

Executive Director's Report

A Fond Farewell to Bill Aron

Dr. William Aron is retiring at the end of this month after many long and productive years in federal service. In particular Bill has been on our SSC since 1980, thus distinguishing him as the third longest serving SSC member, the first two places being held by Don Rosenberg and Rich Marasco. And our groundfish stocks are in great shape, so obviously these oldtimers were doing something right! Bill has been most supportive of our staff and many Council projects and analyses. I want to wish him a special farewell and wonderful retirement.

There will be a gala reception for Bill in Seattle at the China Harbor Restaurant on December 19. You should contact Jim Balsiger at (206) 526-4000 to make reservations.

January Council and Council/Board Consultation Meetings

The January meeting will be held at the Anchorage Hilton the week of January 8. The SSC and AP will begin on Monday afternoon, and the Council will begin their plenary session at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, January 10. The day before, on Tuesday, January 9, the Council is scheduled to hold its annual consultation with the Board of Fisheries. I expect to hear from the State on exactly when that meeting will begin in the morning. Tentative draft agendas for both meetings are under this tab at B-1(a).

1996 Meeting Schedule

Here is our meeting schedule for 1996:

Week of	January 8	Anchorage
	April 15	Anchorage
	June 10	Portland
	September 16	Sitka
	December 9	Anchorage

Magnuson Act Reauthorization

The consensus opinion is that the Magnuson Act will still be a live wire for 1996. The House Bill 39 was passed, but the Senate has not had time to finish up. It is my understanding that the Senate staff will be working on draft provisions over the next two months and that committee action should be completed by late February. No new hearings are planned.

New Crab Plan Team Member

The crab plan team requested addition of an economist, and Dr. Joshua Greenberg of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, has been nominated. The SSC is reviewing his resume and will be providing a recommendation to you.

Initial Review of Research Priorities

The plan teams have identified the research priorities compiled under item B-1(b). According to our policy on development of research priorities, the team presents their priorities to the Council, SSC, and NMFS Regional Office in December for review, and then in January the Council will review the topics and any comments and develop their priority recommendations.

Budgets and Continuing Resolutions

As you are aware, the lack of a continuing budget resolution almost caused the December meeting to be canceled. The current resolution goes through December 15. If a budget compromise is not agreed to by the President and Congress, our January meeting could be in jeopardy. Even if we have sufficient money to hold the meeting and keep our Council staff going, if the Commerce budget is not funded, then Federal employees will not be able to attend. NMFS has notified us that if that is the case, the Council meeting will be canceled also as part of a special condition in our grant award. So let's keep our fingers crossed and hope all this worry is for naught.

PROPOSED JANUARY 1996 AGENDA TOPICS

1. Sablefish and Halibut IFQs
 - a. Final review of buydown amendment.
 - b. Initial review of sweep-up amendment.
 - c. Implementation Team and RAM reports.
2. Comprehensive Rationalization Planning
 - a. Status report on license limitation.
 - b. Further consideration of pollock ITQs and next steps.
 - c. Demersal Shelf Rockfish License Program.
 - d. Skipper Licence Program report.
3. Halibut Charterboat Issue
 - a. Status report. (This issue may be delayed until April if no analysis is available)
4. Council Operations
 - a. Follow through on issues raised by SSC.
5. Crab Management
 - a. Board-Council consultation.
 - b. Discussion of any issues raised by PNCIAC.
6. Scallop Management
 - a. Review Magnuson Act changes concerning State jurisdiction.
 - b. Status report on amendment 1 and FMP.
7. Observer Program
Action depends on outcome of December meeting.
8. Research Priorities - Final Review
9. Groundfish Amendments
 - a. Initial review of foragé fish amendment.
 - b. Initial review of overfishing definition amendments.
 - c. Final action on halibut gridsorting amendment.
 - d. Final action on pollock trimester allocations in GOA.
 - e. Review pollock scale weight proposed rule.
 - f. Discussion of Tanner crab PSCs and inseason adjustments.
 - g. Salmon Foundation report.
10. Pacific Pelagics - review three-council management framework.

DRAFT

**AGENDA ITEMS
NPFMC/BOF MEETING
JANUARY 9, 1996**

1. Introduction and Crab Plan Team Report
2. Research (observer) Plan update
3. 1995/96 Crab Fishery Updates
4. Use of ADF&G Length Base-analysis to estimate Bristol Bay red king crab abundance
5. Council action on BSAI crab issues:
 - a. Bering Sea trawl closures
 - 1) Pribilof Islands
 - 2) non-pelagic trawl closure for Bristol Bay red king crab
 - b. Tanner crab bycatch cap transfers between Zones 1 and 2
6. BOF proposals for March meeting that are under Category 2 FMP criteria
7. BSAI Crab Research Update
8. State intentions for managing groundfish and scallops in 1996

*add:
Pribilof Charter issue*

STATE OF ALASKA

TONY KNOWLES, GOVERNOR

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November 14, 1995

Mr. Larry Engel, Chair
Alaska Board of Fisheries
P.O. Box 197
Palmer, AK 99645

Larry
Dear Mr. Engel:

On January 9, 1995, the Board of Fisheries will meet with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. The meeting is the result of a 1993 agreement between the Commissioner of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Director of National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to foster improved coordination and communication between NMFS and ADF&G with respect to crab management under the Fishery Management Plan for Commercial King and Tanner Fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area. Included in the agreement is the formation of a Consultation Group composed of a subcommittee of Council and Board members that meet publicly on an annual basis to focus on Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands crab issues. The joint subcommittee reviews staff data on the status of crab stocks and fisheries, receive both public and staff concerns regarding crab management, and provides respective guidance to the Council and Board on pertinent crab issues.

During the board's work session in Juneau, the board requested that jurisdictional issues dealing with groundfish, halibut and salmon management be included on the January 9 agenda. These issues are of great importance to the board, and would require significant discussion. I believe their inclusion at the January Board/Council crab meeting would distract participants from the focus of the meeting. This is of particular concern since many individuals from the BSAI crab industry will be present at this meeting and expect the joint members to receive public testimony and discuss pertinent information on the research and management of the BSAI crab fisheries.

Considering the time constraints of this meeting, approximately 6 hours, the Board will barely have sufficient time to address the issues pertaining to the joint management of BSAI crab scheduled on this agenda. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to schedule an additional joint meeting with the Council if you wish to discuss groundfish, halibut/sablefish, and salmon management issues. To aid the Board in selecting any non-crab issues they may want to discuss with the council at the January meeting if time allows or at a future meeting, briefing documents

Larry Engel, Chair

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November 14, 1995

on groundfish, halibut/sablefish IFQ's, and salmon will be included in the briefing books I am having prepared for the board.

Sincerely,



Robert C. Clasby
Director

Enclosure

cc: Larid Jones
BOF Memers
Earl Krygier

**Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Plan Team
1995 Research Needs**

1. Life history and distribution patterns of Greenland turbot.
2. Vertical distribution of pollock by sex, size, and age. Trawl locations conducted during the acoustic survey may bias age analysis. Generally, the net is towed through a concentration of pollock, which may also be not representative of the size distribution.
3. Stock structure information for Atka mackerel and Pacific cod. How do they migrate between the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska? Should BSAI and GOA stocks should be assessed together as one?
4. Abundance and distribution data for forage fish. Forage fish species are an important part of the Bering Sea ecosystem, yet little is known about these stocks
5. Effects of bottom trawling and other gear types on habitat. In situ studies and comparisons of open and closed areas were suggested.
6. Examine the fishing power of the bottom trawl survey for pollock. Does it reflect population trends? Survey data indicate stable populations in both the BSAI and GOA areas.

Gulf of Alaska Plan Team Statement of Additional Research Priorities/Concerns

The Team strongly supports the ongoing development of alternative survey efforts in the GOA, which may yield more reliable information for species such as Atka Mackerel and some rockfish that are not sampled particularly well by the current bottom trawl survey. Nearshore rockfish, which are currently unsurveyed, should be a focus of attention.

Additional survey efforts in lower Cook Inlet around the time of the bottom trawl survey would be particularly useful in evaluating the effect of increased fishing effort in that area in recent years. As the State of Alaska is already operating a crab survey in portions of the southern inlet, the possibility of having the State cover Federal waters in that part of the inlet more extensively should be explored.

The Team strongly supports expansion of the bottom trawl survey to deep-water locations (> 500 m) so that adult thornyhead rockfish and other deep-water species can be better sampled. The last GOA sampling of this depth strata, which contains the primary thornyhead habitat, occurred in 1984. Because recent assessments have recommended that ABCs and overfishing mortality levels be set at low values, with little cushion between them, there is a continuing threat that reaching the overfishing level will force closure of other GOA fisheries which intercept thornyheads. If such closures are to occur, their need should be established on the basis of recent survey data from thornyhead habitat.

Evaluation of Pacific cod tagging information by Shimada and Kimura (1994) indicates a dynamic pattern of seasonal migration for fish tagged in the Bering Sea. The Team feels that additional tagging effort, particularly in the GOA, may provide some insights into divergent age-composition patterns observed between the survey and fishery. Better migrational information is also a key requirement for the development of an integrated BSAI/GOA stock assessment model for Pacific cod.

The Team noted the problem with unreported bycatch mortality of rockfishes, Pacific cod and other groundfishes in the unobserved sector of the fleet. Currently unreported mortality of demersal shelf rockfish is estimated by ADFG, but no information is available for estimating unreported mortality of other rockfishes. Bycatch mortality estimates advanced for Pacific cod in the halibut fishery, which were formulated when halibut were harvested during a derby opening, may not accurately represent conditions in the existing IFQ fishery. The Team was informed that the Halibut Commission has been advised that it cannot currently collect information on groundfish bycatch through its logbook program for halibut. Given the lack of observer coverage in the halibut fishery, the Team requests that NMFS explore arrangements for collection of bycatch information for groundfish in the halibut fishery. Additional research should be focused on documenting landings of Pacific cod on halibut trips during the 1995 fishery.

In order to better understand sablefish recruitment variability, the Team would like more effort directed towards questions pertaining to the geographical distribution and movement of juvenile sablefish.

For many species/assemblages, Team and Council discussion of management alternatives would benefit from the additional information regarding "natural" rates of coincident catch across species and the relationship of these rates to observed bycatch and discard information. In cases where discard rates are particularly high, the Team requests that chapter authors attempt to document for the species in question, rates/amounts of discard by gear and target fishery, and also by season if there are noteworthy seasonal swings in discard rates. Where possible, documentation of the reason for discard (e.g., trip limit, TAC closure, market consideration) would also be useful. Knowledge of background bycatch rates by gear and area are also needed to evaluate whether directed fishing standards are set at appropriate levels with respect to discard objectives.