

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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NEWSLETTER

May Council Meeting Will Be Held in Anchorage

The 48th plenary session of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council will be held on Wednesday and Thursday, May 19-20, 1982, beginning at 9 a.m. in the Trattoria at the Westward Hilton Hotel in Anchorage. Heading the agenda will be the completion of final Council action on Amendment #11 to the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery Management Plan and Council review of changes to Amendment #1 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. The Council will consider the establishment of a Fishery Development Zone north of Unimak Pass, which would prohibit foreign fishing in designated areas of heavy fish populations traditionally favored by U.S. trawl and pot fishermen.

The Scientific and Statistical Committee will convene at 9:30 a.m. on Monday, May 17, 1982, and continue on Tuesday, May 18, in the Council's headquarters conference room.

The Advisory Panel will meet from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesday, May 18, 1982, in the Kenai Room at the Westward Hilton.

Council Sets Chinook Salmon Optimum Yield for 1982 Troll Fishery

In response to poor escapements of chinook salmon in British Columbia and the Columbia River, the Council set an optimum yield of 255,500 chinook salmon for the 1982 Southeast Alaska troll fishery. This figure represents a reduction of 9½% from the 1981 harvest of 268,100 chinooks. Because this figure falls within the 243,000 to 272,000 OY range currently in effect, no amendment to the Southeast Alaska Troll Salmon Fishery Management Plan will be needed. The Alaska Board of Fisheries also adopted the 255,500 fish optimum yield for 1982.

The Council said it will consider dropping the OY toward the lower end of the range in 1983 pending equivalent, complementary action by the Canadian government to restrict their fishing efforts and provide increased escapements to southern spawning grounds, both in Canada and the U.S. Canadian officials at the meeting said a proposed two-week troll closure in the northern British Columbia fishery this June would provide the opportunity for increased pass-through to Washington and Oregon streams; however, a formal decision whether or not to implement this closure has not yet been issued by the Canadian Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Council Imposes Moratorium on Halibut Licensing

In order to place a ceiling on the number of participants in the halibut fishery while studying limited entry systems for the fishery, the Council voted to recommend a moratorium on the issuance of new licenses. Only fishermen who fished in 1981 or before would be able to fish in 1982.

A Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to establish the moratorium is now being revised and is scheduled to be published in the Federal Register by the National Marine Fisheries Service sometime in April, 1982. After a public comment period, a Notice of Final Rulemaking will be published to be effective prior to the beginning of the halibut fishery on May 11.

It is important to note that this is simply a moratorium and is not a permanent limited entry system.

Halibut Limited Entry RFP Will Be Sent Out for Bid

The Council has approved a research proposal to conduct a study of halibut limited entry off Alaska. The RFP will compare a share quota system giving each fisherman one or more shares of the halibut catch quota with a system similar to the Alaska salmon limited entry system, and also with the fishery without limited entry. The catch of halibut in pounds associated with each share would vary annually depending on the total quota set by the International Pacific Halibut Commission.

The RFP was developed over the past two years through numerous meetings of a workgroup composed mainly of industry representatives. From among various limited entry proposals, the workgroup favored the share system approach and chose it as the main emphasis of the study.

The contract proposal will be released for bid in early April. A contractor will be chosen in late May and the study will be completed by December, 1982. Public hearings will be held by the contractor in Kodiak, Southeast Alaska, and Seattle. Depending on the results of the study and the public hearings, a limited entry system could possibly be in place for the 1983 fishery.

Council Reduces Sablefish Optimum Yield for the Gulf of Alaska

The Council voted to reduce the optimum yield for dwindling sablefish stocks in the Gulf of Alaska from 13,000 mt to 8,200 mt and will ask the State Department to restrict foreign allocations for 1982 so as not to exceed a total OY of 8,200 mt. The reduction in optimum yield is only one of six proposals contained in Amendment #11 to the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP, which has been under Council and public review for over six months. The Council also voted against the Japanese North Pacific Longline and Gillnet Association's proposal to allow foreign longlining in the Davidson Bank area. Other proposals in the amendment, which will be acted upon at the May meeting, include establishment of catch reporting procedures, restricting gear used for sablefish to hook and line only, closing the entire Gulf of Alaska sablefish fishery from November 15 to March 15, and a new method for specifying groundfish DAH and reserves.

Council and Board Talk King Crab

At the March meeting Council and Board members heard comprehensive staff reports on the status of the king crab resource throughout Alaska, received public testimony, and discussed proposals for 1982 State regulations. The Board will take final action on proposed 1982 regulations before the end of its ongoing shellfish meeting. In May the Council will review the applicability of the Board's actions to Federal waters in accordance with the provisions of the Joint Statement of Principles for King Crab Management and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King Crab Management Framework.

The Council's "walk-through" of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands King Crab FMP with NMFS plan review staff in Washington, D.C. was deemed highly successful by all the participants. The purpose of the meeting was to answer questions from the plan review staff about the mechanics of the fishery and the proposed plan and to agree on the contents of a finished framework document. It was the consensus of the group that the changes made to the text of the plan did not affect any substantive portions of the FMP or reflect any changes in policy. The FMP and Regulatory Impact Review are currently undergoing final improvements and will be resubmitted shortly for Secretarial review.

Tanner Crab Quibbles, Part II

The Council and Board heard staff reports on the condition of the Tanner crab resource, listened to public testimony on proposals for 1982 State regulations, and discussed inconsistencies between the Tanner Crab FMP and existing and proposed State regulations. Upon recommendation of the Scientific and Statistical Committee, the Council instructed the Plan Maintenance Team to begin drafting a "housekeeping" amendment to bring State and Federal regulations into conformity.

Bering Sea Amendment #1 Revised

Amendment #1 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Fishery Management Plan, a multi-species ecosystem management regime, has undergone revisions because of concerns raised during Secretarial review. The Plan Development Team has re-written Sections 11 and 14, which will be released for public review on April 2. It should be noted that the changes do not affect the principles of ecosystem fishery management as applied in the amendment, although actual numbers have been affected and more specific criteria have been used to determine some management measures. Some sections affecting the catch of prohibited species, such as halibut, by the domestic groundfish fishery have been eliminated.

Written comments on the revised sections will be accepted until 5 p.m. on Friday, May 7, 1982. The Council will accept public testimony and consider the revised amendment as part of its regular agenda at the May 19-20 meeting in Anchorage. The Council will also consider establishment of a domestic Fishery Development Zone north of Unimak Pass to protect areas of heavy fish concentrations favored by U.S. trawl and pot fishermen.

Observer Coverage on the Way Up

Total observer coverage for Alaskan fisheries was about 10% in 1981 and is scheduled to climb to an overall average of 35-40% for 1982, according to Robert French of the Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center, retiring director of the Observer Program. Coverage levels of the various fisheries for 1982 are projected at 90-100% for joint ventures; 100% for the Japanese mothership fisheries; 35-40% for large stern trawlers; 20% for small trawlers; and 25% for longliners.

Mr. French reported a total incidental catch of salmon by foreign groundfish fisheries of 77,430 fish in 1981, over 90% of which were chinooks.

Pacific Cod Abundance Estimates Released by Northwest Center

Resource assessment surveys by the Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center have shown a substantial increase in Pacific cod abundance in the eastern Bering Sea since 1977, primarily due to the strong 1977 year-class. But because the life span of cod is relatively short and the current high abundance of the population is mainly the result of this single year-class, stock abundance may soon return to historic lower levels. The Council feels it is important to predict such trends so the industry can anticipate the future harvest potential of the resource and plan accordingly.

In a report entitled "Current Abundance of Pacific Cod in the Eastern Bering Sea and Expected Abundance in 1982-86" by Vidar Weststad, Richard Bakkala, and Jeff June, biomass estimates determined through use of a numeric population simulation model indicated that the contribution of the strong 1977 year-class will diminish substantially in 1984. According to the simulation model, the exploitable population biomass could be expected to decline by 1986 to a range of 349,000 mt with no fishing to a low of 120,000 mt with a constant annual catch of 120,000 mt in 1982-86. Copies of the report are available from the Northwest Center.

Domestic Fish Figures

Over 11,700 mt of groundfish were taken off Alaska during January, 1982, compared to a catch of only 222 mt at the same time last year. The catch was 93% pollock, 6% Pacific cod, and 1% other species, primarily from the Gulf of Alaska.

Foreign Fisheries Update

Ron Naab, Director of Enforcement, NMFS, said there were 181 foreign vessels operating off Alaska at the end of February, 1982, but by March 16th that number had fallen to 126 vessels, mostly Japanese. Both the number of vessels and vessel days through February, 1982 show a slight decline from 1981 levels, though fishing patterns are similar to last year.

Final figures show that 1,273,000 mt or 86% of the 1,479,609 mt Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands TALFF was taken in 1981. In the Gulf of Alaska only 65% or 243,000 mt of the 374,274 mt TALFF was utilized. Through February, 1982 103,215 mt, 17.5% of the 588,777 mt Bering Sea/Aleutians TALFF, had been taken. The catch was 81.6% pollock, 12.6% flounders, 1.2% Pacific cod, and 4.6% other

species. In the Gulf of Alaska 7,319 mt, or 9% of the 82,312 mt TALFF, has been caught, with 68% of the catch Pacific cod, 29% pollock, and 3% other species.

Enforcement Activities

Since the January meeting the U.S. Coast Guard off Alaska issued seven reports of violation and five citations to one Taiwanese, one Soviet, two Polish, two Japanese, and four Korean vessels. Infractions included failure to provide a safe boarding ladder for the authorized boarding party; failure to properly maintain daily cumulative catch logs; failure to stop immediately to facilitate an authorized boarding; failure to properly display international radio call sign; conducting fishing activities prior to the time submitted in check-in message; and failure to give proper notification of ceasing fishing activities prior to completion and departure from the fishing area.

O'Connell, Samuelsen, and Wojcek Appointed to Council's Advisory Panel

The appointment of James O'Connell, Fisheries Officer for the National Bank of Alaska, Harvey Samuelsen, President of the Western Alaska Cooperative Marketing Association, and Ed Wojcek, Executive Director of the Alaska Trollers Association, were confirmed by the Council at the March meeting. The Council welcomes the expertise and Alaskan experience of these three gentlemen.

SSC and AP Elect Officers

The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee re-elected Donald H. Rosenberg, Director of Alaska Sea Grant, and Dr. Richard Marasco of the Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center in Seattle, as chairman and vice-chairman, respectively, for a one-year term.

Robert D. Alverson, Manager of the Fishing Vessel Owners Association, Seattle, and A. W. "Bud" Boddy, sport fish representative from Juneau, were re-elected by the Advisory Panel to serve one-year terms as chairman and vice-chairman, respectively.

The Council congratulates these leaders and looks forward to another year of close cooperation with the AP and SSC.

Council Recommends Approval for Four New Joint Ventures

The Council will recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries approve one new Soviet joint venture and three new Japanese joint ventures off Alaska. Marine Resources Company expects to catch and process 35,000 mt of yellowfin sole and other flounders, 7,000 mt of Pacific cod, 500 mt of pollock, and 500 mt of by-catch species in areas 51, 52, 53 and 54 of the Bering Sea and Aleutians. Seven to ten U.S. trawlers and as many as eight Soviet processing vessels will work in the fishery from April 15 to September 30.

Hoko Fishing Company, Ltd. of Tokyo will work in a joint venture with Jeff Hendricks and Associates of Anacortes, Washington to catch and process about 9,500 mt of pollock and 500 mt of by-catch species in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. Operations are expected to run for 40 days beginning mid-May and will employ four U.S. catcher boats and the Japanese factoryship CHIKUBU MARU.

Ohtori Suisan Company, Ltd. of Tokyo and Whitney-Fidalgo Seafoods, Inc. of Seattle plan to catch and process 9,500 mt of pollock, 300 mt of Pacific cod, and 200 mt of other species in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. This operation is scheduled to begin in early May and will employ two or three U.S. trawlers and the Japanese factoryship OHTORI MARU.

Nippon Suisan Kaisha, Ltd. of Tokyo and Universal Seafoods of Redmond, Washington plan a second joint venture in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska scheduled to begin mid-year. They will use two to four U.S. catchers and the Japanese factoryship HARUNA MARU to catch and process 9,500 mt of pollock, 200 mt of Pacific cod, and 300 mt of by-catch species.

Taiyo Gyogyo Company will continue its operation to double its original estimate of purchases from U.S. fishermen to 20,000 mt. This will bring the total expected to be purchased by Japanese processors at sea to 60,000 mt in 1982.

Joint Venture Update

The West German FRIEDRICH BUSSE commenced operations on February 27 with four U.S. catcher vessels in the Bering Sea. About 1,100 tons of U.S.-caught fish was delivered to the BUSSE for processing in the first two weeks, 700 mt of Pacific cod and 400 mt of pollock.

Fish Producers Associates and Korea Wonyang Fisheries commenced operations in mid-January with seven U.S. trawlers and six Korean processors in Shelikof Straits. As of March 13, over 17,000 mt had been caught, mostly pollock.

Universal Seafoods and Nippon Suisan began their joint venture on February 14 with two U.S. trawlers and the Japanese factoryship KONGO MARU working in Shelikof Straits. Operations are proceeding on schedule, but catch figures are not available.

Joint Venture Fisheries, Ltd. and a consortium of eleven companies from the Korea Deep Sea Fisheries Association are operating in the Shelikof Straits with three U.S. trawlers and two Korean processors. As of March 23, 9,628.5 mt of pollock and 5.6 mt of Pacific cod had been caught. Operations are proceeding smoothly and the partners expect to take their total 15,000 mt by the end of April.

Westward Trawlers and Taiyo Fishery Company began a joint venture in late January with two U.S. trawlers and the Japanese factoryship ZUIYO MARU NO. 3 in Shelikof Straits. Over 6,000 mt of pollock had been delivered for processing as of March 13, 92.9% food grade fish. The partners expect to achieve their target of 10,000 mt by the first week of April.