

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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NEWSLETTER

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Council Meets in Juneau

The Council met August 4-5 in Juneau, Alaska to review and consider approval of a revised Amendment 18 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish plan. The Council also reviewed the implementation of the 750 metric ton halibut prohibited species catch limit for non-trawl fisheries in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands. Details of Council action on these two items are given below. The Council will meet next the week of September 21, 1992 at the Hilton Hotel in Anchorage, Alaska. Exact times and dates have not yet been set. A draft agenda for the meeting should be available by early September.

Cooling Off Period Spells Relief for Longliners

Last December the Council placed a 750 mt cap on the halibut mortality that the fixed gear fleet could incur in harvesting groundfish in the Bering Sea and Aleutians in 1992. Pot gear is exempted, so the cap controls activities only for the hook-and-line longliners fishing mainly for Pacific cod, though other longline species would be closed as well. The cap, part of Amendment 19 to the Bering Sea groundfish plan which was approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service on July 22, will not take effect until late September unless NMFS waives the 30-day cooling off period required by the Administrative Procedures Act between final publication of a regulation and its implementation.

The longline cod fleet has been taking more halibut as bycatch than expected. Halibut bycatch reached 781 mt by July 26, surpassing the 750 mt cap prescribed last December. If the cooling-off period is waived, the cap will take effect by late August and there will be some overrun. By not waiving the cooling period, thus allowing an extra 30 days of cod longlining, the halibut cap overrun will be greater, but more cod will be taken. Industry representatives of the longline fleet argued that they should be given more time to fish before a halibut cap closes their cod fisheries, especially because it's a newer fishery and they are attempting to find ways to reduce halibut bycatch and still harvest the cod optimum yield.

The Council was sympathetic to the longline fleet's concerns and recommended that NMFS not waive the cooling period. The Council also recommended that NMFS release the remaining cod reserves of about 27,000 mt. Additionally, the Council will establish an industry committee to review the halibut caps and mortality, the validity of the data used, and the equity of the caps, with an initial report due in September.

Council Signs Off On Revised Inshore/Offshore Pollock Allocation

The Council adopted a preferred inshore-offshore alternative for Secretarial review after receiving recommendations from its Advisory Panel and Scientific and Statistical Committee, considering supplementary analysis of the proposed management alternatives, and hearing extensive public testimony, some of it very technical. The Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands pollock TAC will be allocated as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Inshore</u>	<u>Offshore</u>
1993	35.0%	65.0%
1994	37.5%	62.5%
1995	37.5%	62.5%

A Catcher Vessel Operational Area is defined for pollock harvesting and processing during the pollock "B" season (starting on June 1 unless changed), encompassing the area between 168 and 163 degrees West longitude, and 56 degrees south to the Aleutian Islands. Inshore catcher vessels delivering pollock from a directed fishery to shore plants or inshore motherships may operate in the area if an inshore allocation remains unharvested. Offshore motherships and their associated catcher vessels also may operate in the area if an offshore allocation remains unharvested. Only offshore catcher-processors cannot target on pollock in the CVOA during the "B" season. Access to the special area is unrestricted during the pollock "A" season.

If during the fishing year, it becomes apparent that a sector cannot fully harvest its allocation, the excess shall be released to the other component, without prejudice to the allocation formula. The definitions and operating rules approved in the original Amendment 18 remain applicable during 1993-1995. The Community Development program already has been approved by the Secretary of Commerce for 1993-1995.

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