

# North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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## MINUTES

### SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE

March 25-26, 1985  
Anchorage, Alaska

The Scientific and Statistical Committee of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council met in Anchorage on March 25-26, 1985. Members present were:

Don Rosenberg, Chairman  
Richard Marasco, Vice Chairman  
William Aron  
Larry Hreha  
Donald Bevan

Tom Northup  
Scott Marshall  
Doug Eggers  
Bud Burgner

#### C-4 Other Business

The SSC discussed the use of the term Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC). The SSC had discussion regarding the development of an initial starting point when establishing a value for ABC. Dr. Bevan will draft a discussion document on this matter for consideration by the SSC at our next meeting.

#### D-3 Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP

The SSC reviewed the draft amendment package and decision documents for proposed Amendment #14 to the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP. This package consists of:

1. Draft Environmental Assessment dated March 1985;
2. Draft Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, Parts I and II dated March 1985; and
3. The proposed habitat sections to the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fishery, undated.

The SSC's comments and recommendations are as follows:

Amendment 1: Establish a gear and/or area restriction in the sablefish fishery.

In reviewing these documents, it is unclear to the SSC if this amendment is only to address gear conflicts/local fisheries issues or a combination of gear conflicts/local fisheries issues and effort limitation. The Council briefing

document [Agenda D-3(b)] and the Environmental Assessment document provides alternatives which address gear conflicts only (corrected at Council meeting). The RIR provides alternatives which address both gear conflicts and effort limitation. If it is the intention of the Council to address the gear conflict issue, then the RIR should be modified to reflect those alternatives provided in the Environmental Assessment, i.e., deletion of license limitation alternative and possibly the allocation alternative should be made.

If the intention is to address the efforts limitation, then the Environmental Assessment needs to be modified before public review. In addition, the alternatives in the RIR should be reexamined to ensure they address both gear conflict and effort limitation combined before release for public review.

Specific comments on the documents have been provided to Council staff.

Amendment 2: Establish rockfish area and quotas.

The SSC noted that the alternatives provided in Council document [Agenda D-3(b)] do not match the alternatives in the EIS or RIR (corrected at Council meeting). The SSC, in reviewing the five alternatives, noted that there is no scientific basis for dividing up the 5,000 mt OY by area.

In light of the fact that the resource of concern (Southeast shelf demersal rockfish) were not included in the original OY, the likely high cost of management and enforcement, and the existing capability of the state to adequately manage these resources, the SSC recommends an additional alternative be added. That alternative would be to remove the Southeast shelf demersal rockfish fishery (less than 200 meters) from the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP and find that there is no need for federal management.

With the addition of this alternative, the SSC recommends that the amendment and the discussion documents be released for public review.

Amendment 3: Implement new optimum yields for pollock, Pacific ocean perch, rockfish, Atka mackerel and other species

The SSC recommends this amendment and supporting documents be sent out for public review.

Amendment 4: Implement reports requirements for catcher/processors.

The Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands comments apply here. Subject to those comments, the SSC recommends release for public review.

Amendment 5: Establish measures to control the Pacific halibut bycatch.

The SSC notes that there are problems in enforcing PSC limits in purely domestic fishing without observers. Therefore, we recommend that a mandatory observer program be included in the four alternatives if the domestic catch is to be included in the PSC limit.

The SSC noted that Alternative 3 (framework PSC limited) does not identify how or the criteria to be used in setting PSC limits. The SSC recommends that the amendment and supporting documents be sent out for public review.

Amendment 6: Implement the NMFS Habitat Policy.

Our comments from the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish FMP apply to this amendment.

D-4 Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish FMP

The SSC reviewed the draft amendment package and decision documents for proposed Amendment #10 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish FMP. This package consists of:

1. Draft Environmental Assessment dated March 1985;
2. Draft Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis dated March 1985; and
3. the proposed habitat sections to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish FMP, undated.

The SSC would like to compliment all of the individuals who participated in the development of these and the Gulf of Alaska documents. The SSC comments and recommendations on the proposed amendments are as follows:

Amendment A: Raise the upper end of the Optimum Yield (OY) range.

The SSC recommends that the wording in the Council document [Agenda D-4(a)], March 1985, page 2, Alternative 1 be modified to read "The proposed upper limit is somewhat arbitrary. It is above the upper end of the MSY range (2.4 million mt)."

The SSC recommends that this amendment and the supporting decision documents be released for public review. Editorial comments were given to the staff.

Amendment B: Reduce the incidental catch of salmon in Joint Venture fisheries.

This SSC noted that the supporting documents lead the reader to conclude that the incidentally caught chum salmon were primarily of western Alaska origin. We found no scientific evidence to support that conclusion. The SSC feels that the decision documents in support of this amendment are not fully developed at this time and that additional data and analysis could be made available to assist the Council in making a decision on the proposed alternatives.

For example, with regard to Alternatives 1 and 2, no analysis is provided that indicates what the incidental salmon and other prohibited species bycatches would be in the areas into which the fleet could move when the area is closed. The SSC recognizes that the data are very limited for domestic operations in these other areas. However, it is felt that an examination of the foreign catch from these areas and comparison with the domestic experiences would provide useful insights. This analysis should include an examination of several years data. Past experience has indicated that there is a high degree of variability in incidental catches in time and space. This characteristic of incidental catches make it difficult to define a simple time/area closure which would solve a bycatch problem.

Alternatives 3 and 4 are not developed sufficiently to allow analysis or evaluation by the public or the Council. For example, neither the criteria for establishing a PSC or fee limit is specified nor is a specific fee or PSC limit proposed.

The SSC recommends that in expanding the discussion documents, that the following analysis be undertaken:

1. A preliminary examination of the scale samples be undertaken to determine the preliminary origin of these fish.
2. A more detailed examination of target and incidental catches by time and space be provided.
3. A detailed examination of the fishing strategies be undertaken to determine if a gear or fishing strategy alternative can be developed.

Our concern regarding the decision documents leads the SSC to recommend that this amendment not be released for public review at this time. Recognizing the importance of the issue, the SSC recommends that the Council work closer with industry to see if a non-regulatory solution can be reached to keep the 1985/86 bycatches to a minimum.

Amendment C: Reduce the incidental catch of fully utilized domestic species by foreign trawlers.

The SSC had a difficult time evaluating this amendment because of a lack of a clearly defined objective. It is not clear if the Council wishes to reduce the bycatch levels of fully utilized domestic species to fixed bycatch level or to reduce it to zero. If it is the Council's intention to limit bycatches to a set value, then the action taken at the last Council meeting makes this amendment unnecessary. If, however, the Council wishes the bycatch to be zero, then the only alternative is to close the area. The SSC noted the data presented in the RIR (Table 7) indicates that reduction in the harvest of these bycatch species has already taken place in the area.

If the objective is to reduce the bycatch to zero, then the SSC recommends Alternative 2 and 3 be dropped, the objective be clearly stated in the decision document, and the documents released for public review. The SSC recommends the boundaries of the closed area be modified to match current statistical reporting areas. Editorial comments and corrections have been provided the Council staff.

Amendment D: Require domestic catch/processors to submit periodic catch reports.

The SSC recommends that Alternatives 4 and 5 in the RIR be modified to include the costs of observers. With that modification, the SSC recommends that this amendment and the associated discussion documents be sent out for public review.

Amendment E: Reduce the groundfish complex reserve.

The SSC recommends that this amendment and the associated discussion documents be sent out for public review.

Amendment F: Implement the NMFS Habitat Policy.

The SSC reviewed the proposed amendment and has the following comments on the draft.

Section 9.8.3 "Habitat areas of particular concern." This section could be misinterpreted to be an all inclusive list of critical habitat areas, whereas in fact we know so little about the Bering Sea/Aleutian Island groundfish habitat requirements that a definitive definition of this area is impossible at this time. Thus, this section needs to be strongly qualified to reflect our lack of knowledge.

Section 9.8.4 Habitat Threats. This section identifies the potential sources of pollution and habitat degradation that could affect groundfish resources. The SSC feels that organic enrichment, ocean discharge and dumping and contamination by heavy metals are not sources of present or potential habitat degradation in the area covered by the plan, and should therefore be removed. If these items are to be included they should be accompanied by better information linking the alleged threat to habitat degradation. The section on environmental stress indicators should be eliminated since the data has not been linked to changes in habitat.

To facilitate the updating of the habitat related information outside of the plan amendment process and so that the Council can have one habitat policy that is not plan dependent, the SSC recommends that these materials be placed in a separate document and referenced in each plan. The SSC therefore recommends that the following substitute for the proposed amendment.

"9.8 Habitat Policy. To assure the long-term productivity of the Bering Sea and the marine waters of the Aleutian Islands Archipelago, the Council will take all necessary and appropriate steps to prevent or minimize man-made environmental changes that have adverse ecosystem impacts. The Council will maintain a document which identifies the habitat requirements of all species managed by the Council and that identifies critical habitats and potential threats. This document will include a statement of actions that the Council will take to respond to man-made activities which could have adverse impacts on habitats. This document will be updated as needed."

The SSC notes that material contained in the draft amendment could be used as a starting point for preparation of this document. In the event the Council wishes to go to public review with the original draft amendment, the SSC requests that the draft amendment be modified to take into consideration our previous comments.

E-1 Contracts

Contract 84-1: Sea Lion Pup Census

The SSC reviewed the draft final report for Contract 84-1. The SSC had a series of questions regarding the data, the analysis and the conclusions. These questions were provided to Council staff to be passed on to the contractor. The SSC does not recommend final approval at this time.

Contract 84-6: Bering Sea Herring Scale Analysis

The SSC had just received the draft final report. Since most members did not have the time to review this report, the SSC postponed final action until next meeting.

Programmatic Funds

The SSC received a presentation from the Council staff on the status of FY85 and projected FY86 programmatic funds. In light of the current budget situation and the lack of funding for our FY85 projects, the SSC will not recommend soliciting project proposals at this time.