

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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N E W S L E T T E R

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Crab/Halibut Interceptions Issues Dominate Council Meeting

The North Pacific Council met January 15-17 in Sitka and took final action on alternative approaches for minimizing the bycatches of crabs and halibut in the Bering Sea joint venture yellowfin sole/flounder fisheries. Action was taken to protect king crab stocks around Kodiak, and the Council also instructed the Bering Sea groundfish plan team on proposed amendments to be further developed for Council consideration in March. These and other actions are detailed in the following articles.

Council to Meet Next in Anchorage

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council will hold its next meeting the week of March 17-21 at the Westward Hilton in Anchorage. A portion of the meeting will be held jointly with the Alaska Board of Fisheries to consider king and Tanner crab regulations. The Council will approve proposals for changes to the crab plans to go out for public review. Alternatives for rewriting the troll salmon plan also will be considered for public review.

Groundfish issues include approval for public review of Amendment 10 to the Bering Sea and Aleutians Groundfish Fishery Management Plan and a review of the status of the yellowfin sole/flounder emergency rule to control halibut and crab bycatches. In addition the latest draft of the new Gulf of Alaska groundfish plan will be reviewed.

SSC Elects Officers and Welcomes New Appointments

The Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reelected Don Rosenberg and Dr. Richard Marasco Chairman and Vice Chairman for the coming year. Mr. Rosenberg recently retired as Director of the Alaska Sea Grant College Program and Dr. Marasco is Director of the Resource Ecology and Fisheries Management Division of the Northwest & Alaska Fisheries Center in Seattle. The eleven-member SSC advises the Council on scientific and technical matters relating to Council functions and is composed of leading scientists in biology, economics, statistics and social science.

The Council appointed Dr. Terry Quinn and Dr. Philip R. Mundy to the SSC. Terry Quinn is a biometrician from the School of Fisheries at the University of Alaska, Juneau. Phil Mundy is ADF&G's Chief Fisheries Scientist. He replaces Scott Marshall who is assuming new duties as the State's Chief Scientist for U.S./Canada salmon studies.

Council Supports ADF&G/NMFS Bering Sea Tanner Crab Closure

Following a review of the 1985 trawl surveys and recent State/Federal management action, the Council supported the ADF&G and NMFS decision to close the directed 1986 Chionoecetes bairdi Tanner crab fishery in the Bering Sea. Survey results show that Bering Sea C. bairdi stocks have declined to their lowest level since 1975. The decline has occurred in both sexes with males declining from 210 million crab in 1975 to 4.4 million crab in 1985. ADF&G and NMFS believe that the C. bairdi stocks are extremely depressed and the Council's SSC concurred with this assessment. NMFS reported that the closure may be lifted if improved stock conditions can be documented following the summer 1986 survey.

Council Approves Emergency Rule to Protect Kodiak King Crab

Following presentation of a joint ADF&G and NMFS study which identified sensitive king crab areas around Kodiak Island, the Council approved an emergency rule closing the Chirikof Island, Alitak Flats, Towers, Barnabas and Marmot Flats areas to hard on-bottom trawling during the period February 15-June 15, 1986 (see Figure 1). These five areas encompass 80-90% of the known female king crab stocks.

The closure was considered necessary because of the poor condition of the king crab resource off Kodiak and because trawl catches and mortality rates are highest during the spring months when king crab migrate inshore for reproduction. The king crab molting period lasts from approximately February 15 to June 15. Prohibiting on-bottom trawling during this period will protect reproducing king crab and may help stimulate the rebuilding of this important resource. The directed king crab fishery has been closed since 1983. The Council also requested that representatives of the groundfish and crab industry meet to develop long-term alternatives to resolve the bycatch problem.

Crab and Halibut Bycatch Restrictions Approved for Trawlers

Because of the high bycatch of king crab by yellowfin sole/flounder joint ventures in the Bering Sea in 1985, the Council has approved restrictive measures including a closure to all commercial fishing in the area between 160°W longitude and 162°W longitude south of 58°N latitude (see Figure 2). The closure will begin as soon as NMFS implements an Emergency Rule, probably around April 1. Waters shallower than 25 fathoms within the closed area will remain open to U.S. cod trawlers or processors if NMFS-approved observers are aboard. NMFS is developing measures to close the fishery in 25 fathoms or less if excessive king crab bycatches occur. Catches larger than two red king crab per ton of groundfish will be considered excessive for initial consideration of closure. NMFS-approved observers are also required on all DAP fishing vessels and joint venture processing vessels in the groundfish fishery east of 160°W longitude.

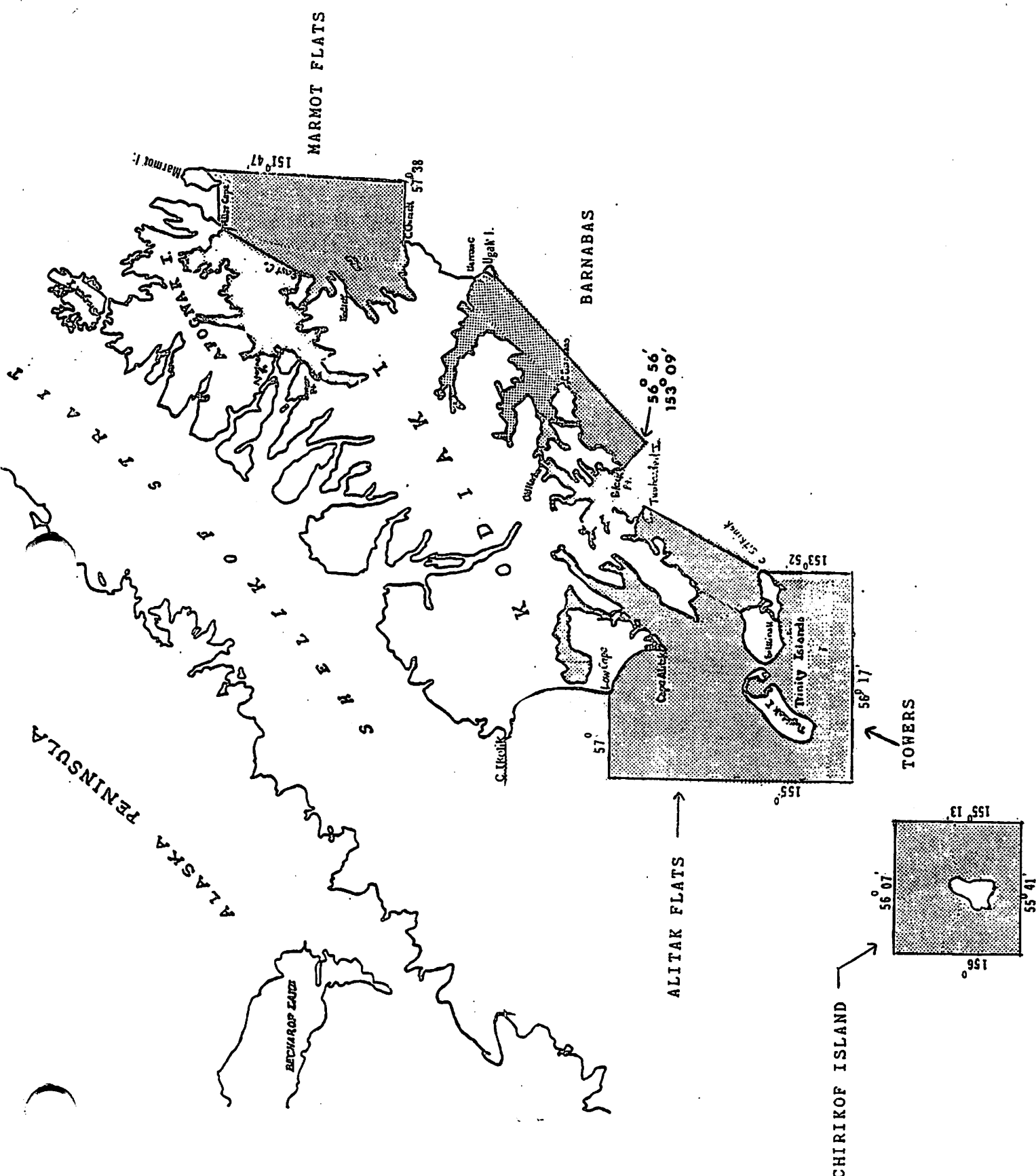


Figure 1. Emergency Rule Closures for 1986.
February 15 - June 15, 1986

Entire Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands - 1986

250,000 Halibut (includes Pot Sanctuary)

1 Red or Blue King Crab/mt of JVP

320,000 Tanner Crab (*C. bairdi*)

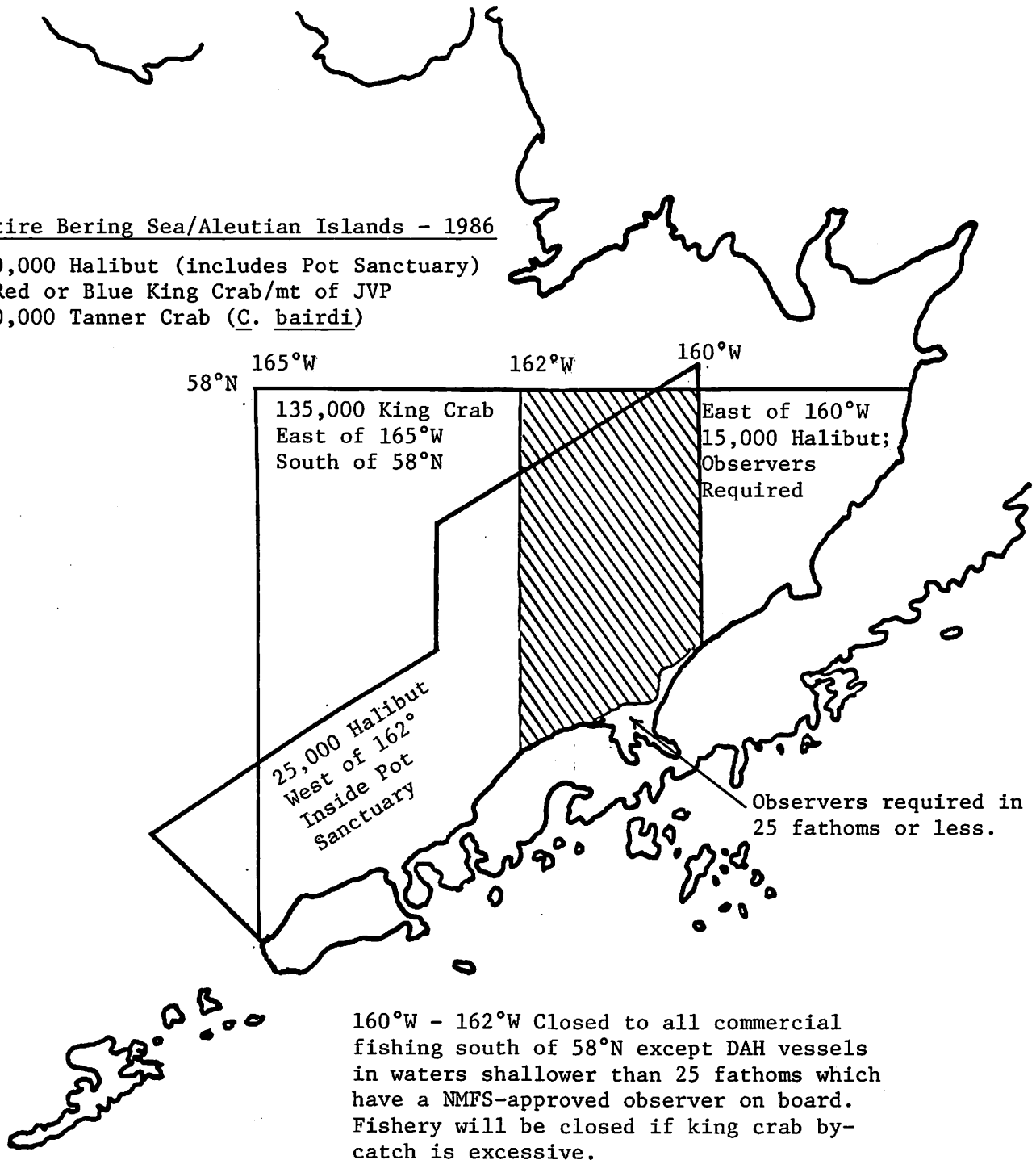


Figure 2

KING CRAB AREA DESCRIPTIONS

CHIRIKOF ISLAND AREA

All waters surrounding Chirikof Island enclosed by a line from 56 deg. 07' N. lat., 156 deg. W. long then to 56 deg. 07' N. lat., 155 deg. 13' W. long., then to 55 deg. 41' N. lat., 155 deg. 13' W. long., then to 55 deg. 41' N. lat., 156 deg. W. long., then back to 56 deg. 07' N. lat., 156 deg. W. long.

ALITAK FLATS AND TONERS AREAS

All waters of Alitak Flats, and Sitkinak Island enclosed by a line from Low Cape (57 deg. N. lat., 154 deg. 31' W. long.) to 57 deg. N. lat., 155 deg. W. long., then to 56 deg. 17' N. lat., 155 deg. W. long., then to 56 deg. 17' N. lat., 153 deg. 52' W. long., then to Cape Sitkinak at 56 deg. 33' 30" N. lat., 153 deg. 52' W. long, then to the eastern most point of Twoheaded Island at 56 deg. 54' 30" N. lat., 153 deg. 32' 30" W. long. then to the point of Kodiak Island located at 56 deg. 56' N. lat., 153 deg. 35' 30" W. long.

BARNABAS AREA

All waters enclosed by a line from Black Point (56 deg. 59' 30" N. lat., 153 deg. 18' W. long. to 56 deg. 56' N. lat., 153 deg. 09' W. long. to the southern most tip of Ugak Island (57 deg. 22' N. lat., 152 deg. 18' 30" W. long.) and west of a line from the northern most tip of Ugak Island (57 deg. 22' 30" N. lat., 152 deg. 17' W. long) to Narrow Cape (57 deg. 26' N. lat., 152 deg. 19' W. long).

MARMOT FLATS AREA

All waters enclosed by a line from East Cape (57 deg. 55' N. lat., 152 deg. 19' 30" W. long to Pillar Cape (58 deg. 09' N. lat., 152 deg. 06' W. long.) to Marmot Cape (58 deg. 10' N. lat., 151 deg. 52' W. long.) and from Cape St. Hermogenes on Marmot Island (58 deg. 15' N. lat., 151 deg. 47' W. long.) to 57 deg. 38' N. lat., 151 deg. 47' W. long. to the Cape Chiniak light at 57 deg. 38' N. lat., 152 deg. 10' W. long.

East of 165°W longitude and south of 58°N latitude a Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limit of 135,000 red king crab will apply to the joint venture yellowfin sole/flounder fishery. In the remainder of Bering Sea/Aleutians a PSC cap will be established equal to one red or blue king crab times the total groundfish allocation to the joint venture yellowfin sole/flounder fishery. In addition, there is a Tanner crab (C. bairdi) PSC limit for that fishery of 320,000 crabs for the entire Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands area.

The overall PSC limit for halibut in the yellowfin sole/flounder joint venture fishery in the entire Bering Sea/Aleutians Islands management area is 250,000 halibut with no more than 25,000 halibut to come from within the Pot Sanctuary west of 162°W and no more than 15,000 from east of 160°W longitude.

When the PSC limits for halibut, king crab or Tanner crab are reached in any of the areas described, all yellowfin sole/flounder joint venture operations will end in that area for the rest of 1986. It is the Council's intention that these measures apply for one year only and be carefully evaluated during 1986.

Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands FMP Amendment 10 to be Prepared

The Council instructed the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Plan Team to develop an FMP amendment package for review at the March Council meeting. The package will include five major issues:

- (1) Establish field order authority for the NMFS Regional Director.
- (2) Provide for inseason reallocation between joint ventures and U.S. fishermen delivering to U.S. processors.
- (3) Establish measures to prevent one fishery from closing down another.
- (4) Establish measures to more fully implement the priority granted U.S. processed fisheries by the Magnuson Act.
- (5) Establish a framework for setting annual prohibited species catch (PSC) limits and time/area closures.

The Team will draft alternative management approaches for each issue for Council consideration. The draft decision documents will be reviewed by the Council at the March meeting for release for public review. Final action is scheduled for June with implementation by early December.

Issue 4 will require a great deal of industry input if the Council is to strengthen support for U.S. processors. A request for comments and information will be circulated within the next few weeks. A substantial amount of new information on DAP needs and the benefits of alternative management measures is needed to ensure implementation.

Issue 5 (PSC framework) addresses the same problems as the measures approved at this meeting to control the catch of crabs and halibut by trawlers. Those will be implemented by Emergency Rule, but since an Emergency Rule cannot be implemented again in 1987 a plan amendment must be in place for next year.

Management of Fully U.S.-Utilized Groundfish Species

Last year the harvest limits for sablefish off Alaska were reached before the end of the year. Groundfish regulations then prohibited further directed or incidental sablefish harvests which would have closed the Pacific cod and rockfish fisheries and the turbot fishery in the Bering Sea. To avoid those closures NMFS used its emergency powers to declare sablefish a prohibited species that must be discarded. This action allowed fisheries targeting on other groundfish species to continue.

The interim regulations have now expired and NMFS requested the Council to review a change in the regulations that would allow a species to be designated as prohibited when its OY/TAC is reached and permit NMFS to close or limit fisheries targeting on other species to prevent overfishing of the prohibited species. The regulatory change would formally implement the interim approach used in 1985. Groundfish species considered fully U.S.-utilized now include sablefish, Pacific ocean perch, and Other rockfish. The Council approved the regulatory amendment believing it the best short-term solution, but directed the groundfish plan teams to develop long-term alternatives for later Council consideration.

The Council reaffirmed that its intent in Amendment 14 was that gear shares of the overall OY for Gulf of Alaska sablefish be limiting for the gear type. All further fishing by a gear type when its share of the OY is reached should cease in the applicable area. These regulations are intended to apply equally to trawl, hook and longline, and pot gear. The Council requested that NMFS develop a regulatory amendment to allow the Regional Director to declare sablefish a "non-target species" for a particular gear type before its total share was reached. Regulations for the Eastern Gulf define a species as targeted if it constitutes more than 20% of the catch. If sablefish were less than 20% of the catch, NMFS would consider it an incidental harvest. This approach should provide fishermen sufficient sablefish bycatch to support directed fishing on other species. The Regional Director will base bycatch needs on observed incidental catch rates and estimated harvests by a particular gear type.

Bycatch Guidelines Set for Joint Ventures

The Council's joint venture policy provides for the use of permit restrictions to limit the harvest of fully-DAP and prohibited species by individual joint venture companies so that high bycatches by one company could not close down all others. Setting company limits for 1986 was postponed from December because operational plans for many companies were still unsettled. The mechanical aspects of setting bycatch limits also had to be worked out.

In Sitka the Council reviewed bycatch needs and how to set and monitor the limits. NMFS recommended that only guidelines, and not firm cut-off points, be used this year so that procedures could be tested and legal questions about using vessel permits to control bycatch could be answered. NMFS volunteered to establish guidelines for each joint venture company and warn them during the season as their bycatch reached the prescribed levels.

The Council accepted this recommendation and requested NMFS to develop company guidelines that would maintain the overall bycatches within 200 mt and 35 mt for Pacific ocean perch in the Western and Central Gulf respectively, and 50 mt Other rockfish and 64 mt salmon in the Western and Central Gulf combined. They asked that NMFS report at each Council meeting their progress on monitoring these guideline bycatches. The Council also plans a major review of its joint venture policy which will include a reconsideration of company-by-company limits on both bycatch and target species.

Salmon Troll Season to Open June 20

In a vote of concurrence with the Alaska Board of Fisheries, the Council recommended that the 1986 troll salmon fishery in Southeast Alaska open on June 20. No area-wide closures will be implemented until the chinook harvest guideline has been taken, which is expected to occur about July 26.

The Council also directed the Plan Team to develop alternatives for rewriting the salmon FMP. They will review the package at the March meeting and send it out for public review. Final action is expected in June.

Policy Approved on Confidentiality of Data

The Council approved a policy on maintaining the confidentiality of information obtained from State or Federal sources or provided voluntarily by industry to the Council. The Council Executive Director will designate certain staff members as authorized users of confidential data. They must sign a statement of non-disclosure and cannot use the data for personal gain, reward or competitive advantage. Though the staff may be allowed routine access to confidential data via microcomputer, procedures must be established to ensure the security of the data. A complete inventory of all confidential data must be maintained. The policy will enable the Council staff to arrange access to confidential data collected by the NMFS Regional Office and the Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center. These data are often needed for proper analysis of the social and economic impacts of proposed management measures. No Council members will be allowed access to confidential unaggregated data.

Seattle King Crab Hearing Set

The Council has scheduled a public hearing on 1986 king crab management proposals for Friday, March 7, in Seattle. Before the hearing date the Council will review the Alaska Board of Fisheries proposal package to determine whether any proposals will significantly affect management in federal waters. If not, or if all proposals are non-controversial, the Council may cancel the hearing unless the industry expresses a strong desire to attend.

Domestic Observer Program

The Domestic Observer Committee described its work over the past few months. The Council voted to support a funding request sent to the NMFS Central Office by NMFS-Alaska Region for a pilot domestic observer program. This pilot program would begin with no more than four observers and a project manager at a program cost of approximately \$250,000. The program would provide approximately 20 percent coverage on 20 domestic vessels off Alaska, including all of the trawl catcher-processors and some longliners and other trawlers.

Two New Workgroups Established

The Council established a workgroup on inseason management of fully-utilized species such as sablefish, Pacific ocean perch and rockfish. Sara Hemphill, Henry Mitchell, Lee Alverson, Don Bevan and Nancy Munro were requested to serve on the workgroup and will consider what actions NMFS should take when the catch of a fully-utilized species approaches the harvest limit.

A second workgroup, composed of Rudy Petersen, John Winther and Oscar Dyson, will consider how the Council should manage sablefish in the Gulf of Alaska. In December the Council voted to accept September 26, 1985 as a cut-off date beyond which anyone entering the longline fishery would not be assured of future participation should an access limitation system be implemented.

State Department Announces Initial Allocations

The U.S. Department of State has announced the following initial foreign groundfish allocations in the Bering Sea and Aleutians:

<u>Country</u>	<u>State Department</u>	
	<u>Initial Allocation</u>	
	<u>mt</u>	<u>%</u>
Japan	10,000	19
South Korea	33,462	63
Poland	984	2
U.S.S.R.	5,905	11
Taiwan	1,561	3
China	977	2
Total	52,889	100

In December the Council recommended that groundfish tonnages available for foreign fisheries in 1986 be apportioned 77% to Japan, 22% to Korea and 1% to the People's Republic of China. They also recommended that the Japanese allocation be withheld until high seas salmon interception problems were resolved. The Department of State, acting with the advice of the Department of Commerce, has set 1986 apportionments at 75% for Japan, 17% for Korea, 6% for the U.S.S.R., 1% for Taiwan, and 0.5% each for Poland and China.

The Council did not change its position last week that no fish be allocated to Poland, the U.S.S.R., or Taiwan. In addition, the Council still recommends that Japan's intended foreign allocation be withheld pending solution of the salmon interception issue. A letter was sent to U.S. Secretary of State Shultz again emphasizing the Council's position and expressing appreciation for his continued support in this very important fisheries issue.