

Updated 2/16/99

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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February 1999 Newsletter - Published 2/16/99

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Council Meets During Sub-zero Cold Snap

The Council met February 2-8 at the Anchorage Hilton Hotel in the midst of a severe cold snap with temperatures dipping to -25° F and wind chills down to -50° F. Among the many issues addressed were the American Fisheries Act and associated co-op and sideboard provisions; Steller sea lion protection; seabird avoidance and protection in the longline fisheries; chinook salmon bycatch reduction measures; and, license limitation for the scallop fishery.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for the week of April 19, 1999, at the Anchorage Hilton Hotel. Major items on that agenda will again be Steller sea lion-related measures and the AFA amendment package, both of which are scheduled for initial review and release for public comment. [Back to top](#)

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 re-elected 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.

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American Fisheries Act (AFA)

At this meeting, the Council finalized alternatives and options for the AFA "sideboard" analyses that will be completed between now and the April meeting. This amendment package mainly contains options for sideboard limits in non-pollock fisheries for the AFA catcher/processors, catcher vessels, and processors. Initial review is scheduled for April, with a final decision in June, allowing the Council to meet the July 1999 deadline imposed by the AFA for development of these sideboard measures.

Other AFA-related amendments may be developed later this year. For example, an amendment package examining excessive share caps for processing of BSAI pollock, groundfish, and crab is scheduled for initial review in December. A discussion paper regarding pollock co-op structures among the catcher vessels and shore plants is scheduled for review in June, with further discussion in October. Under this agenda item, the Council also discussed a proposal to begin an analysis to split the allocation of the fixed gear TAC for BSAI Pacific cod between the freezer-longline component and other fixed gear components. This issue is now scheduled for further discussion at the April 1999 meeting. Council staff contacts for these and other AFA issues are Chris Oliver or Darrell Brannan.

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Chinook Salmon Bycatch

In 1997, the Council initiated analysis of a proposal to reduce further chinook salmon bycatch in accordance with National Standard 9. The proposal, submitted by the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, asked the Council to lower the chinook salmon bycatch limits that trigger a trawl closure in the Chinook Salmon Savings Areas in the Bering Sea. The Council reviewed the analysis for this proposal and took final action last week.

The Council recommended incrementally reducing the chinook salmon bycatch cap as follows: 48,000 salmon (current 1999), 41,000 in 2000, 37,000 in 2001, 33,000 in 2002, and 29,000 in 2003. Accounting for the cap would begin January 1 and continue year-round. Non-pollock fisheries would be exempt from the closure and those fisheries' chinook PSC bycatch would not be counted toward the cap. The two Pribilof blocks would be deleted from the closure area, and block 226 would be added. If the cap is triggered in the A season, the chinook savings areas would close immediately. The closure would be removed at the beginning of the B season, but would be reinitiated September 1. The Council recommended that a sampling regime be developed to accurately estimate bycatch of chinook salmon. Additionally, the Council requested analysis of apportioning the chinook salmon PSC cap by sector or individual co-op. This will be addressed as part of the AFA sideboard amendments which may allocate non-pollock groundfish, crab and PSC apportionments to sectors or co-op pools. Staff contact is Dave Witherell. [Back to top](#)

Seabird Protection

Two endangered short-tailed albatross were taken in late September 1998 in the BSAI Pacific cod fishery. Both vessels that hooked these birds were using the currently required seabird avoidance devices. In response to an industry request, the Council initiated an analysis of requiring additional seabird avoidance measures in BSAI and GOA groundfish and halibut fixed gear fisheries to protect short-tailed albatross and other seabirds in December 1998.



At the February meeting, the Council approved releasing a revised analysis with additional sub-options for public review. Proposed measures would explicitly specify that weights must be added to the groundline to make it sink as soon as it enters the water. The offal discharge regulation would be amended to require the removal of any embedded hooks. Streamer lines and buoy bags may both qualify as bird scaring lines, and there would be specific instructions for proper placement and deployment of bird scaring lines. Towed boards, sticks, and other devices would no longer qualify as seabird avoidance measures. The use of bird scaring lines would be required in conjunction with using a lining tube or night-setting. Use of a lining tube or night-setting would be optional.



A second option would require the use of a lining tube for specified vessels. Weights added to the groundline would be required to prevent the groundline from resurfacing after it was set. A third option would disallow buoy bags as bird scaring lines. Night-setting still would be required of all specified vessels. Sub-options for fishing sectors and size of vessel were also added. The detailed options and revised analysis will be available to the public by March 19 from Jane DiCosimo at the Council or Kim Rivera at the NMFS Regional Office. [Back to top](#)

IFQ/CDQ Management

In October 1998, the Council requested that NMFS analyze six regulatory changes to the halibut and multi-species CDQ programs. At the request of NMFS staff, and with advice from the CDQ Implementation Team and the Advisory Panel, the Council prioritized the development of those regulatory changes. It recommended that NMFS prepare proposed rulemaking to reduce CDQ observer coverage requirements on longline catcher vessels and shore-side processors. For the longline catcher vessels, the Council requested that NMFS require 30 percent observer coverage in all CDQ fisheries for vessels that meet the following requirements: (1) the vessel is between 60 ft and 80 ft LOA, (2) participated in a CDQ fishery prior to December 31, 1998, and (3) has sufficient halibut IFQ or CDQ to cover halibut bycatch in their groundfish CDQ fisheries. For the shore-side processors, the Council recommended that, rather than requiring a CDQ observer to monitor each CDQ delivery, NMFS should base CDQ observer coverage requirements on the amount of groundfish processed each month as is done for the open access fisheries. A follow-up analysis on longline catcher vessel observer coverage will be scheduled for later this year.

The Council also requested that NMFS prioritize the requested changes in the following order: (1) preparation of a proposed rule discussed above to reduce observer coverage requirements; (2) preparation of a proposed rule to allow the harvest of area 4D halibut CDQ in area 4E and to clarify the area 4E halibut CDQ trip limit; (3) analysis of alternative quota management measures including underage and overage provisions and removing species from the CDQ program; (4) preparation of a proposed rule to clarify the crab CDQ season start date; and (5) analysis of allowing the non-pollock CDQ trawl fisheries to start on January 1 instead of January 20. The proposed rules for multi-species CDQ (MS-CDQ) observer requirement changes and halibut CDQ changes will be prepared separately. The comment periods for the two rules will coincide with the April Council meeting. The intent is for the MS-CDQ observer coverage and the halibut CDQ changes to be effective as soon as possible in 1999. Alternative quota management measures are planned for implementation in 2000. The season start date changes are planned for 2001, if approved.

The Council also received a progress report from NMFS on the IFQ/CDQ fee program indicating that fee collection for these fisheries will likely begin in the year 2000. Contact Jane DiCosimo at the

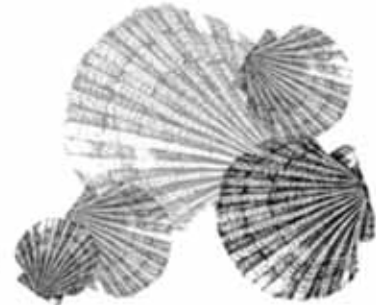
Council or Sally Bibb at the NMFS Regional Office for more information. [Back to top](#)

Halibut Charterboat GHL

The Council did not take up this agenda item at its February meeting due to the press of other business, though it was addressed by the SSC and AP. However, the Council did set a "time certain" for its future deliberation of proposed halibut charter GHL management measures. Halibut GHL will be the first agenda item (after agency reports) on its April 1999 agenda. The Council will review the staff discussion paper and the recommendations of its Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Advisory Panel (AP), and GHL Committee, and may revise the list of management alternatives for analysis by Council and ADF&G staff. Initial review of the analysis is scheduled for October 1999, with final action in December 1999. A discussion paper on proposed halibut GHL and moratorium management measures is available from the Council office. Contact Jane DiCosimo for additional information. [Back to top](#)

Scallop License Limitation

The Council took final action on establishing a license limitation program for the Alaska scallop fishery. This program will supersede the existing federal scallop vessel moratorium that is scheduled to expire in 2000. The Council adopted Alternative 6 of the analysis, which will limit the fishery to a total of 9 licenses. Only one license will be issued for each qualifying vessel. Only those holders of moratorium permits that made legal landings of scallops from a vessel in two of the three years 1996, 1997, or 1998 will receive a license.



The Council further adopted several options from the analysis, including option 1C(1) and a modified option 2D, which specify license restrictions and limits on vessel replacement size. All licenses will be state-wide, but license holders who never made a legal landing of scallops from outside Cook Inlet during the recent qualifying period would be restricted to a single 6 ft dredge in all areas. Maximum vessel length will be restricted to 100% of the LOA of the qualifying vessel on February 8, 1999, unless the moratorium permit was used on a longer vessel in the recent qualifying period, in which case, the license will be limited to 100% of the LOA of the longest vessel used in the recent qualifying period. Licenses would be issued to those who held the moratorium permit for the qualifying vessel on February 8, 1999.

The Council considered the Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements that no person shall be granted excessive shares of limited access privileges. The Council recommended that no "person" (as defined under the Magnuson-Stevens Act) can control or own more than 2 scallop licenses. Similar to the

rules adopted for the halibut and sablefish ITQ program, persons who hold more than 2 licenses (based on qualified vessels as of February 8, 1999) would have grandfather rights, but these rights would be extinguished if corporation structure is changed. Staff contact is Dave Witherell. [Back to top](#)

Bairdi Crab Rebuilding

The Bering Sea Tanner crab (*C. bairdi*) stock will be declared "overfished" based on the minimum stock size thresholds (MSST) proposed for crab under Amendment 7 to the BSAI king and Tanner crab FMP. The national standard guidelines require a rebuilding plan for any overfished stock, with a rebuilding period less than 10 years unless limited by life history characteristics. In October 1998, the Council voted to move forward with an aggressive rebuilding plan for this stock. Since then, the Crab Plan Team has been working on the rebuilding plan analysis.

The rebuilding plan will be composed of three parts: a new harvest strategy, evaluation of bycatch control measures, and habitat protection. ADF&G is developing a new harvest strategy for Tanner crabs, which the Board of Fisheries is scheduled to address in March. ADF&G is analyzing a stair-step harvest rate and associated thresholds, along the lines of the strategy developed two years ago for Bristol Bay red king crab. The approach was recommended by the plan team and advocated by NMFS. The second part of the rebuilding plan is an evaluation of bycatch control measures in both the crab and groundfish fisheries. The opilio crab fishery may be prohibited from fishing in areas with high bycatch rates of bairdi. For groundfish fisheries, new bycatch limits or zones may be proposed.

Habitat protection will also be considered as a component to the rebuilding plan. Unlike red king crab, Tanner crab do not seem to require well-defined habitat types for settlement. Survey, groundfish observer, and crab observer data will be examined to see if there are any "hot spot" habitat areas for *C. bairdi*. Protection of important habitat areas could range from designation as a habitat area of particular concern to year-round or seasonal closure of the area to specific or all gear types. The Council is scheduled to review the amendment analysis in April. Staff contact is Dave Witherell. [Back to top](#)

Ecosystems Committee

The Ecosystem Committee recently held a two-day workshop to examine opportunities for better incorporation of ecosystem information and theory into fishery management in the North Pacific. Several presentations were made on the implications of climate variability and regime shifts to fishery management, and the role of marine reserves as a management tool. The committee also reviewed recommendations from the NMFS Ecosystem Principles Advisory Panel and the National Research Council (NRC) report on Ecosystem Management of Sustainable Marine Fisheries to see if there

are additional ecosystem-based management measures that could be considered for the North Pacific. A summary of the workshop is available from the Council's web site (Reports & Papers of Interest) or from the Council office. Watch the Council's web site for updated information and links to other ecosystem sites. Staff contact is David Witherell. [Back to top](#)

VBA/HMAP

In October 1998, the Council tasked the Vessel Bycatch Accountability (VBA)/Halibut Mortality Avoidance Program (HMAP) Committee to flesh out the details of VBA and HMAP pilot programs and develop options for PSC caps for co-op vessels in non-pollock fisheries as part of the American Fisheries Act amendment measures. The Council reviewed the committee's findings and recommended that NMFS initiate regulatory action as required to implement a HMAP pilot program. The Council requested that Groundfish Forum, and others interested in developing a HMAP program, submit detailed proposals to NMFS and the Council for analysis. The Council also recommended that NMFS and the observer program work with industry to discuss monitoring and rulemaking necessary to implement a VBA program and report back to the Council at a future meeting. These same issues will be considered within the context of the Council's AFA sideboard analysis, as PSC sideboard limits for sectors as co-ops likely will function much like a VBA pool. Staff contact is Dave Witherell. [Back to top](#)

Social and Economic Data

The Council accepted the Social and Economic Data Committee's recommendation to initiate an amendment that would require at-sea processors to file the Alaska Commercial Operators Annual Report (ACOAR). Currently, processors that operate in State waters and shore-based processors are required to file the ACOAR. Requiring at-sea processors to file the ACOAR will provide consistent information on prices and production for all sectors of the industry. The Council also recommended that the committee work with the Alaska Fisheries Information Network (AKFIN) Steering Committee to determine if the ACOAR could be improved, and to explore the possibility of collecting additional information on fish tickets. A letter from the Council will be sent to AKFIN requesting that these issues be placed on its April agenda. The committee will continue to meet in 1999 to further develop measures to compile necessary social and economic data. The latest committee report is available upon request. Staff contact is Darrell Brannan. [Back to top](#)

Improved Retention/Improved Utilization

The Council took final action on four regulatory changes to the Improved Retention/Improved

Utilization (IR/IU) Program. The Council: (1) adopted four changes to allow discards of adulterated fish; (2) changed the maximum retainable roe retention to 9% in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands, and requested an annual report of product going to fish meal; (3) added a product recovery rate for kirimi; and (4) recommended that bait and consumed fish be deducted before calculating utilization rates. These changes will likely be implemented for the year 2000. The Council also requested that NMFS prepare an analysis by February 2000 of whether meal should be considered a primary product for IR/IU purposes, its economic impact on different sectors of the fleet (particularly the flatfish fisheries), and a review of the ability to adequately track primary production of fish meal when meal is made from whole fish.

During 1998, the first year of the IR/IU program, discards of both pollock and cod were significantly reduced. In the BSAI, for example, total Pacific cod discards were 4,000 mt (down from 22,000 mt in 1997) for an overall discard rate of 2.2%. BSAI pollock discards totaled 17,000 mt (down from 94,000 mt in 1997) for an overall rate of 1.5%.

In the GOA, similar reductions occurred. Total Pacific cod discards were 1,700 mt with a discard rate of 2.8%, while pollock discards totaled 1,390 mt with an overall rate of 1.1%. The Council, NMFS, and the North Pacific fishing industry should be very proud of the results of this management initiative. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo. [Back to top](#)

Demersal Shelf Rockfish (DSR) Retention

The Council also approved a regulatory change to require full retention of demersal shelf rockfish (DSR) by federally permitted vessels in the GOA fixed gear fisheries by: (1) eliminating the maximum retainable bycatch limit for DSR; (2) requiring full retention of DSR by federally permitted vessels in the fixed gear fisheries in the GOA Regulatory Area 650; (3) permitting fishermen to sell an amount of retained DSR that is up to, but not more than, 10 percent of other retained catch; and (4) after DSR has been landed, weighed and reported on a fish ticket, requiring fishermen to surrender the excess to the State. Further, surrendered fish would not accrue to catch history in the event of development of a license limitation or IFQ fishery for this rockfish assemblage and should be handled so as to be fit for human consumption (food grade quality). This amendment will not likely be in place prior to the year 2000 IFQ fishery. Southeast fixed gear fishermen should be aware that the maximum retainable bycatch (MRB) limit is still in place for 1999. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo. [Back to top](#)

Steller Sea Lions

In December, the Council reviewed the Biological Opinion (Section 7 consultation) from NMFS,

which concluded that the proposed BSAI and GOA pollock fisheries were likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the western population of Steller sea lions and adversely modify its critical habitat. In order to allow these fisheries to be prosecuted in 1999, the Council took emergency action in December to implement measures consistent with NMFS' proposed Reasonable and Prudent Alternatives (RPAs). The RPAs, in summary, proposed spatial and temporal distribution of the pollock fisheries as well as additional closure areas around specific rookery and haul-out sites used by sea lions. For the BSAI, the Council's actions include: (1) separating the pollock fisheries into four seasons (A1, A2, B, and C seasons), with a limit of 30% of the total TAC coming from any one season; (2) reducing the overall roe season fishery to 40% of the annual total TAC; (3) limiting the overall A season removals from the sea lion critical habitat area/catcher vessel operational area (CH/CVOA) to 62.5% of the total TAC for those seasons; (4) eliminating a directed pollock fishery in the Aleutian Islands subarea; and, (5) expanding closure areas around rookery and haul-out sites.

For the GOA, the Council also created four seasons with limits on the percentage of the TAC which can be taken from any one season, expanded the closure areas around rookery and haul-out sites, and established a 300,000 pound trip limit for pollock in the western and central Gulf areas. These measures will be implemented by emergency rulemaking for the 1999 fisheries.

Follow-up amendments will be prepared for the year 2000 and beyond and could include similar, or additional, measures for sea lion protection. At the June 1999 meeting, the Council will need to take final action on permanent regulations to protect Steller sea lions for 2000 and beyond, as well as adopt additional emergency rules for the second half of 1999. Staff contact is Dave Witherell. [Back to top](#)

Documents Available to the Public

1. Halibut Charter GHL/moratorium discussion paper.
2. Seabird Protection analysis will be available for public review approximately March 19, 1999. Contact the Council office.
3. The Ecosystem Committee Report is currently available from the Council office.
4. Changes Under Alaska's Sablefish IFQ Program, 1995-1997 (CFEC, November 1998).
5. Changes Under Alaska's Halibut IFQ Program, 1995-1997 (CFEC, November 1998).
6. January 1999 report of the Council's Social and Economic Data Committee.

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