

Executive Director Report

Agenda issues

Since the last agenda was sent to you, we made some minor changes to the AP and Council agendas to accommodate some timing issues. The Steller sea lion (SSL) staff report was given to the AP and SSC together on Monday, as NMFS staff presenting that issue had to be in court on Tuesday for Beluga whale issues. The AP went on to other issues Tuesday, and I expect them to be back on the SSL agenda item today and into tomorrow. The Council is scheduled to get into this agenda item Thursday morning. We do have a real full agenda for today, with several 'B' reports in addition to the norm, three 'C' agenda items after lunch, and an executive session. I have also been requested to have agenda item C-7 (the CDQ oversight issue) taken up by the Council prior to the SSL issue, either this afternoon or Thursday morning. That is reflected in the latest agenda, and we made corresponding changes to the AP agenda.

Committees and Executive Sessions

An executive session is scheduled for today, with Stetson Tinkham from the State Department and Bill Hines from NMFS, to receive an update on US/Russia boundary negotiations and legal aspects of other treaty issues of interest to the Council. We also have an executive session scheduled for Sunday to discuss AP and SSC appointments, though we may want to consider a separate, earlier session to discuss SSC membership when Dr. Marasco is available (maybe Friday). We are losing at least one SSC member, Dr. Doug Larson, and would like to have some Council discussion of a possible replacement, along with the issue of possibly adding some other expertise to the SSC.

A Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for Monday where I simply want to update you on our budget situation for the end of the year, and our budget submittal for FY2001. With recent changes on the Council, the membership of this Committee (and possibly others) has changed. I have been working with the Chairman to update our Committee lists. Once he finalizes the appointments on some Committees recently initiated by the Council I will provide you all with an updated list of Committees.

February meeting/Joint Council/BOF

Our February Council meeting begins on Wednesday the 7th, with a joint session with the Board of Fish on Tuesday the 6th. I have only drafted a very rough agenda for that meeting, with so much uncertainty regarding possible SSL issues at this time. Hopefully, at the end of this meeting we will have a better idea of what is facing us for that February meeting and we can go over a draft agenda. In any case, I do think we need to confirm our joint meeting with the Board, and need to decide whether and when to have the Joint Council/Board Subcommittee meet. The Board is in session from January 9th through February 1st, so I am suggesting the afternoon of Monday the 5th for a meeting of that Committee, although I have discussed this with a couple of Board members who feel that we may not need the Committee to meet this time around; rather, we would jump straight into the full Council/Board session on the 6th. I need to pin that down so that Diana Cote and I can make the necessary arrangements.

Review of NMFS documents

In the past couple weeks, three large, draft documents from NMFS have been sent to me for comments: (1) The National Artificial Reef Plan - comments due by December 11; (2) A Preliminary, Qualitative Report on Excess Fishing Capacity in Federally Managed Fisheries - comments due by December 15; and, (3) Draft Status of Fisheries of the US - Report to Congress - comments due by December 8. I reviewed the first two documents and do not have any comments. The Artificial Reef Plan did not seem to have any direct

relevance to our region, and the report on capacity appeared to correctly characterize our region's fisheries as generally overcapitalized. David Witherell reviewed the third document, which outlines whether and how each of the Nation's fisheries are considered overfished, or whether information exists to make that determination. We believe there are some issues with that report that tend to mischaracterize the status of some of our fisheries. Attached is the letter I sent to the agency reflecting our staff review.

Coast Guard Foundation

I had the pleasure in October of attending the annual Coast Guard Foundation Awards Dinner in Anchorage. A highlight of that evening was to watch several Coast Guard personnel receive awards for heroism related to two life-saving rescue missions recently conducted in Southeast Alaska. Before this I was only vaguely aware of the Foundation - now I more fully understand, and appreciate, its importance to the Coast Guard mission. The Foundation is a non-profit organization devoted to providing quality of life support services for various Coast Guard facilities and their personnel. For example, proceeds from this awards dinner went directly to the construction of the new Valdez Personnel Support Building. Numerous other projects supported by the Foundation provide educational, recreational, and morale building enrichment for Coast Guard personnel and their families. The Foundation is supported by donations from a variety of individuals and businesses throughout Alaska, including members of our own fishing industry. I simply wanted to make you more aware of this organization and encourage you to take a look at their WEB-site sometime at www.cgfdn.org.

Marine Debris

Last August, at the invitation of the Western Pacific Council, I attended the International Marine Debris Conference which focused on derelict fishing gear. That conference was also attended by members of our own fishing industry, including Al Burch, Brent Paine, John Henderschedt, Rob Zuanich, and Rick Steiner. One particular focus of that conference was the issue of derelict netting which has found its way to the northwest Hawaiian island reefs and atolls, much of which is believed to have originated in the North Pacific (some likely from our trawl and gillnet fisheries). Among other things, there have been several entanglements of endangered monk seals in this gear. It was a very informative conference and included several 'break-out' sessions, one of which focused on this very issue. Along with myself, members of our industry committed to elevating attention to this issue, and to pursue development of regulatory requirements to document and log lost fishing gear. This would require coordination between state and federal jurisdictions, and industry associations, but it is something which neither I nor the industry have had any chance to follow-up on. I just wanted to raise this issue for now, recognizing it is something we may bring back to your attention as necessary at some future time.

SEIS document

The Draft Programmatic SEIS for the groundfish fisheries is due out in late January. Some of you may have gotten notice of that from NMFS, requesting whether you wanted a CD of that document. This document will be huge, with several appendices, and difficult for us to reproduce hard copies for everyone. Between us and NMFS, we will be able to provide hard copies of that document to those who want it, but are encouraging everyone in the Council family to take the CD option. Likewise, I am encouraging the industry and public to get the document on CD from NMFS. Council review and comments on this document would be tentatively scheduled for April.

Travel claims

We need you to get all travel claims (for this meeting and any previous meetings) into Gail ASAP so that we can deal with end of the year budgeting.

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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November 30, 2000

Dr. Clarence Pautzke
NMFS - F/SF
1315 East West Highway, Room 13362
Silver Springs, MD 20910

Dear Clarence:

Per your request, we are providing comments on the Report to Congress on the Status of Fisheries in the United States, December 2000.

There are some inaccuracies in the text section. The report says that rainbow trout in both the GOA and BSAI groundfish FMPs are classified as forage fish and are no longer contained in the management unit. While the anadromous strain of rainbow trout (steelhead) are a prohibited species, they were never considered a forage fish and have never been part of the management unit. The report also notes that the listing of eastern GOA walleye pollock and BSAI walleye pollock was changed from "not overfished" to "unknown". Based on the tables, the report summary is actually referring to the Bogoslof stock of pollock, the Aleutian Islands stock of pollock, and the eastern Gulf of Alaska pollock. Certainly we wouldn't consider the status of eastern Bering Sea pollock to be "unknown", since we know more about this stock than any other groundfish in Alaska.

The issue of listing each and every of the very minor stocks is troublesome for several reasons. First, most if not all of these stocks are non-commercial species. They are not targeted and are only caught incidentally. The status of these stocks in the area will never be known, and hence always listed as "status unknown". Together, these two factors give the false impression that NMFS is allowing fisheries to occur on stocks with no information; this would be contrary to the precautionary approach. Lastly, many of these species are outside of their normal range and truly not part of any commercial catches. For example, the listing of BSAI FMP species includes 31 species of other rockfish, 22 species of sculpin, 18 species of miscellaneous other flatfish, and 14 species of skate. These species are listed in the SAFE documents, in some cases only because one specimen was identified by a fishery observer. Most of these fish species are at the extreme edge, or even outside of their normal range. To illustrate this point, the adjacent table lists a few of these other rockfish species and their corresponding range from the Peterson Field Guide (Eshmeyer et al. 1983). If the NMFS insists on including these

Selected species of BSAI other rockfish and their listed range.

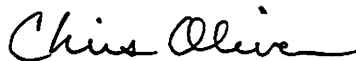
Aurora rockfish	Southern British Columbia to central Baja.
Chilipepper rockfish	Vancouver Island to south Baja.
Blackgill rockfish	Washington to central Baja.
Vermilian rockfish	Queen Charlotte Island to central Baja.
Chameleon rockfish	Monteray Bay to Newport Beach, CA.
Yellowmouth rockfish	Sitka to Crescent City, CA.
Rosy rockfish	Puget Sound to central Baja.
Pink rose rockfish	San Pedro Island, CA to central Baja.

species in their annual report to Congress, the Council could consider amending the FMP to delete many of these minor species from the FMP. There are over 150 species of fish in Alaska (Bakkala 1993), the report to Congress lists 114 species, but the fishery targets only 15 species.

Concerning the definition of 'major' and 'minor' stocks, using a threshold of 200,000 pounds (91 mt) landed seems to be somewhat inappropriate for Bering Sea stocks. First, fishery statistics in the North Pacific region are based on the amount of fish caught, whether or not they are "landed" or discarded at sea. Second, a single threshold level may not be appropriate for the entire US; catch of what we consider secondary species in the Bering Sea may be more than the total fish caught in some regions such as the Carribean. For example, butter sole and starry flounder are listed as major stocks in BSAI fisheries because the SAFE indicates that 1999 catches were 757 mt and 212 mt, respectively. It is likely, however, that almost none of these fish are landed. Interestingly, some stocks with much higher catches are considered minor stocks, such as AI northern rockfish (catches of 4,400 mt in 1999). Other criteria for identifying 'major' and 'minor' species should be considered.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this important document. If you have additional questions, please contact Dave Witherell at our office.

Sincerely,



Chris Oliver
Acting Executive Director