

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members
FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke
Executive Director
DATE: June 5, 1997
SUBJECT: Groundfish SEIS

ESTIMATED TIME
1 HOUR

ACTION REQUIRED

Receive report and comment on NOAA/NMFS proposal to draft SEIS on groundfish management in the BSAI and GOA.

BACKGROUND

In March 1997, NMFS announced its intention to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on Alaska groundfish management. Specifically, they intend to examine the Federal action by which total allowable catch (TAC) specifications and prohibited species catch limits are established and apportioned in the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries. The Federal Register Notice is attached as Item C-10(a).

Scoping meetings have been scheduled to provide for public input into the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts that the SEIS should consider. The fourth such meeting is scheduled for this week, on June 18, from 7-10 p.m. at the Kodiak Inn. The final schedule is in Item C-10(b). NMFS staff will be on hand to discuss this issue.

pending publication of the Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study full report. This ANPRM is mandated by the ICC Termination Act of 1995.

DATES: Comments to the general ANPRM should be received no later than June 30, 1997. Late comments will be considered to the extent practicable.

ADDRESSES: Signed, written comments should refer to the docket number that appears at the top of this document and must be submitted to the Docket Clerk, U.S. DOT Dockets, Room PL-401, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001. All comments received will be available for examination at the above address between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. Those desiring notification of receipt of comments must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or postcard.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For information regarding rulemaking and operational issues: Mr. David Miller, Office of Motor Carrier Research and Standards, (202) 366-1790; for information regarding human factors and fatigue research programs: Ms. Deborah Freund, Office of Motor Carrier Research and Standards, (202) 366-1790; and for information regarding legal issues: Mr. Charles Medalen, Office of the Chief Counsel, (202) 366-0834, Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On November 5, 1996 (61 FR 57251), the FHWA published an ANPRM requesting answers to numerous questions related to commercial motor vehicle driver hours-of-service regulations, including fatigue, loss of alertness, and hours off duty. The ANPRM set March 31, 1997, as the docket closing date for signed, written comments.

On March 5, 1997, the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (AHAS) delivered a petition to the FHWA. This petition requested the FHWA to extend this rulemaking's comment period closing date by 60 days. The AHAS believes it and the public should have ample opportunity to review and critique the Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study's full report. The full report has not yet been published or placed in the docket. A 59-page technical summary and a 17-page executive summary have been placed in the docket.

On March 13, 1997, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) petitioned the FHWA to extend this rulemaking's comment period closing date by 60 days. The IIHS believes it

also should have ample opportunity to review and critique the Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study's full report, including its data.

At the time of the original publication in November 1996 (61 FR 57251), the FHWA believed the full report would be published and available well in advance of the comment closing date. The FHWA, however, has experienced unforeseen editorial delays in publishing the full report. The FHWA believes publication will now be accomplished by the end of April 1997. The FHWA believes it should allow the public to review and critique the full report of the Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study.

The FHWA has also conducted listening sessions, specifically listening to drivers, about how the hours-of-service regulations affect their daily lives and their recommended changes to improve the rules. See 62 FR 6161, February 11, 1997. Many interested persons have attended these sessions and would like to review the transcripts of these listening sessions. A few of the transcripts will not be delivered to the FHWA docket prior to March 31, 1997.

For the reasons above, the FHWA finds good cause to extend this ANPRM comment period closing date for 60 days after the expected publication date of the full report of the FHWA's Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study in late April 1997.

List of Subjects in 49 CFR Part 395

Global positioning systems, Highway safety, Highways and roads, Intelligent Transportation Systems, Motor carriers, Motor vehicle safety, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

Issued on: March 26, 1997.

Authority: 23 U.S.C. 315 and 49 CFR 1.48.

Jane Garvey,

Acting Administrator, Federal Highway Administration.

[FR Doc. 97-8198 Filed 3-27-97; 1:06 pm]

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[I.D. 032097E]

Groundfish Fisheries of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Area and the Gulf of Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent; scoping meetings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces its intention to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on the Federal action by which total allowable catch (TAC) specifications and prohibited species catch limits in the groundfish fisheries that are conducted in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (BSAI) and the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) are annually established and apportioned.

NMFS will hold scoping meetings to provide for public input into the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts that the SEIS should consider. In addition to holding the scoping meetings, NMFS is accepting written comments on the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts it should be considering for this SEIS.

DATES: Written comments will be accepted through July 1, 1997. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for meeting times and special accommodations.

ADDRESSES: Written comments and requests to be included on a mailing list of persons interested in the SEIS should be sent to Lori Gravel, Fisheries Management Division, National Marine Fisheries Service, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802.

See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for meeting locations and special accommodations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tamra Faris, (907) 586-7645.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the United States has exclusive fishery management authority over all living marine resources, except for migratory species, found within the exclusive economic zone between 3 and 200 nautical miles from the baseline used to measure the territorial sea.

The management of these marine resources is vested in the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) and in eight Regional Fishery Management Councils. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) has the responsibility to prepare fishery management plans (FMPs) for the marine resources, which it finds require conservation and management, in the Alaska region of responsibility. The Council consists of Federal and State officials having authority for fishery management and of private persons nominated by the governors of the States of Alaska,

Oregon, and Washington and appointed by the Secretary.

The FMPs must specify the optimum yield from each fishery, which would provide the greatest benefit to the Nation, and must state how much of that optimum yield can be expected to be harvested by U.S. vessels. The FMPs must also specify the level of fishing that would comprise overfishing.

The Council prepared and the Secretary approved the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area in 1981. An environmental impact statement (EIS) was prepared for the action implementing the FMP and was filed in 1981. The BSAI FMP has been amended 42 times. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental documents have been prepared for each amendment as well as for subsequent regulatory actions, including the annual process of establishing TAC specifications.

The Council prepared and the Secretary approved the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska in 1978. An EIS was prepared for the action implementing the FMP and was filed in 1978. The GOA FMP has been amended 45 times. NEPA environmental documents have been prepared for each amendment as well as for subsequent regulatory actions, including the annual process of establishing TAC specifications.

The purpose of the original FMPs was to manage the groundfish fisheries for the optimum yield and to allocate harvest between domestic and foreign fishermen. The fisheries have evolved since then through the Council process including FMP amendments, regulations, and continued compliance with other Federal laws and executive orders. The frequencies of marine mammal, marine bird, and fish species in the biological assemblage present now are different from frequencies that existed and were displayed in 1978 and 1981 environmental analyses. Several marine species have been listed under the Endangered Species Act, some of which may be affected by fishery

management actions. New information about the ecosystem, impacts of the fisheries, and management tools has become available since the EISs were prepared.

For the above reasons, NMFS has determined that a SEIS shall be prepared that incorporates the following: The amendments to the groundfish FMPs; the annual process for determining the TAC specifications; and the public processes in place for implementing new regulations, revising existing ones, and incorporating new information. Because the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries utilize similar resources from adjacent locations in the large North Pacific ecosystem, use similar gear deployed by interrelated constituents, and are overseen by the same Fishery Management Council, NMFS has decided to display the impacts of both fisheries in one SEIS.

The SEIS will analyze the process by which annual TAC specifications and prohibited species catch limits are determined, together with the procedures for implementing changes to those processes. The processes encompass decisions about location and timing of each fishery, harvestable amounts, exploitation rates, exploited species, groupings of exploited species, gear types and groupings, allocations, product quality, organic waste and secondary utilization, at-sea and on-land organic discard, species at higher and lower trophic levels, habitat alterations, and relative impacts to coastal communities, society, the economy, and the domestic and foreign groundfish markets. Effects of these decisions are manifested over many years in multifaceted social and biological arenas. Inherent in implementing any groundfish fisheries management regime are commitments to provide in-season management, enforcement, monitoring, stock assessment, and summary analyses. In addition to evaluating the mandated No Action Alternative (i.e., the management process that is in place now would continue to apply), the SEIS will include a full range of alternatives and

discussions of their potential impacts on the biological and socioeconomic environments. NMFS is seeking suggested additional alternatives from the public through the scoping process and written responses to this document.

Preparation of the SEIS is expected to take 1 year and include distribution of a draft SEIS and incorporation of comments on it into the final SEIS.

The scoping meetings for Anchorage, Dutch Harbor, Juneau, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Portland, Seattle, and Sitka will be held at the following times and locations:

1. Juneau—June 11, 1997, 1–3 p.m., Juneau Federal Building, Room 445, 709 West 9th Street, Juneau, AK.
2. Anchorage—June 13, 1997, 2–5 p.m., Anchorage Federal Building; Executive Dining Room, 222 West Seventh Avenue, Anchorage, AK.
3. Dutch Harbor—June 16, 1997, 2–5 p.m., Grand Aleutian Hotel 100 Salmon Way, Dutch Harbor, AK.
4. Kodiak—June 18, 1997, 7–10 p.m., Westmark Hotel, 236 West Rezanof Drive, Kodiak, AK, in combination with meeting of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting.
5. Sitka—June 23, 1997, 1–3 p.m., University of Alaska, Sitka, Room 133, 1332 Seward Avenue (Duponski Island), Sitka, AK.
6. Seattle—June 25, 1997, 2–5 p.m., Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE., Building 4, Room 2039, Seattle, WA.
7. Portland—June 27, 1997, 7–10 p.m., Red Lion - Downtown, 310 SW. Lincoln, Portland, OR.

Special Accommodations

Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Rebecca Campbell (907) 586-7228 at least 5 days before the meeting dates.

Dated: March 25, 1997.

Bruce C. Morehead,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable
Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
(FR Doc. 97-8059 Filed 3-28-97; 8:45 am)
BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

JUN - 5

Groundfish Fisheries SEIS Scoping Meetings

The Alaska Region of the National Marine Fisheries Service is holding seven scoping meetings in June to collect information for preparation of a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on the Groundfish Fisheries of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Area and the Gulf of Alaska. The SEIS will analyze the process by which annual TAC specifications are determined.

Preparation of the SEIS is expected to take 1 year and include distribution of a draft and final SEIS.

Scoping meetings will be at the following times and locations:

1. Juneau--June 11, 1997, 1-3 p.m., Juneau Federal Building, Room 445, 709 West 9th Street.
2. Anchorage--June 13, 1997, 2-5 p.m., Anchorage Federal Building Annex G-6 inside Suite A-18, 222 West Seventh Avenue.
3. Dutch Harbor--June 16, 1997, 2-5 p.m., Grand Aleutian Hotel 100 Salmon Way.
4. Kodiak--June 18, 1997, 7-10 p.m., Kodiak Inn, 236 West Rezanof Drive, in combination with meeting of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting.
5. Sitka--June 23, 1997, 1-3 p.m., University of Alaska, Sitka, Room 133, 1332 Seward Avenue (Duponski Island).
6. Seattle--June 25, 1997, 2-5 p.m., Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Building 4, Room 2039.
- Portland--June 27, 1997, 2-5 p.m., Red Lion - Downtown, 310 S.W. Lincoln.

The general public, including fishermen, processors, fishermen's groups, regulatory agencies, and environmental groups are encouraged to attend any of these scoping meeting and provide input into the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts that the SEIS should consider.

In addition to scoping meetings, NMFS is accepting written comments on the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts it should be considering. For more information see the Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register March 31, 1997, (also accessible from this website) or contact Tamra Faris, NMFS, (907) 586-7645.