Executive Director's Report

Staff Changes

Two members of the Council staff, Brent Paine and Regina Stewart, left us during December. Brent is working now for United Catcher Boats Association as their Executive Director and Regina has returned to Houston to be closer to her family. Both did a great job and will be missed. We have vacancy notices out now and I hope we fill their positions by the April meeting.

June 1994 Council Meeting

We finally have located space in Anchorage at the Hilton for the June 6-10, 1994 Council meeting. The room rates will be high that time of year, but Anchorage is very centrally located and transportation costs will be considerably lower than in Juneau, the other site considered. Persons attending the meeting will need to have their reservations by April 5. We will make reservations for the "Council Family." If you do not plan to attend please call Judy. We have a block of rooms for the public at a rate of $177 plus tax, per day (the normal summer rate is $220-280). Reservations for these rooms must also be made by April 5.

Marine Mammal Consortium to Meet

Item B-1(a) is a meeting announcement for the consortium to present the results of their first year's research on Steller sea lions in the North Pacific. The meeting is very timely because comments are due by January 31 on the proposal by NMFS to consider the Steller sea lion for listing as "endangered." The FR notice was in your December notebooks under B-1. Related to this is a letter from Council member Pereyra seeking further review and comment on the Steller population viability analysis we reviewed in September. I have included his letter under item B-1(b) along with the SSC minutes from September. Time permitting, the SSC may have additional comments later in the week.

Pacific Pelagics

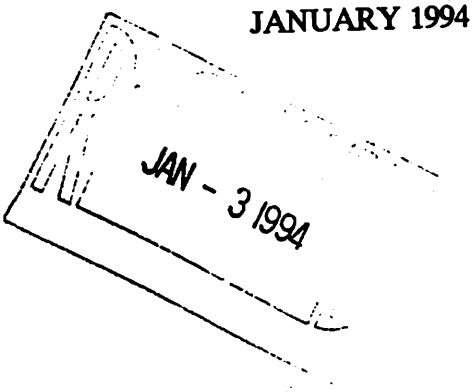
Item B-1(c) is a letter from the Western Pacific Council seeking concurrence from the Pacific and North Pacific Councils that the Western Pacific Council lead in developing data reporting amendments for the Pacific pelagic fisheries management plan. Those fisheries include bigeye, yellowfin, bluefin, albacore and skipjack tuna, broadbill swordfish, blue and striped marlin, wahoo, and dolphin (mahimahi). Boats out of Dutch Harbor are beginning to fish pelagics outside the Hawaiian EEZ. The Council wants to collect data from them since those stocks are common to waters within 200 miles fished from the islands. An article by Mark Lundsten is under B-1(d).

PSMFC Director Named

Randy Fisher, Director of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, has been names as Guy Thornburgh's replacement at the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. Item B-1(e) is a news release from the Commission.

June 1995 Council Meeting

We originally intended to go to Kodiak in June 1995. Item B-1(e) is an invitation to Dutch Harbor. Judy Willoughby will provide some cost comparisons for your consideration.



MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

What: The North Pacific Universities Marine Mammal Research Consortium will present the results and progress of its first year's research on Steller sea lions in the North Pacific

When: January 26, 1994

Time: 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Where: Building No. 9, National Marine Fisheries Service, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, Washington (see enclosed map)

The North Pacific Marine Science Foundation Board of Directors cordially invites the many sponsors of this industry funded research program to the inaugural annual meeting of the foundation. The foundation's unique research consortium, headed by Dr. P. A. Larkin, and research coordinator Dr. A. W. Trites, incorporates a group of research scientists from the University of Alaska, University of British Columbia, University of Washington, and Oregon State University. These investigators will give a summary of their studies to the sponsors. Other interested persons associated with the commercial fishing industry are welcome to attend.

JR/650

AGENDA B-1(b)
JANUARY 1994

ProFish

JAN - 3

December 30, 1993

Mr. Rick Lauber, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
P.O. Box 103136
Anchorage, Alaska

Re: Steller sea lion status review

Dear Rick:

As you are no doubt aware, NMFS has published a notice in Federal Register Vol. 58, No. 209 dated November 1, 1993 alerting the public that they are initiating a status review of the Steller sea lion to determine whether a change in status to endangered is warrented. The comment period expires on January 31, 1994.

This is a very significant initiative, and one which I feel the council and the appropriate council committees, e.g. SSC, should review in full at our January council meeting. Of particular note is the extensive reference in the notice to the results of a population viability analysis (PVA) which was recently prepared on a portion of the Steller sea lion population. Using data on the observed 1985-1992 population trend at the Kenai-Kiska index sites, the PVA model predicted "a high probability of extinction within 100 years for the Alaska Steller sea lion population."

Extinction of the Alaska Steller sea lion population is a frightening statement with all sorts of implications for the management of the fisheries under our jurisdiction. As such, it would certainly appear to be deserving of scrutiny by the council family. Furthermore, I understand that the basis for this PVA model exercise has not been universally accepted by the scientific community.

If you concur with my concerns and decide to have the Council take up this issue, I would hope that we could have a report from the SSC on the scientific validity of the PVA model, its application to the Steller sea lion data and the conclusions on extinction probability which are inferred from the results.

Thank you for your considerations of my concerns.

Sincerely,

Wally

Walter T. Pereyra

400 North 34th St., Suite 303 Seattle, WA 98103 USA (206) 632-6761 FAX (206) 632-6762 Telex 320355 PROFISH

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Richard B. Lauber, Chairman
Clarence G. Pautzke, Executive Director

605 West 4th Avenue
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 103136
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

Telephone: (907) 271-2809
FAX: (907) 271-2817

Certified: _____
Date: _____

MINUTES
Scientific & Statistical Committee
September 20-22, 1993

The Scientific and Statistical Committee of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council met September 20-22, 1993 at the Hilton Hotel in Anchorage. All members were present except for F. H. Bud Fay and Marc Miller:

Terrance Quinn, Chair	Doug Eggers	Jack Tagart
William Clark, Co-chair	Dan Huppert	Harold Weeks
William Aron	Richard Marasco	
Keith Criddle	Phil Rigby	

B-5 BERING SEA ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH

The SSC received a report from Dr. David Policansky of the National Research Council on the Bering Sea Ecosystem study being initiated at the request of the U.S. Department of State. The Department of State has expressed several concerns regarding the health of the Bering Sea ecosystem, as indicated by the declines in some marine mammal, marine bird, and fish populations. These have an important bearing on international marine resource policy issues, especially with the Russian Confederation and Japan.

Dr. Policansky reviewed the composition of the study committee and outlined its task statement. The Committee is to review and synthesize existing information on the Bering Sea ecosystem, and address whether conclusions can be drawn regarding the structure and function of the ecosystem, the declines of certain components, and whether our understanding recommends alternative management and research approaches.

The Committee is meeting in Anchorage on September 22 - 24 and in Seattle on December 1 - 3. The Committee's report is expected in fall 1994.

The SSC is willing to assist the Committee in the accomplishment of its task.

B-6 STELLER SEA LIONS

Richard Merrick, NMML, AFSC reported on the status of the recovery plan (published December 1992) and the designation of critical habitats for sea lions.

Merrick reported on late winter and spring surveys for sea lions from the Eastern Gulf to the Western Aleutians. Distributions from this survey show differences with previous summer surveys in that the Central GOA and Eastern Aleutian Islands have shown a disproportionate decrease, while surrounding areas have increased proportionately. Pup surveys for the area from SE Alaska to the Eastern Aleutians for 1990-91 and 1992-93 were compared. A 20% decline of pup production was reported ranging from 0.0% in the Eastern Gulf to a 32.6% decline in the Central Gulf. Big declines may reflect disappearance of the 1987-1988 year class of females: only 15 of 414 female pups were observed to return to Marmot Island during 1991-93 breeding seasons.

Merrick also reported on his and Anne York's viability analysis modeling for sea lions. Depending on a variety of key assumptions, the analysis suggests rookeries will begin to disappear in some areas in about 20 years and extinction for the population as a whole could occur in 100-160 years, if trends continue.

Merrick also reported on recent studies, included in the SAFE document, showing importance of pollock as a dominant food item for sea lions in the 1970s-1980s in all areas, apart from Kodiak in the 1970s when capelin were about equal importance to pollock. Prime prey are 1-3 year old pollock. Scat samples in Aleutians show importance of Atka mackerel with importance increasing from east to west.

C-4 SABLEFISH AND HALIBUT IFQs

Alaska Commercial Fishery Entry Commission staff summarized the analyses of the "Sitka Block" and "Full Partial Block". During the presentation it was indicated that administration costs could either increase or decrease, transaction costs would increase, monitoring/enforcement costs would increase, and the costs of harvesting fish would likely be higher. The SSC agrees with these conclusions.

Restrictions on transferability of quota share, such as the block proposals, are sure to entail some costs even if they cannot be estimated. As indicated in our June minutes:

> "Whenever the government limits the choices of vessel operators, the most efficient choices are ruled out for some operators. It is not possible to say who will be hurt, small operators or large, but there are sure to be some adverse effects because some operators will not be able to adjust their holdings of quota share quickly and easily to match the needs of there operations."

Adoption of either of these proposals will reduce the economic benefits that will accrue from ITQ's, but the actual magnitude of the reduction cannot be quantified at present. Further, while the proposals do restrict the maximum potential consolidation of the fleets, it is not known whether or not social gains are large enough to compensate for the reduction.

C-6 SCALLOP MANAGEMENT

The SSC reviewed the revised analysis of management alternatives, which contained additional information on scallops and the fishery as the Committee had requested in June. Public testimony was received from both the Wanchese Fish Company and the Kodiak Fish Company in support of a moratorium, the inclusion of scallops under an FMP under Alternative 2 or 3, and other measures to limit and rationalize the fishery.

AGENDA B-1(c)
JANUARY 1994

WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
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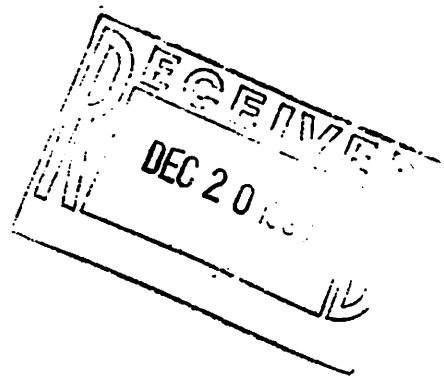
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL



10 December 1993

Mr. Richard B. Lauber, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
P.O. Box 103136
Anchorage, AK 99510

Dear Mr. Lauber:

In order to more efficiently manage and utilize high-value pelagic fish resources of the Pacific, the Western Pacific Council seeks approval from your Council to proceed with a request for the Western Pacific Council to be designated as the Council responsible for management of pelagic fish resources in the central and western Pacific Ocean, as per 50 CFR §601.12 (a).

The area of responsibility of the Council includes over 1.5 million square miles of US Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters in the central and western Pacific Ocean. This area is comparable to half the size of the continental USA. The Council's pelagic Fishery Management Plan (FMP) includes species of major commercial and recreational importance, in particular-- bigeye, yellowfin, bluefin, albacore and skipjack tuna, broadbill swordfish, blue and striped marlin, wahoo, and dolphin (mahimahi). Management of these fisheries is complicated by the wide-ranging migratory behavior that is characteristic of pelagic fishes in the open Pacific, and by the large number of nations whose fleets target these species. Even though stock boundaries are still mostly unknown, they are believed to be hundreds-to-thousands of miles wide and commonly traverse many political boundaries.

Pacific pelagic stocks regulated in part under NMFS regulations implementing the Council's FMP, are increasingly being harvested by longline and purse seine vessels based on the US west coast and in Alaska, and by foreign fishing vessels. To manage effectively, it is important to monitor catch statistics from all fisheries on these stocks. This will require mutual collaboration among all user groups, whether the fleet is based in Hawaii, other states or foreign countries. Our goal is to maximize economic benefits from these resources for the US while conserving the vitality of Pacific pelagic stocks. We feel it would be inappropriate, for example without such collaboration, for a county (e.g., USA) to unilaterally sacrifice its economic viability through conservation efforts (e.g., protection of sea turtles; stock maximum sustainable yield concerns) at the expense of other countries (e.g., Japan, Taiwan, Korea) who impose no self-restrictions on high-seas fishing and impacting our stocks.

As a first step to managing this expansive fishery, agreement among the Western Pacific, Pacific and North Pacific Councils is needed. A recent memo (from NOAA General Counsel) addresses legal aspects of pelagics FMP jurisdiction. In this situation, we feel that this goal will be accomplished most successfully and cost-effective when a single Council is in charge. Regulation 50 CFR §601.12(a) provides that the Secretary may designate a single Council to prepare the FMP/amendments, in consultation with the other Councils. Therefore, with approval from the North Pacific and Pacific Councils, we would like to request that the Western Pacific Council be designated as the Council charged with Pacific pelagic fisheries management. Primary reasons to support such a designation are:

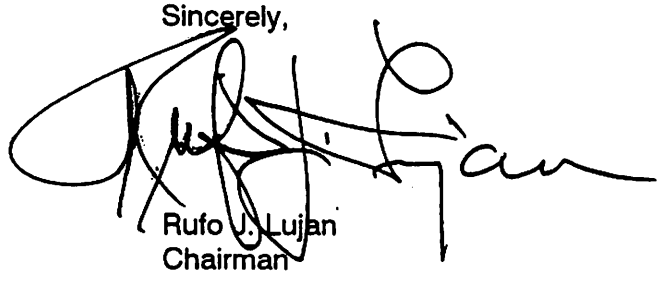
1) the Western Pacific Council is the only Council with a migratory pelagic FMP;
2) Hawaii is the base for the majority of the domestic Pacific longline fleet;
3) logbooks for data collection from longliners have already been established;
4) pelagics are our region's most valuable fishery, and are quite important to the people of small Pacific islands; and
5) our Council is participating in a recently initiated long-term and multidisciplinary program of research on Pacific pelagic fish/fisheries, to improve the information base necessary for effective management.

As the designated Council for western and central Pacific pelagics fisheries management, we would work with the west coast States and the North Pacific and Pacific Councils to acquire the needed data from existing systems. If the available data is not sufficient, an amendment could then be prepared to require reporting of catch and effort statistics from all domestic boats that fish on pelagic stocks managed by the Western Pacific Council. Obtaining data from foreign fleets fishing on our pelagic stocks anywhere in the Pacific would be a subsequent goal. For any proposed action, adequate review opportunity would be given to the North Pacific and Pacific Councils, and Pacific states, with the NMFS having final approval authority on any FMP amendment.

For the above reasons -- we request that your Council consider this issue and, hopefully, approve a request for the Western Pacific Council to be designated as the single Council responsible for the management of highly-migratory pelagic fish stocks in the central and western Pacific Ocean.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Rufo J. Lujan
Chairman

cc: C. Pautzke, NPRFMC
S. Pennoyer, NMFS RD/AK
C. Rosier, DF&G/AK

Subpart B—Boundaries

§601.11 Intercouncil boundaries.

(a) *New England and Mid-Atlantic Councils.* The boundary begins at the intersection point of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York at 41°18'16.249" N. latitude and 71°54'28.477" W. longitude and proceeds south 37°22'32.75" E. to the point of intersection with the outward boundary of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as specified in the Magnuson Act.

(b) *Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Councils.* The boundary begins at the seaward boundary between the States of Virginia and North Carolina, and proceeds due east to the point of intersection with the outward boundary of the EEZ as specified in the Magnuson Act.

(c) *South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Councils.* The boundary coincides with the line of demarcation between the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, which begins at the intersection of the outer boundary of the EEZ, as specified in the Magnuson Act, and 83°00' W. longitude, proceeds northward along that meridian to 24°35' N. latitude (near the Dry Tortugas Islands), thence eastward along that parallel, through Rebecca Shoal and the Quicksand Shoal, to the Marquessas Keys, and then through the Florida Keys to the mainland at the eastern end of Florida Bay, the line so running that the narrow waters within the Dry Tortugas Islands, the Marquessas Keys and the Florida Keys, and between the Florida Keys and the mainland, are within the Gulf of Mexico.

§601.12 Intercouncil fisheries.

If any fishery extends beyond the geographical area of authority of any one Council, the Secretary may:

(a) Designate a single Council to prepare the FMP for such fishery and any amendments to such FMP, in consultation with the other Councils concerned; or

(b) Require that the FMP and any amendments be prepared jointly by all the Councils concerned.

(1) A jointly prepared FMP or amendment must be adopted by a majority of the voting members, present and voting, of each participating Council. Different conservation and management measures may be developed for specific geographic areas, but the FMP should address the entire geographic range of the stock(s).

(2) In the case of joint FMP or amendment preparation, one Council will be designated as the "administrative lead." The "administrative lead" Council is responsible for the preparation of the FMP or any amendments and other required documents for submission to the Secretary.

(3) None of the Councils involved in joint preparation may withdraw without Secretarial approval. If Councils cannot agree on approach or management measures within a reasonable period of time, the Secretary may designate a single Council to prepare the FMP or may issue the FMP under Secretarial authority.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Office of General Counsel
Southwest Regional Office
Long Beach Federal Building
501 West Ocean Blvd., Suite 4470
Long Beach, CA 90802-4213
Telephone: (310) 980-4067

September 10, 1993

MEMORANDUM FOR: Members of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council

FROM: Martin Hochman, Southwest Regional Counsel

SUBJECT: Pelagics FMP Jurisdiction

This memorandum addresses the extent to which the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council can further regulate fishing activities for Pelagic Species in the Pacific Ocean which do not involve fishing, possessing, receiving, transhipping, or landing pelagic species shoreward of the outer boundary of the EEZ's surrounding Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, CNMI, and the other territories and possessions in the Council's area of designated jurisdiction (see section 302(a)(8) of the Magnuson Act). The Pelagics regulations now require one of these contacts as a basis for requiring permits and the application of regulatory measures.

The regulations implementing the Pelagics FMP define the management unit species ("Pacific pelagic management unit species") by listing many species of fish, including Mahimahi, marlin, spearfish, oceanic sharks, sailfish, swordfish, tunas, and wahoo. The introductory section of the regulations (50 CFR § 685.1) states that the regulations govern the conservation and management of the pacific pelagic management unit species in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the Pacific Ocean, excluding the portions of the EEZ seaward of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California. The prohibitions section of the regulations is crafted to regulate fishing activities outside the EEZ only when the contacts discussed in the first paragraph above exist between the fishing activities and the areas shoreward of the outer boundary of the EEZs surrounding the State of Hawaii, CNMI, Guam, American Samoa, and the other possessions and territories within the Council's designated jurisdiction.

If the Council wants to extend the reach of the Pelagics FMP to US vessels fishing in the Pacific Ocean Area that don't have these contacts with the EEZ's surrounding Hawaii, etc., there must be necessary and appropriate fishery management and conservation reasons satisfying the requirements of the Magnuson Act (the requirements must be reasonably related to the fishery conservation and management needs connected to the EEZs within the Council's designated jurisdiction). (see National Fisheries Institute, Inc. v. Mosbacher, 732 F. Supp. 210, 214 (D.C. Cir.

1990) To pursue this option, the Council must obtain, under 50 CFR §601.12 "Intercouncil fisheries", the designation by the Secretary of Commerce (in effect, the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries) as the Council to manage a fishery which extends beyond the geographical area of authority of any one council. The Council would then amend the FMP and the regulations in consultation with the other affected councils (North Pacific and Pacific would most likely be involved if the vessels to be regulated used, or might use, the EEZs of these councils).

Longlining 'dinosaurs' out of Dutch Harbor

With Alaska's halibut and blackcod fisheries wearing thin, the author and a few partners mapped out a new strategy for swordfishing in waters well to the north of Hawaii. They learned a few things — and even caught some fish.

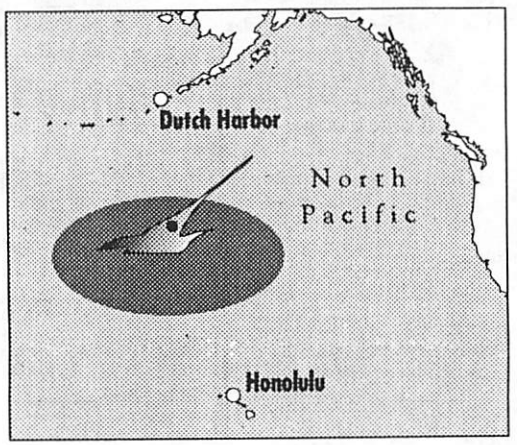
By Mark Lundsten

We were into our second day longlining for swordfish, and I hadn't learned much. For one thing, I didn't know what it meant when buoys are bunched up together except that the gear is certainly snarled. The buoys are spaced 1/8 mile apart to float the longline and mark the position of the string along its 30- to 40-mile length. And when we came up that morning to three floats in a bunch, I thought I'd just screwed up when I set — but I was about to be educated in another of the complexities of pelagic longlining.

The weather had been beautiful for days (and would be for most of the summer): flat calm with either dense fog or sunshine. Our first day, we hauled 30 miles in a clean, straight line of buoys and gear and caught about 100 blue sharks, three or four lancetfish — and zero swordfish. Now it looked like I'd managed to set a drift snarl, a skill for which I show occasional prowess in the blackcod and halibut business.

As the rollerman hauled the floats up and over the rail, pulling in all the loose ends, the white bulk of the snarl itself looked like a fish as it rose through the water. One long bite extended under the boat without much strain on it, and then one of the guys started yelling. "It's a fish! It's a swordfish! Swordfish!" Then everybody was yelling the same thing all at once, just to make sure we all understood.

The bill broke into the sun from the calm water with just the slightest sign of life, and our well-planned, carefully executed new operation broke into pandemonium. We'd rigged our boat and gear systematically, run out to the middle of nowhere to set and haul it, and now that we'd actually caught one of these huge fish, we had to do something with it.



With surprisingly little effort — but a lot of hollering — we used the longest gaffs and brought it to the rail where we put the eye-hook into one eye and out the other. Pulling on the block and tackle to lift it aboard, we watched as its sword kept rising and its body kept emerging from the water. We juggled its bill below the boom and swung its weight over the rail, lowered the block and let the fish rest on the hatch cover, where it extended well over each side, barely moving. The commotion settled and the operation came to a halt as we simply admired its bill and its fins, its size, and its blue-and-silver sheen.

That fish would weigh out at about 250 lbs., headed and gutted, and was well over our 160-lb. average for the first of three trips last summer from Dutch Harbor, Alaska, down to the northern edge of the Pacific warm water fishing grounds.

The Lure of Freedom

The expedition really began a few years ago, as Tim Martin of the Immigrant and Dave Ericksen of the Memories each started thinking of ways to get to the swordfish grounds from Alaska. The Hawaiian fleet — mostly a collection of boats from the East Coast, where the swordfish have become sadly depleted — developed a fishery five or six years ago when a few of them tried targeting swordfish instead of just taking them as bycatch in the ahi fishery. Their success was the spark that caused the Hawaiian longline fleet to balloon from a few score boats to well over 100, and prompted the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council to implement a limited entry plan for longliners in the Hawaiian FCZ.

By 1992, that fleet had spread its effort to the northern warm water edge, well beyond Hawaii and within range of Dutch Harbor — closer, in fact, to Dutch than to Honolulu. It was no secret that the boats in that area had done very well. If the fish were still there this year, and if we could get them out of Dutch to market without spending too much on freight, we could finesse ourselves into a new summer fishery.

The freedom to look for fish over a huge area was the main allure of this project. All three of us had been longlining for blackcod and halibut in Alaska — the only kind of fishing I'd done for 15 years. Those fisheries had given us steady production but were slacking off now. A flood of new participants was slicing the pie so many ways that individual production had dropped all over the fleet, waste of the fish had grown endemic, and, in short, the fishery had become a disgrace and no fun at all. Traditional management techniques, until we implement the IFQ plan due in 1995, seemed unable to help, and every day seemed less like fishing and more like searching for another parking space for our gear. By going swordfishing, we could really look for fish again. We just didn't realize how long.

In April, just before we'd all leave for the May 15 blackcod opening in the Gulf of Alaska, Tim held a meeting for eight or 10 Seattle longliners and laid out the possibilities of a Dutch-based swordfishery. We'd need a few boats working together, a well-coordinated (and cheap) freight system to get bait; light sticks and gear to Dutch and then get the fish to market. We'd also need a full-service dock and a buyer who knows the business. The boats would require a whole load of new gear and a range of 2,000 miles, round trip, plus 10 days of fishing (we should've figured 20). Clearly, if any link in the chain was weak, the whole

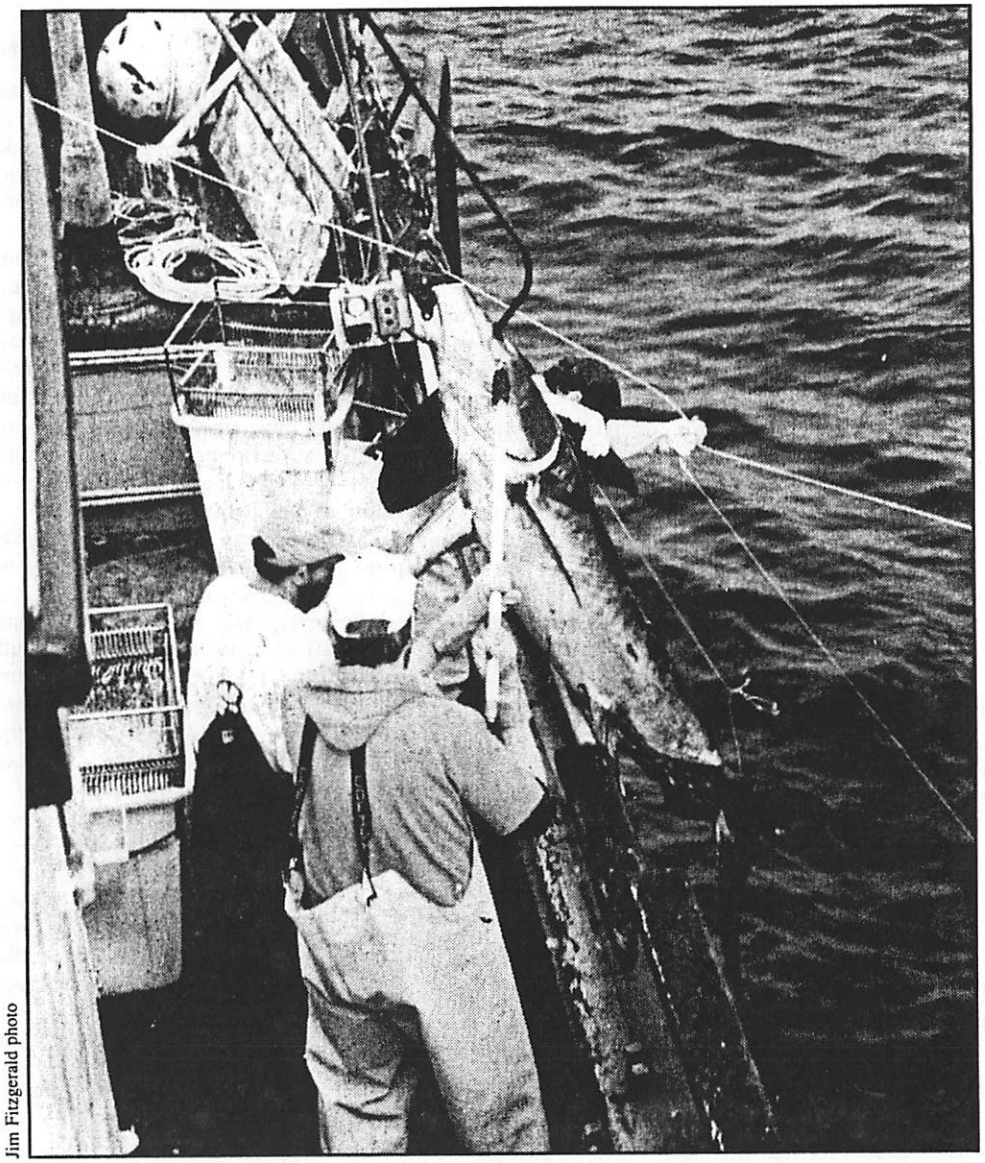
AGENDA B-1(d)
JANUARY 1994

operation would go under.

By late June, Tim Martin's Immigrant, Dave Ericksen's Memories and my Masonic were committed to the adventure, and we converged on Dutch Harbor with the last of our spring season behind us. In less than a week we'd unloaded our trips of blackcod and our conventional gear, rigged our new monofilament gangions and longline, snaps and hooks into tubs, mounted drums on deck, hooked up all the new electronics (temperature gauges, direction finders, weatherfax), and given everything a dry run. Westward Seafoods provided dock space for us, and Tom Kraft and Dragnet Fisheries prepared to market and ship our fish.

Tim's brother Sean had sold and shipped us most of our gear and came up to help us set up both the gear and our decks. Some of Dave's crew on the Memories were experienced swordfishermen; they'd spent an evening or two detailing for the rest of us the intricacies of a safe operation and well-dressed, well-iced fish. By July 3, packed with more ice and fuel than our boats had ever carried (twelve 55-gal. drums on deck), we were on our way.

From the start, the Masonic seemed to be a custom design for a swordfish boat. Besides being a good sea boat and fuel efficient like most halibut schooners, her deck layout accommodated the monofilament snap-on system as if she were built for it. The drum had about an inch of clearance ahead of the deck pump and behind the hatch and was well-centered amidships. With the halibut chute gone from the stern, we tied the tubs neatly next to the setting stations and hooked the floats in clusters above the now-empty bait benches. By way



Jim Fitzgerald photo

The author (bottom) and crewmates Tim Henkel (left) and Peter Black (top) hoist a big sword, its bill removed, aboard the Masonic. The relaxed pace of hauling snap-on gear made the work "a breeze."

of a few blocks, the gear ran from the drum to the roller for hauling, and to the stern for setting. This was going to be a breeze.

And it was. From day one, we picked up the system handily and were soon setting and hauling the full length of gear on the drum in a day. The transition from conventional groundfish longlining to pelagic snap-on was no problem for the crew. In fact, the relatively relaxed pace of hauling pelagic snap-on gear was more like a sportfishing holiday than the old routine of hauling and setting halibut and blackcod gear. It

(Continued on page 50)

The Big Picture.

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Circle Reader Inquiry # 60

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7-8993 Fax
Circle Reader Inquiry # 46

(Continued from page 19)

was my job to put the fish on the boat — that was the tall order.

An Ancient Fish

From the first one we laid out on the hatch, I was intrigued by these fish. Xiphias gladius is so different from other fish, I can't help thinking the species is a leftover from dinosaurs or some other ancient animal. Its mouth is white and completely smooth, like Teflon — more like the bill of a bird than the mouth of a fish — and with no teeth. Yet it is a predator, with only its strength and the long bill for protection from other predators, like sharks. A swordfish's tail is a virtual copy of the tail of a mako shark's (another ancient species), and the caudal fin, peduncle and keel are all shark-like, too, as if sprung from a common ancestor. These fish have no ribs, only a backbone. Their meat is more like a sturgeon's (also ancient) than a halibut's, in that it doesn't flake. The white flesh tastes more like beef than fish. And dressing them uncovers a gut sack, like a deer's.

When everyone's fishing as hard as they can, and the fish keep getting harder to find, I worry that maybe the Pacific is going the way of the Atlantic, and the fish are in a little trouble.

Current science holds, briefly, that dinosaurs were probably fast, strong, more-or-less warm-blooded, in many ways more like birds than reptiles. Swordfish are migratory, and it is this sense of location that reminds me most of the creatures of the Mesozoic. After catching the first one, we got three more in a hurry, all nice ones, and then none the rest of the day. We'd run into a temperature edge, where the fish had obviously congregated.

The next day, I followed the water conditions of the previous day's catch as best I could, and the catch increased to 10 fish (not as much as I hoped). Over the next five or six days, I followed temperature edges and feed layers at different angles all through the area as the water and feed shifted. After a week on the spot, we caught almost all the fish in a two-by-six-mile area; it was as if the fish were staying near an invisible buoy, as if each had its own GPS.

By the end of the summer, it became apparent that swordfish congregate in temperature breaks and feed conditions of a certain sort. But it was also obvious that, on the surface of an ocean of shifting currents and temperatures, they somehow know how to stay in one location. Figuring out when and how they do these things could easily consume a great part of a fishing career.

It consumed me for two months. Our first trip brought in 8,100 lbs. in 10 days — not bad for rank amateurs — and we hoped that August and a waxing moon would lure more fish to the grounds. It did bring a few more, but we had to run a few extra days to find them, with the help of Jerry on the Sea Spray, a friend from Honolulu. We ended up with about 8,500 lbs. in a little less time, our trip cut short because of lack of fuel. We fished in much warmer water, and had an average size of under 100 lbs.

By then, we realized the fish were not where they'd been reported in previous years, and that to find them on any given trip, we needed more fuel capacity. To get the 30,000- to 40,000-lb. trips that would pay well, we'd have to run farther and look longer than we originally thought.

Post Mortem

Our last trip put us in quite a dilemma. In the brief time left before the September halibut opening, we had to run out to the swordfish grounds and decide in a few days of fishing if we could catch enough fish to justify sticking with it, or if we should cut and run to fish halibut. Bullheaded as we are, Dave and I went back out for swords. Tim opted to go on a trip-limit halibut opening in the Aleutians instead.

The first day on the grounds, we awoke to a 30 knot blow and jackass seas. Hauling into it wasn't bad until a front passed over. The wind picked up to about 50 for a half hour or so, and more rain filled the air than I've ever seen in my life — worse than Ketchikan or King Cove, except that it was warm. The good weather of the first two trips had ended along with any sign of fish moving into the area. If anything, the sign was that they had moved out.

Dave and I covered water from 60° to 74° in three days and found less than ever for that duration of time. Sadly, after four months of optimistic planning and exploration, it was obviously time to give up and get our last shot at halibut for the year.

On the way back, Dave made one more set on a 60° edge he found. He said he couldn't help being like the kid in front of a pile of manure who just keeps on digging through it, because there just has to be a pony in there somewhere. His catch was halfway decent, but not enough to stay on. With a five-day run to Dutch, I just wanted to make sure I got to town in time to re-rig for halibut.

On the way in, we learned that two experienced swordfish boats from Honolulu, the Barbara H and the Seeker II, were on their way to Dutch to unload their trips and take advantage of the system we'd set up. In the post-mortem of our expedition, their experience brought added insight. They each had more than 40,000 lbs., had fished well over 20 days to get it and had looked for most of the trip over hundreds of miles before finding a body of fish on which to work. They'd found those fish about three days farther out than where we were. Once they did find them, a number of other boats were on them, too. (Alaska's fleets aren't the only ones looking for parking spaces.) Clearly, for success in 1993 at least, much more time and fuel were necessary than what we'd allotted ourselves.

What seemed like a natural operation for my boat, and what seemed like a fresh breath of freedom both turned out to be only partly accurate. The Masonic simply didn't pack enough fuel to make it work. And that big, wide-open ocean was perhaps a little too big. Dave, on the Seeker II , a boat that is 10' longer than mine and that holds three times the fuel, remarked to me that they were catching some fish but "maxing out these boats completely" to do so.

I can't kick. My consolation prize was our one bigeye tuna on the very last day that weighed 155 lbs., dressed. We handled well enough to sell sashimi grade, and caught one last marlin (we got about a dozen all summer) trolling jigs on the run in. That was fun — and a little bit of glory for a noble effort.

When IFQs are in place and no halibut openings are hanging over our heads, maybe we could make the swordfishery work for boats like ours. Maybe another El Niño will bring the fish closer to Dutch in greater numbers. But I doubt I'll give that scenario a chance. □

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NEWS RELEASE January 5, 1994 NEWS RELEASE

FISHERY COMMISSION ANNOUNCES NEW DIRECTOR

The Pacific States Marine Fishery Commission (PSMFC) announced today that Randy Fisher, current director of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, will become the Commission's new Executive Director. Fisher replaces Guy Thornburgh, who left the Commission in December to enter private industry. Fisher will assume his new duties in February.

"Randy is an outstanding administrator with a proven track record at the helm of large agencies in both Oregon and Washington," said Commission Chairman Jerry Conley, Director of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Fisher came to ODFW in 1986, after serving six years in Washington at its departments of Veterans Affairs and Ecology. In Oregon, Fisher gained a reputation for decisive leadership and a strong conservation ethic. "We're going to miss Randy at ODFW," said Jim Martin, Chief of Fisheries for the Department, "but his talents fit perfectly into PSMFC's mission to coordinate the long term sustainability of our valuable marine fishery resources along the Pacific coast from California to Alaska."

PSMFC is an interstate compact representing California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Alaska. It supports and promotes policies to conserve, develop, and manage fishery resources of mutual concern to member states through a coordinated regional approach to research, monitoring, and utilization. PSMFC maintains regional fishery data bases, and in recent years has supported fishery-based amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act, multi-state management of Dungeness crab, bans on the use of driftnets on the high seas, and habitat education and gillnet recycling programs. "We were impressed by Mr. Fisher's vision of PSMFC as a facilitator between the public and government management agencies on issues dealing with use of our public resources," said Commissioner and Washington State Senator Dean Sutherland.