of fish, if deemed necessary. To that end, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee held a day-long workshop on February 2 to review catch estimation procedures. They remarked that, in many respects, the system in place is better than any found around the world, but nevertheless, improvements in all aspects of data collection are crucial to successful fisheries management in the future. The SSC offered several suggestions on improving catch estimation and noted that they plan to review catch estimation each February.

The Council heard several reports on catch estimation experiments and called for a review of NMFS' ability to accurately measure catch of each species. These will be available by the October 1998 Council meeting and the Council then will determine where to place its efforts in improving catch measurement. The Council did pass a motion to initiate analysis of a plan amendment to require certified bins or scales for catch estimation in the Bering Sea and Aleutian pollock and yellowfin sole fisheries. NMFS will report back in April on the scope of the proposed analysis, and on what steps it will be taking over this next year to improve its catch estimation procedures. NMFS will also be reviewing assumptions that underlay catch estimation, such as the density coefficients for pollock. This information will help the Council to determine what types of new measures to submit in order to comply with the new requirements in the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

The Council also decided to keep the regulations on the books that now require a groundfish fisherman to retain salmon bycatch until counted by an observer. The Council had been requested by NMFS to rescind that regulation because NMFS uses "blend" data to estimate salmon bycatch rather than the counts of retained salmon. At the request of the Board of Fisheries, and because the Council, its SSC, and NMFS, will be reviewing catch estimation procedures over the coming year, the Council decided to leave the regulation on the books for the time being. Staff contact is David Witherell.

VBA Committee

In February 1997, the Council appointed an industry committee to further develop a 'strawman' vessel bycatch accountability (VBA) program for consideration. A VBA program is essentially an individual bycatch program. Such a program would address the prohibited species (PSC) bycatch problem by decreasing the bycatch of PSC, increasing the ability of the fleet to harvest groundfish without exceeding PSC limits, and producing more equitable distribution of bycatch costs.

The committee has met several times to flesh out details and options for a VBA program. At the February 1998 meeting, committee chairman Steve Hughes reported back to the Council with a preliminary list of alternatives, elements, and options, as well as a discussion of the monitoring, enforcement, and legal considerations. The Council recommended that the committee continue its efforts, and report back with a final list of alternatives and options, along with a discussion of monitoring issues. Summaries of the proceedings from recent VBA Committee meetings are available from the Council office. A VBA committee meeting has tentatively been scheduled for late May. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Improved Retention and Utilization Program (IR/IU)

With the IR/IU program on-line this year, several implementation issues have been raised and the Council will be reactivating the IR/IU Implementation Committee chaired by Council member, Joe Kyle. This committee will likely be meeting in March with a slightly revised membership to be announced soon. One specific issue that the Council took action on at this meeting was the sand flea problem in the longline cod

fisheries. The Council heard from industry regarding the requirement to retain all fish, even those infested with sand fleas or other parasites, and risking contamination of the remaining fish on board. The Council passed a motion to initiate, if necessary, a regulatory amendment to the program to allow the discard of these fish. NMFS will first explore other, non-regulatory solutions to this problem prior to developing a formal amendment. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Workshop on Localized Depletion

NMFS has announced a public workshop to examine the question of whether or not the Atka mackerel fishery results in significant localized depletion of the stock, whether such depletions might have an effect on the foraging success of Steller sea lions, and what management options we should consider to mitigate those potential effects.

Date/Time: Tuesday, March 10, 1998, beginning at 9:00 a.m.

Location: Alaska Fisheries Science Center
7600 Sand Point Way NE, Building 4
Room 2143
Seattle, Washington

Background: Fishing for Atka mackerel in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Island region may result in localized depletions of mackerel stocks. Atka mackerel is a prey species of the endangered western population of Steller sea lions, and such depletions may impede sea lion recovery if they affect the foraging success of young sea lions, in particular.

Purpose: The National Marine Fisheries Service will conduct a public workshop to (1) consider the nature and extent of such potential localized depletions, and (2) identify and consider management options for their prevention.

Participants: The meeting will be open to the public, and all interested persons are encouraged to attend.

Contact: For further information, contact Tim Ragen (907) 586-7248 or 7235, E-mail: Tim.Ragen @noaa.gov.

Upcoming Meetings

(As other committee meetings are scheduled, they will be posted on the NPFMC web site.)

Halibut GHL Committee is scheduled to meet February 25-26, 1998, in Anchorage at the Old Federal Building located at 605 West 4th Avenue, Room 229 (use the G Street entrance). The meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m. on February 25th. The committee plans to discuss management measures to keep the charter fleet under the GHL cap. While the meeting is open to the public, oral testimony will not be accepted. Only written comments should be submitted. The meeting agenda is currently available on the Council's web site and from the Council office.

Essential Fish Habitat Core Team will be meeting March 2-4, 1998, at the NMFS Regional office in Juneau. The meeting will begin at 1:00 p.m. on March 2. The team plans to review habitat information for EFH determination.

An **EFH Public Meeting/Workshop** will be held Tuesday evening , March 3, 1998, at the Centennial Hall Convention Center located at 101 Egan Drive, Juneau, in the Egan Room beginning at 7:00 p.m.

Crab Plan Team is scheduled to meet March 5-6, 1998, in Anchorage at the Old Federal Building located at 605 West 4th Avenue, Room 229 (use the G Street entrance). The meeting will begin at 8:00 a.m. on March 5.

Groundfish Plan Teams have scheduled tentative meeting dates for the weeks of September 14 and November 16, 1998.

Observer Advisory Committee is not yet scheduled, but likely will meet mid to late March.

IR/IU Implementation Committee is not yet scheduled, but likely will meet mid to late March.

W/C Gulf Committee is not yet scheduled, but likely will meet mid to late March

VBA Committee meeting tentatively has been scheduled for late May.

Halibut Mortality Avoidance Program(HMAP)/Individual Vessel Checklist Program (IVCP)Committee is not yet scheduled, but likely will meet in May.

Documents Available to the Public

1. A draft of the analysis for Amendments 48/48 to the BSAI and GOA FMPs to revise the annual quota specification process will be available from the Council office in early March.

2. The Vessel Bycatch Accountability (VBA) meeting minutes are currently available from the Council office.

3. The Ecosystem Committee meeting minutes are currently available from the Council office.

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Tentative Meeting Schedules - 1997-99*

	February Week of/ Location	**April** Week of/ Location	**June** Week of/ Location	**October** Week of/ Location	**December** Week of/ Location
1998		20/Anchorage	8/Dutch Harbor	5/Seattle	7/Anchorage
1999	1/Anchorage	19/Anchorage	7/Kodiak	4/Seattle	6/Anchorage

*Meeting dates are subject to change depending on availability of meeting space. Any changes will be published in the Council's newsletter.

Tentative Meeting Dates for 2000-2002*

	February Week of/ Location	**April** Week of/ Location	**June** Week of/ Location	**October** Week of/ Location	**December** Week of/ Location
2000	7/Anchorage	10/Anchorage	5/Portland	2/Sitka	4/Anchorage
2001	6/Anchorage+	10/Anchorage	5/Kodiak	2/Seattle+	4/Anchorage
2002	5/Anchorage+	9/Anchorage	4/Dutch Harbor	1/Seattle+	3/Anchorage

+These two locations may be reversed (February in Seattle and October in Anchorage).

NPFMC: Three-[illegible]ng Outlook*

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April '98 20/Anchorage	June '98 8/Dutch Harbor	October '98 5/Seattle
• IFQ Amendments: *Initial Review*	• IFQ Amendments: *Final Action*	
• IFQ Fee/Loan Program: Status Report	• IFQ/CDQ Fee Program: Status Report	• IFQ/CDQ Fee Program: Status Report
• Transfer to Heirs: Discussion		
• NMFS Strawman Enforcement Proposal: Report		
• Halibut Charter GHL: Committee Report		• Local area management plan proposals: Review
• Local GOA Community Request for Halibut: Council Direction		
	• Sablefish Rolling Closures: Status report	• Sablefish Rolling Closures: *Final Action*
	• VBAs: Committee report and tasking	
	• HMAP & IVCP Committee: Report	
• Observer Fee Program: Initial development		
• Essential Fish Habitat: *Initial Review*	• Essential Fish Habitat: *Final Action*	
• Cape Edgecombe Pinnacles Closure: *Initial Review*	• Cape Edgecombe Pinnacles Closure: *Final Action*	
• BSAI Pollock CDQ: *Initial Review*	• BSAI Pollock CDQ: *Final Action*	
• Multispecies CDQ: Committee and Status Report		
• Inshore/Offshore 3: *Initial Review*	• Inshore/Offshore 3: *Final Action*	
• Atka Mackerel/Marine Mammal: Discussion		
• GOA MRB Pacific cod/ATF: *Initial Review*	• GOA MRB Pacific cod/ATF: *Final Action*	
• GOA DSR Rockfish Retention: *Initial Review*	• GOA DSR Rockfish Retention: *Final Action*	
• Streamline Groundfish TAC Specification: *Final Action*		
• Chinook Bycatch Control: *Initial Review*	• Chinook Bycatch Control: *Final Action*	
• Prohibit BSAI pollock bottom trawls: *Initial Review*	• Prohibit BSAI pollock bottom trawls: *Final Action*	
• Groundfish, scallop & crab Overfishing Definitions: *Initial Review*	• Groundfish, scallop & crab Overfishing Definitions: *Final Action*	
	• WGOA Management Committee: Report	• Scallop Limited Entry: *Initial Review*
	• LLP Amendments: *Initial Review*	• LLP Amendments: *Final Action*
• Moratorium rollover: *Initial Review*	• Moratorium rollover: *Final Action*	
	• CDQ vessel exemption: *Initial Review*	• CDQ vessel exemption: *Final Action*
• Socioeconomic data: Discussion		• Limited Processing on CV: Discussion
• Vessel registration/information system: Discussion		
• Pollock/Yellowfin Sole Scales/Bins: Report		
		IPHC/Council Joint Meeting

* Note: This tentative timeline will be updated periodically, particularly after each Council meeting, as the Council works through its decision process.

MRB = maximum retainable bycatch; ATF = arrowtooth flounder; SRRE = shortraker/rougheye rockfish; GHL = guideline harvest level
DSR = demersal shelf rockfish; HMAP = Halibut Mortality Avoidance Program; IVCP = Individual Vessel Checklist Program

Board/Council Protocol on Local Area Management Plans

In February 1998 the Alaska Board of Fisheries and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council adopted the following protocol to guide the successful development, processing, and implementation of local area fisheries management plans. Though the protocol covers development of local area management plans for all species of interest in a local area, the Council's main purview will be over halibut and those species covered by one of the Council's fishery management plans.

Scope and Content of Proposals

It is the expectation of the Board and Council that any proposals submitted for review will be well thought out and reflect the efforts and a high degree of consensus of representatives of all users of the fish species in the local area covered by the proposed plan. Local commercial, sport, charter and subsistence representatives, and others as appropriate should be involved in the development of proposals, preferably using a local advisory committee or task force approach. When submitting a proposal, users should be identified and their involvement in the process documented. During development, appropriate agency staff (NMFS, ADF&G, Council, Board, IPHC. etc.) should be contacted to provide guidance and legal limitations so that the proposal has a much higher likelihood of not facing difficulties in the review process. Proposals should encompass all shared fish stocks in the local area and should address as appropriate, catch and possession limits, gear types, effort limitation, closed areas, seasons and overall boundaries of the local area plan. Proposers should anticipate that the local plan, if approved, likely will be implemented for no less than three years before there will be another opportunity to revise it. They should also be aware that the schedule below spans over a year from the April deadline for proposals to implementation sometime in the spring or summer of the following year or longer.

Schedule for Proposal Review and Implementation

The following schedule is an example of the procedural steps through which a proposal will go. The schedule of activities after the July mailing of proposals to the ADF&G advisory committees and public will depend on the complexity of the proposal, the scope of the required analysis, availability of data and staff to complete an adequate analysis, and other issues before the Board or Council.

November	Board of Fisheries calls for proposals (each area is on a specific three-year cycle). The Board will identify its interests in the call for proposals, including a paragraph on how halibut fisheries are handled, and other legal requirements. (Alternatively, the call for proposals could be statewide, but still on a three-year cycle.)
April	Deadline for proposals (*e.g.* April 10, 1998). Staff would screen proposals to evaluate if they meet the Board's call for proposals.
July	In early July, all proposals for a specific area would be grouped together, and along with all other proposals, sent out to the Board's mailing list for comment. ADF&G advisory committees and public would have the opportunity to comment by the prescribed deadline. Their comments would be numbered and made available to the Board for their deliberation. Agency staffs would meet and develop concerns for consideration by the joint Board/Council committee at its July meeting. They would weigh management, enforcement and legal issues and whether the proposal violates any of the provisions of the North Pacific Halibut Act of 1982, the Magnuson-Stevens Act national standards, or other applicable law.

After July, any local area management plan proposal would go through the following sequence:

1. Agency staffs would work together to develop information needed for the Board to make its decision. This would include economic, biological impact information, as well as legal guidance on the ultimate viability of the proposed course of action. The goal is to have sufficient information available to meet the Board's needs and to allow for timely development of an environmental and regulatory assessment that would meet federal requirements once the halibut portion of the plan is forwarded to Council and NMFS review.

2. Joint Board/Council committee meets to review proposal and supporting information. (Most likely in September)

3. Joint Board/Council committee reports to the Council and the Council develops preliminary comments for November Board meeting. (Most likely at Council's October meeting)

4. At its fall or winter meeting, Board considers proposals, public, agency, and Council comments, and deliberates proposal, possibly using a Board committee to work with interested parties during the meeting to develop a unified plan. If the committee successfully resolves outstanding issues, the Board could take final action. If, however, major issues remain unresolved, the Board has the option of sending the proposed plan out for further public involvement and development, perhaps via a task force or other working group. Final action then would be postponed until rescheduled by the Board.

5. Council would receive the Board's proposal along with available analyses and identification of any legal issues. The Council will then send the proposal out for public review. (Timing of this step would depend on staff availability to perform analysis and other issues on Council's agenda.)

6. Council schedules final action on proposed area plan. Final plan would then be submitted to NMFS for review and approval of the halibut portion.

7. Final local area management plan approved by NMFS and implemented as soon as possible, for a minimum of three years.

(Approved by North Pacific Council on February 4, 1998, and by the Alaska Board of Fisheries on February 8, 1998.)

SPECIAL CALL FOR PROPOSALS

THE ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES
SPECIAL CALL FOR PROPOSED CHANGES
IN THE SUBSISTENCE, PERSONAL USE, SPORT, GUIDED SPORT, AND COMMERCIAL GROUNDFISH REGULATIONS, INCLUDING HALIBUT FOR THE
COOK INLET AREA, KODIAK, AND CHIGNIK MANAGEMENT AREAS.

PROPOSAL DEADLINE - APRIL 10, 1998

The Alaska Board of Fisheries issued this special 'Call For Proposals' at the January 1998 meeting. By delegation from the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC), the Board of Fisheries (board), is accepting proposed subsistence, personal use, sport, guided sport, and commercial groundfish regulations, including halibut for the Cook Inlet, Kodiak, and Chignik finfish management areas.

By agreement between the board and NPFMC, the board will consider, with NPFMC approval, local area groundfish management plans, which include halibut. Proposals for Local Area Management Plans [L.A.M.P. or Plans] should be community based. The board will require participation by a wide range of the public in the development of the Plans. Thus, subsistence, personal use, sport, guided sport, and commercial users must be substantially involved in the development of the L.A.M.P. The Plans should address catch limits, possession limits, size limits, gear, areas, boundaries, and moratoriums. The NPFMC and the board have different standards or rules to follow regarding residency requirements, therefore Plans should not use residency requirements. In addition, staff from ADF&G and NMFS are available to assist in the development of the L.A.M.P. Upon request, you can request copies of the Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review (EA/RIR) criteria, National Standards contained in the Magnuson-Stevens Act and Federal Framework documents. Also, upon request, ADF&G and/or NMFS can assist in the development of the L.A.M.P.'s. After board consideration, NPFMC will review and make final decisions on the halibut portions of the Plan.

To ensure that the proposed booklets are distributed well in advance of the board meetings and the fishing season, the board has set a Friday, April 10, 1998 proposal deadline. The board recognizes this is an early deadline, however, feels the advisory committees, fishermen organizations, public and department staff have benefited by having more time to review the proposals.

Your proposal must be received by any Board Support Section office by close of business on Friday, April 10, 1998. The following offices can officially receive proposals:

Robert Speed
Headquarters
PO Box 25526
Juneau, AK 99802-5526
Phone: (907) 465-4110

Joe Chythlook
Southwest Region
PO Box 1030
Dillingham, AK 99576-1030
Phone: (907) 842-5142

Ann Wilkinson
Southcentral Region
333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, AK 99518-1599
Phone: (907) 267-2354

Ida Alexie
Western Region
PO Box 1788
Bethel, AK 99559-1788
Phone: (907) 543-4467

Susan Bucknell
Arctic Region
PO Box 689
Kotzebue, AK 99752-0689
Phone: (907) 442-4320

Jim Marcotte
Interior Region
1300 College Road
Fairbanks, AK 99701
Phone: (907) 459-7215

All proposals must contain an original signature, contact telephone number, and address. Proposals must be received in one of the specific offices listed above by the deadline (only being postmarked by that date

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Richard B. Lauber, Chairman
Clarence G. Pautzke, Executive Director

Telephone: (907) 271-2809

605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501-2252

Fax: (907) 271-2817

REQUEST FOR REPORTS FROM FISHERMEN & COASTAL COMMUNITIES OF UNUSUAL OCCURRENCES, SIGNIFICANT CHANGES AND ANY OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST SEEN DURING THE FISHING YEAR - 1998

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council requests the help of fishing organizations and companies to encourage fishermen to describe any unusual occurrences, changes in the oceans or stocks during the fishing year.

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council produces an annual report in December on the status of Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea ecosystems. As part of this report, the Council is interested in receiving descriptions from the fishermen of changes in the oceans including changes in fish distribution, unusual occurrences and other interesting phenomenons observed by fishermen. Unusual occurrences often precede changes in stock distribution, stock abundances, and/or regime shifts. Fishermen are in the best position to see and evaluate these changes.

Each contributor will be sent a copy of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Ecosystem document in late December.

A list of the kinds of data the North Pacific Fishery Management Council thought would be of interest is included with this mailing. The list is not inclusive so feel free to contribute anything you feel may have significance.

For each item please provide the following:

1. Vessel Name
2. Date of observation
3. Area — latitude and longitude is preferred, but feel free to use the area designation you feel is most appropriate; i.e., lat/long or 2 miles west of Kilokak Rocks, etc.
4. Name of person(s) who made the observation

Observation reports should be sent to Dave Witherell, NPFMC, 605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501-2252 or faxed to the Council at (907) 271-2817.

SEE SOMETHING INTERESTING, UNUSUAL OR JUST PLAIN WEIRD WHILE OUT FISHING? LET THE SCIENTIST AT THE NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL KNOW.

Write down what you noticed, where and when you noticed it. Your observations will become a permanent record in the Council's annual December Ecosystem Report and you will receive your own copy.

OBSERVATION

VESSEL NAME:_____ **DATE:** _____

AREA: _____ **REPORTED BY:** _____

OBSERVATION

VESSEL NAME:_____ **DATE:** _____

AREA: _____ **REPORTED BY:** _____

OBSERVATION

VESSEL NAME:_____ **DATE:** _____

AREA: _____ **REPORTED BY:** _____

Mail this form to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501-2252 or fax it to 907-271-2817. Please feel free to submit photos illustrating your observations.

SEND MY COPY OF THE NPFMC'S DECEMBER ECOSYSTEM REPORT TO:

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

Types of Ecosystem Observations Requested

Gear Changes
- How and why was the gear changed?
- What effect did it have?

Groundfish Species Composition and Distribution
- Major difference in bycatch ratios.
- Unusual absence or presence of a species in an area.

Groundfish Behavior or Physical Conditions
- Location by depth.
- Migration patterns (moving more quickly, traveling deeper).
- Feeding on animals not normally considered prey or low importance prey species.
- Unusual feeding behavior.
- Unusual schooling behavior.
- Unusual physical characteristics (emaciated, 3 eyes etc.).
- Parasite changes (more, less or new).
- Unusual stomach contents

Oceanic and Atmospheric Conditions
- Major differences in seawater temperature, color or clarity.
- Current strength or direction.
- Major differences in wind patterns, air temperature, cloud cover, or storm occurrences.
- Pack ice location or thickness, or time arriving or breaking up (freeze up or break up).

Other Fisheries
- Salmon and herring changes in return size, timing or size/sex distributions.
- Shellfish changes in size/sex distributions, physical location or catches.
- Forage/bait fish changes in schooling, numbers, locations or timing.

Marine Mammals and Birds
- Unusual changes in numbers (including absence and presence) or behavior.
- Unusual concentrations or die-offs.

Terrestrial Influences
- Land-mammal or birds absence or presence
- Land-mammal or birds concentrations or die-offs.
- Unusual vegetation or amounts
- Changes in seasonal elements (e.g. pollen and run-off).

Other Unusual or Unexpected Occurrences
- Rare or exotic species
- Oil spills or ship wrecks
- Seismic activity (volcano eruption, earthquake)
- Excessive or unusual debris (hundreds of toy animals)
- Unusual vessel or aircraft traffic, timing or amount
- Any other observations or concerns about the fishery or marine environment

* CORRECTION TO ARTICLE ON PAGE 4 *

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Richard B. Lauber, Chairman
Clarence G. Pautzke, Executive Director

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605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501-2252

Fax: (907) 271-2817

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Industry Members

FROM: Jane DiCosimo JDC

DATE: February 19, 1998

SUBJECT: Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska Stand-down requirements for 1998

I need to make a correction to the article in the North Pacific Council's February Newsletter (Issue #1-98) on Western/Central GOA management issues. The Council approved the length of stand-down period as:

- 72 hours between the BS and Area 610 in the GOA, in each direction;
- 72 hours from the BS to Areas 620 and 630 in the GOA and 48 hours from Areas 620 and 630 to the BS.

All other registration and stand-down provisions are as reported in the newsletter. I apologize for any confusion on this issue. NMFS will attempt to prepare the regulations for the stand-down in time for implementation for the 1998 fishery. Area registration will likely not be in effect in 1998. NMFS and the Council will keep you updated on implementation of these measures in upcoming newsletters.

cc: Kent Lind