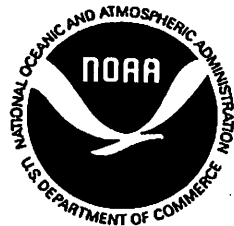


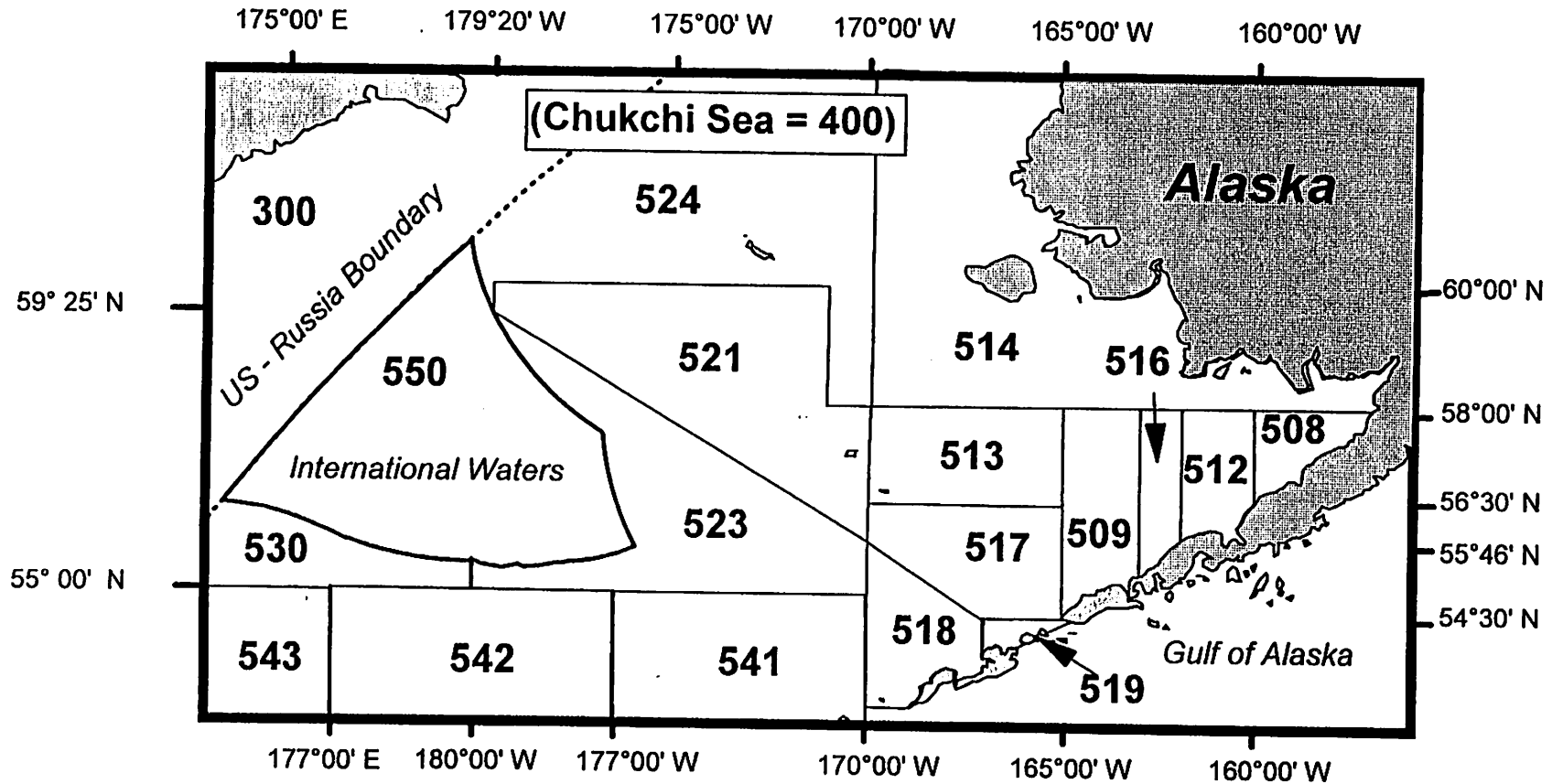
APRIL 1997

**NMFS FISHERIES
MANAGEMENT REPORT**



**BERING SEA &
ALEUTIAN ISLANDS**

1997 REPORTING AREAS OF THE BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS



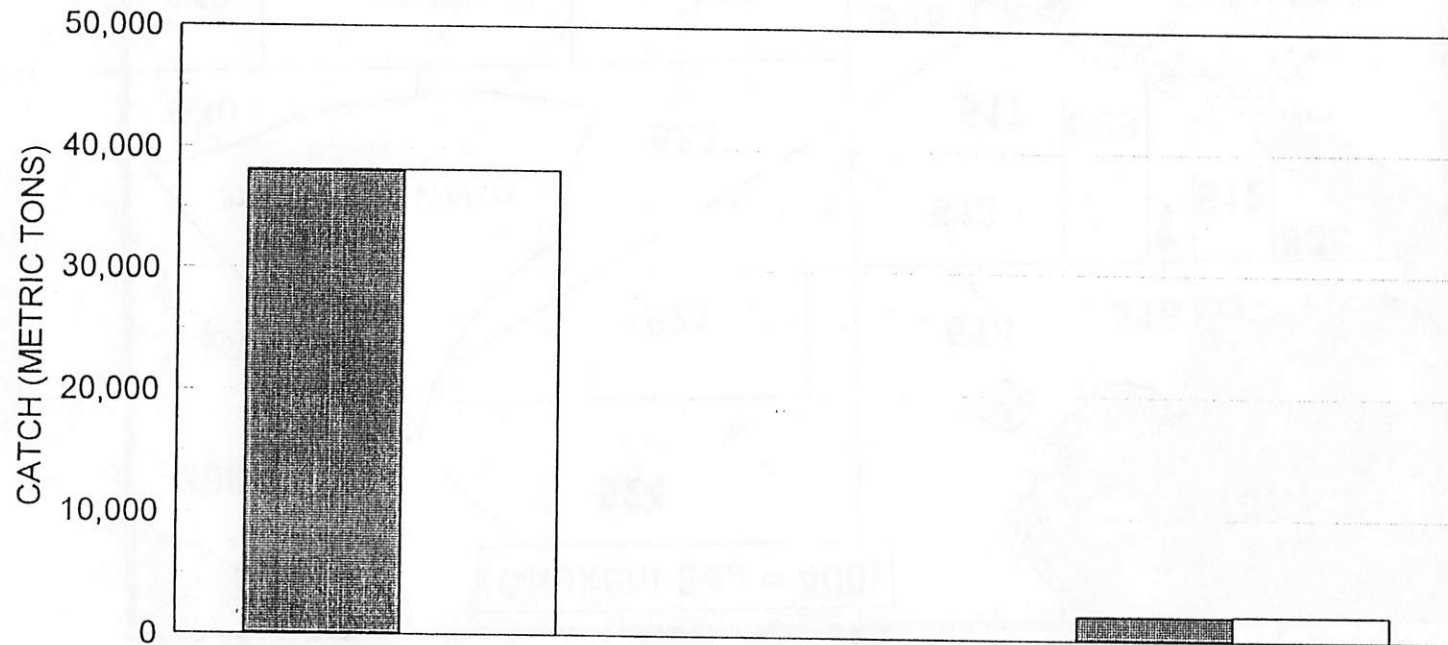
BYCATCH PROTECTION AREAS



Zone 1 = 508 + 509 + 512 + 516

Zone 2 = 513 + 517 + 521

1997

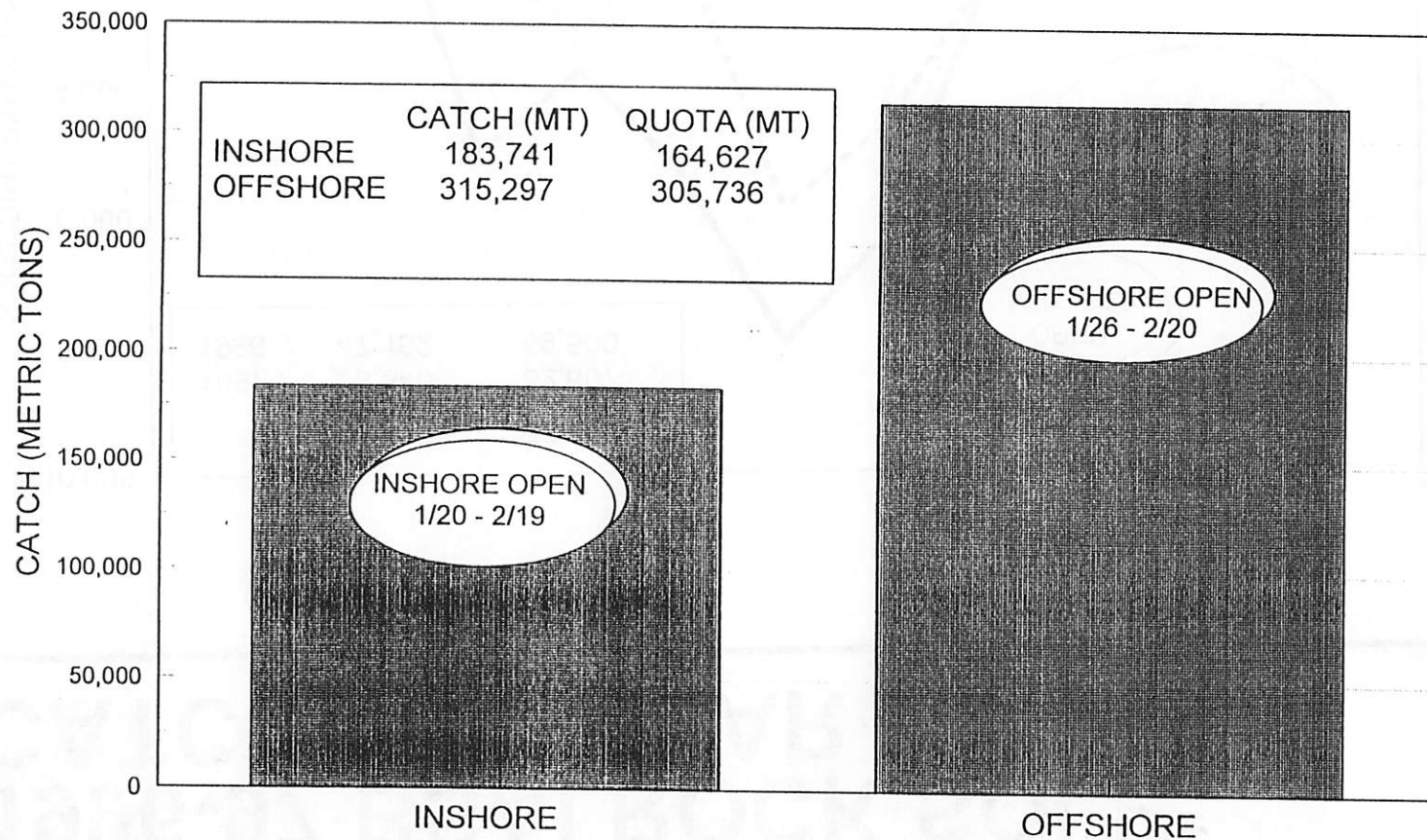
1997 BSAI CDQ POLLOCK



	BS 'A' Season	BS non-'A' Season	Aleutians
CATCH 	38,138	0	2,050
QUOTA 	38,138	0	2,100

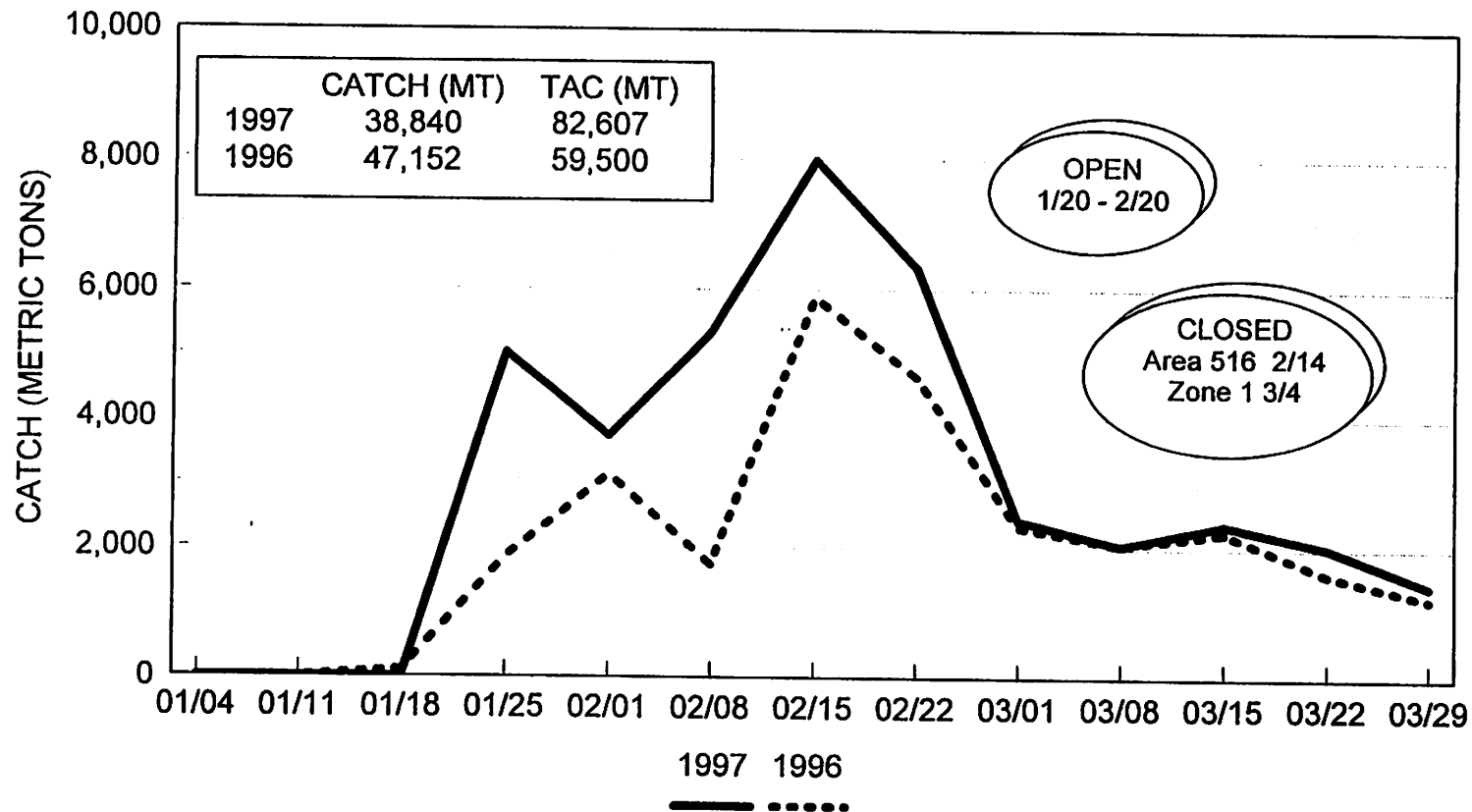
(through 3/29/97)

1997 BERING SEA INSHORE/ OFFSHORE POLLOCK CATCH*



*EXCLUDES CDQ POLLOCK
(through 3/29/97)

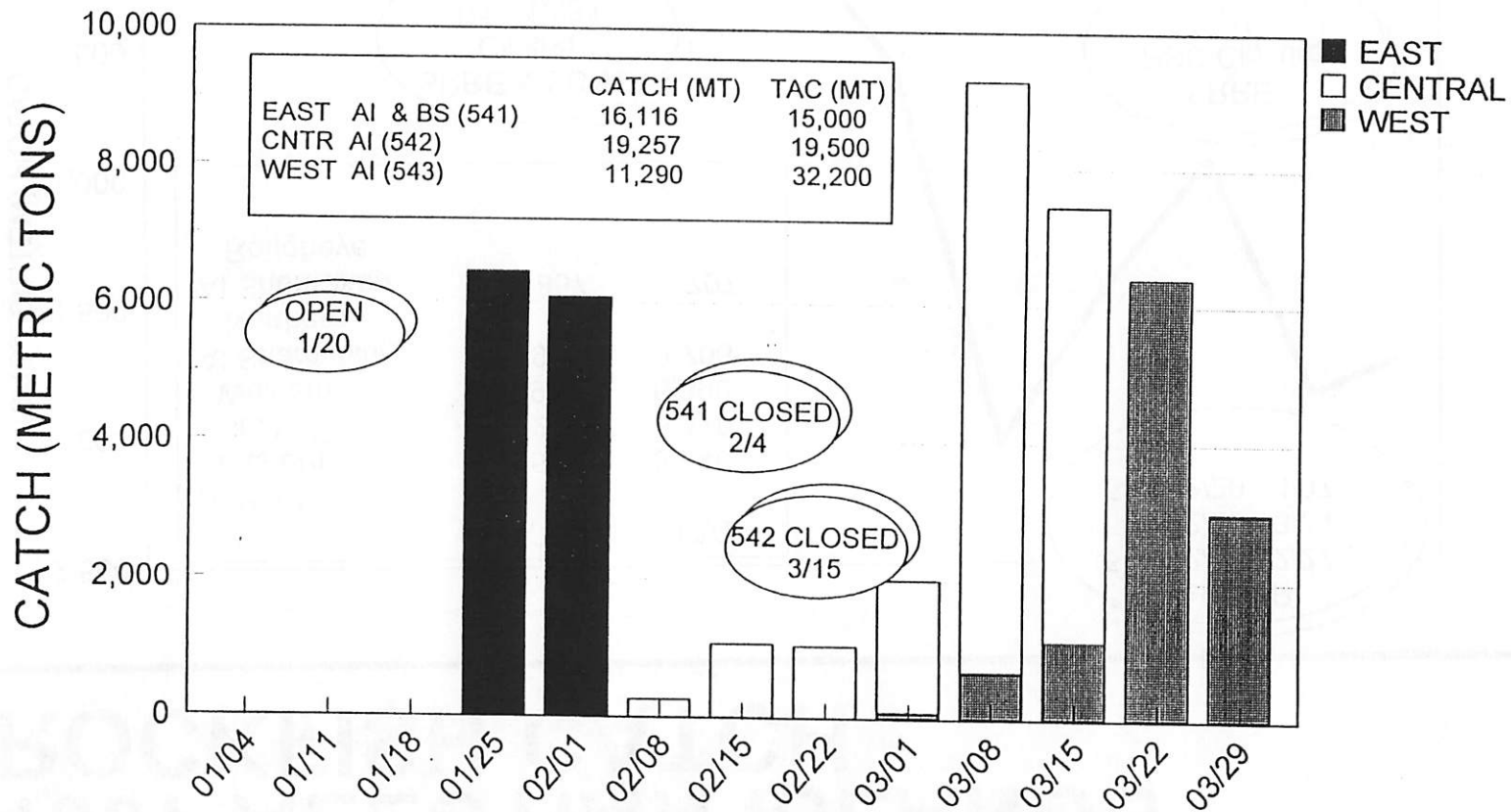
1996-97 BSAI ROCK SOLE* CATCH, ALL GEAR



*Rock sole/flathead sole/other flatfish

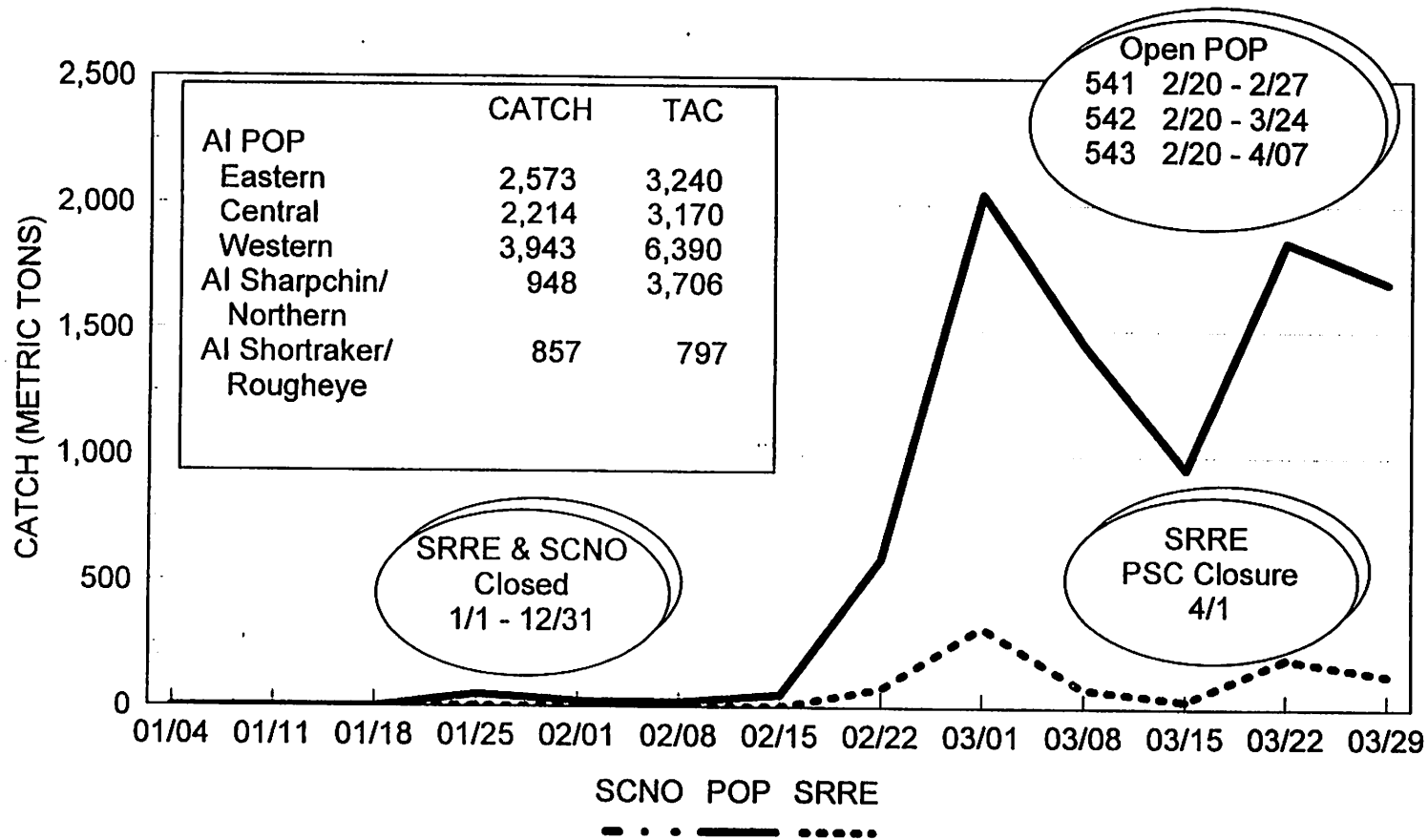
(through 3/29/97)

1997 BSAI TRAWL ATKA MACKEREL CATCH



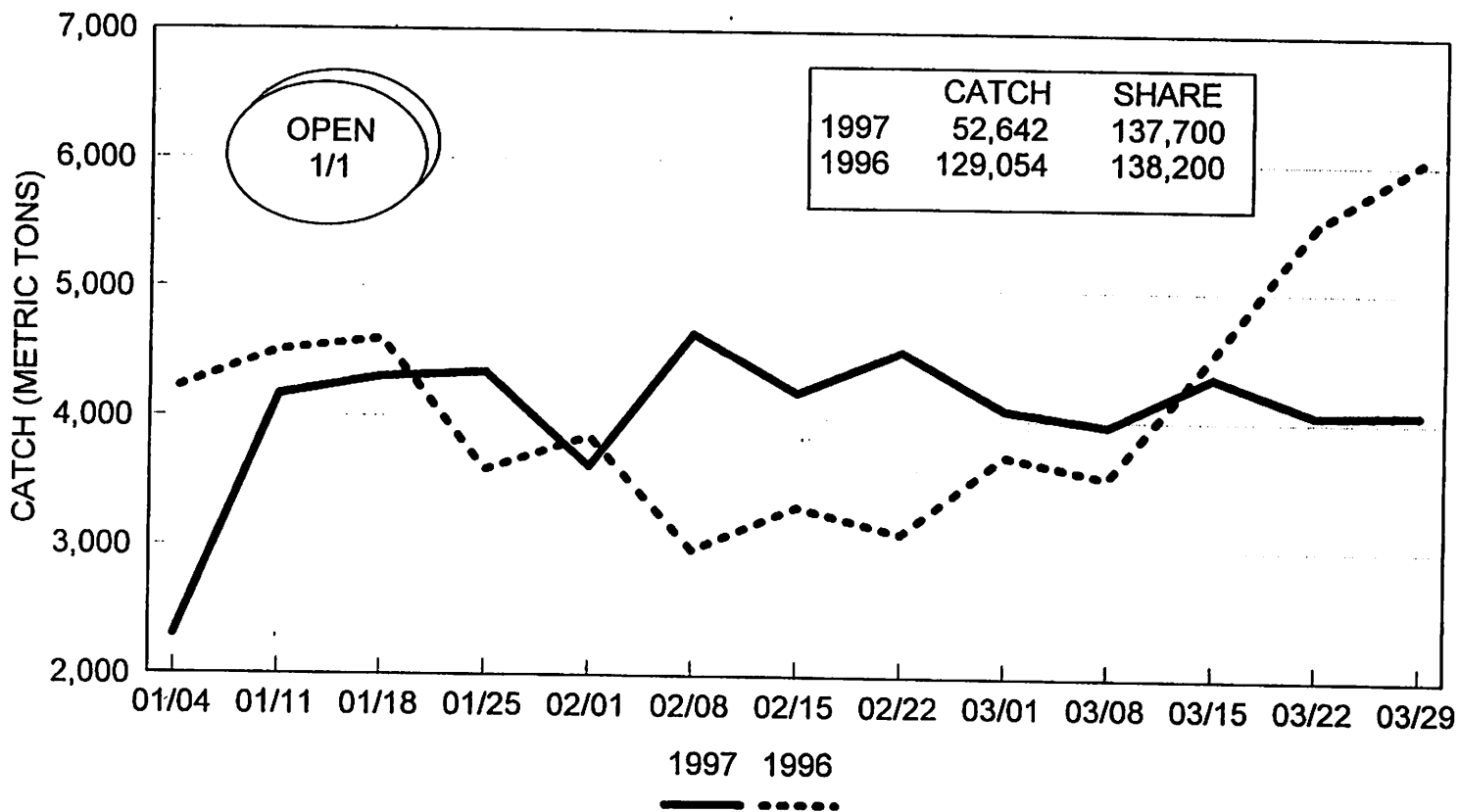
(through 3/29/97)

1997 ALEUTIAN ISLANDS ROCKFISH CATCH



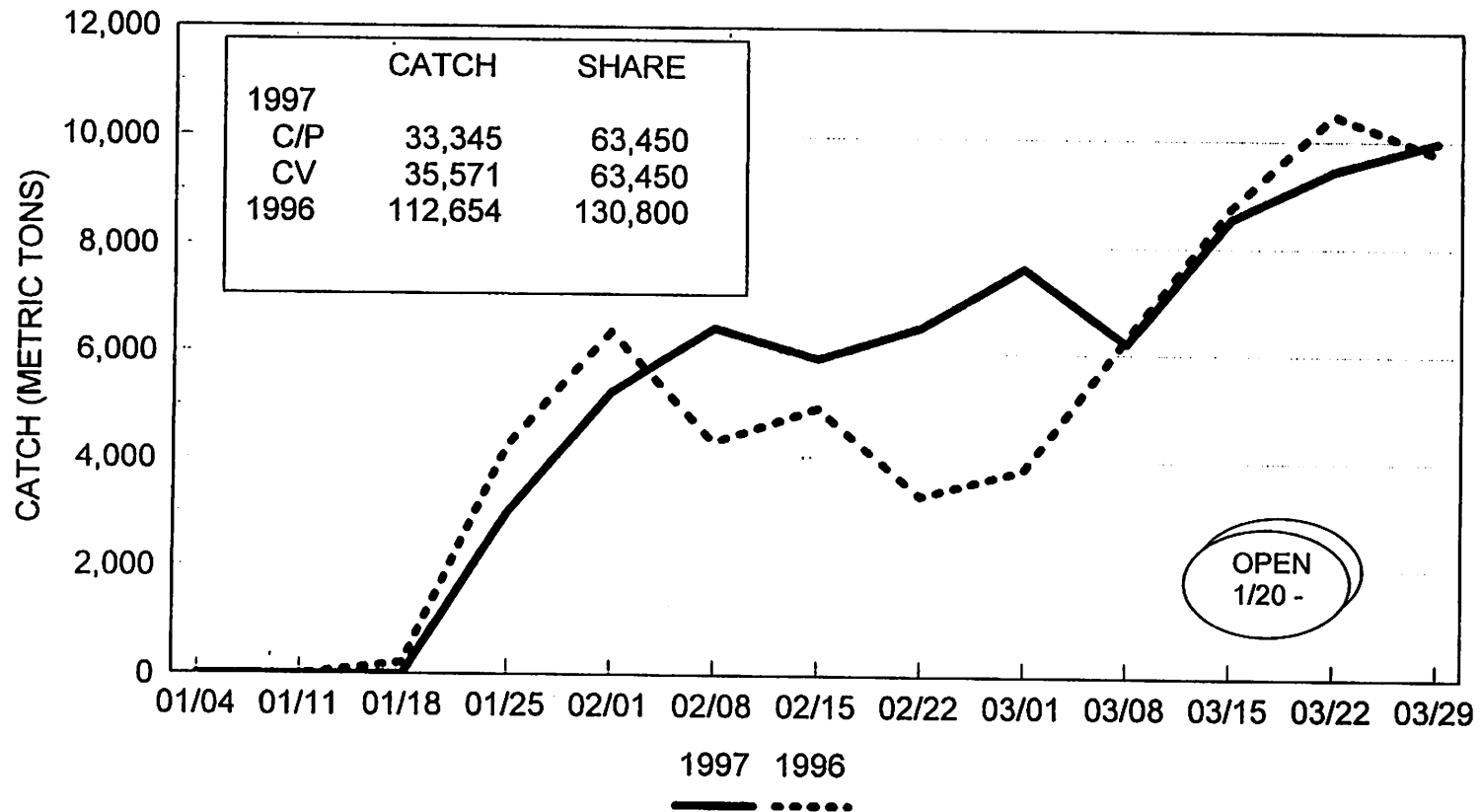
(through 3/29/97)

1996-97 BSAI FIXED GEAR PACIFIC COD CATCH



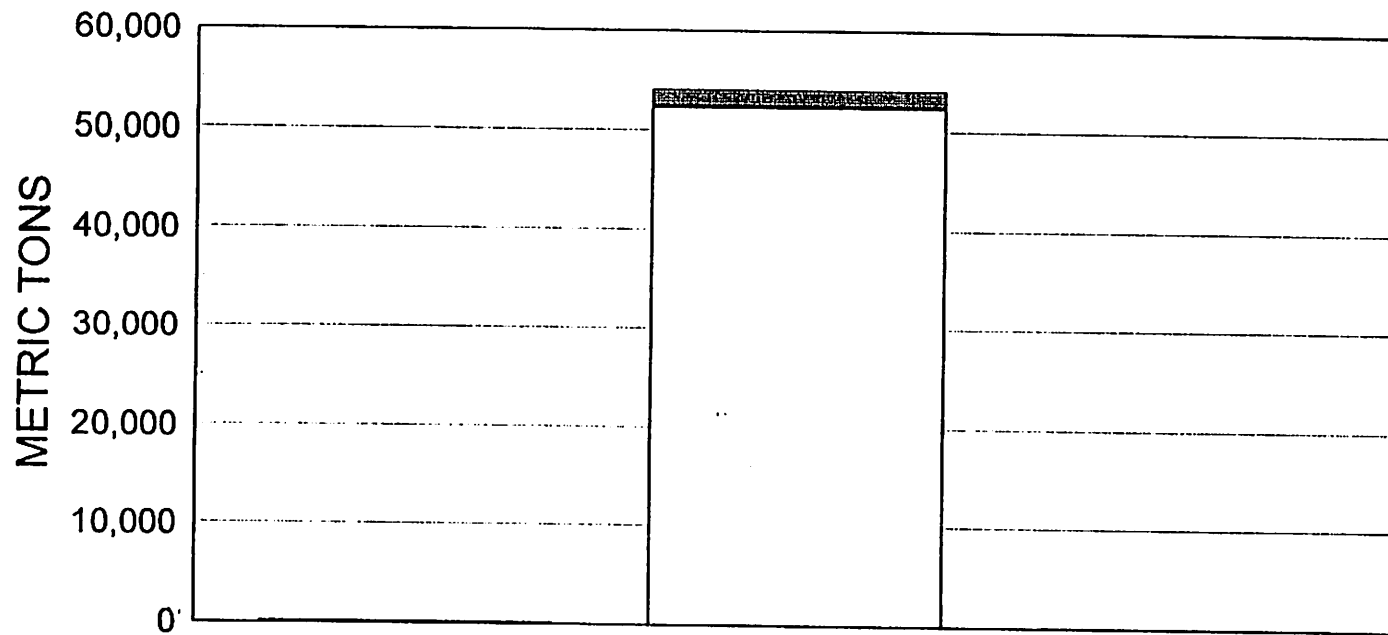
(through 3/29/97)

1996-97 BSAI TRAWL PACIFIC COD CATCH



(through 3/29/97)

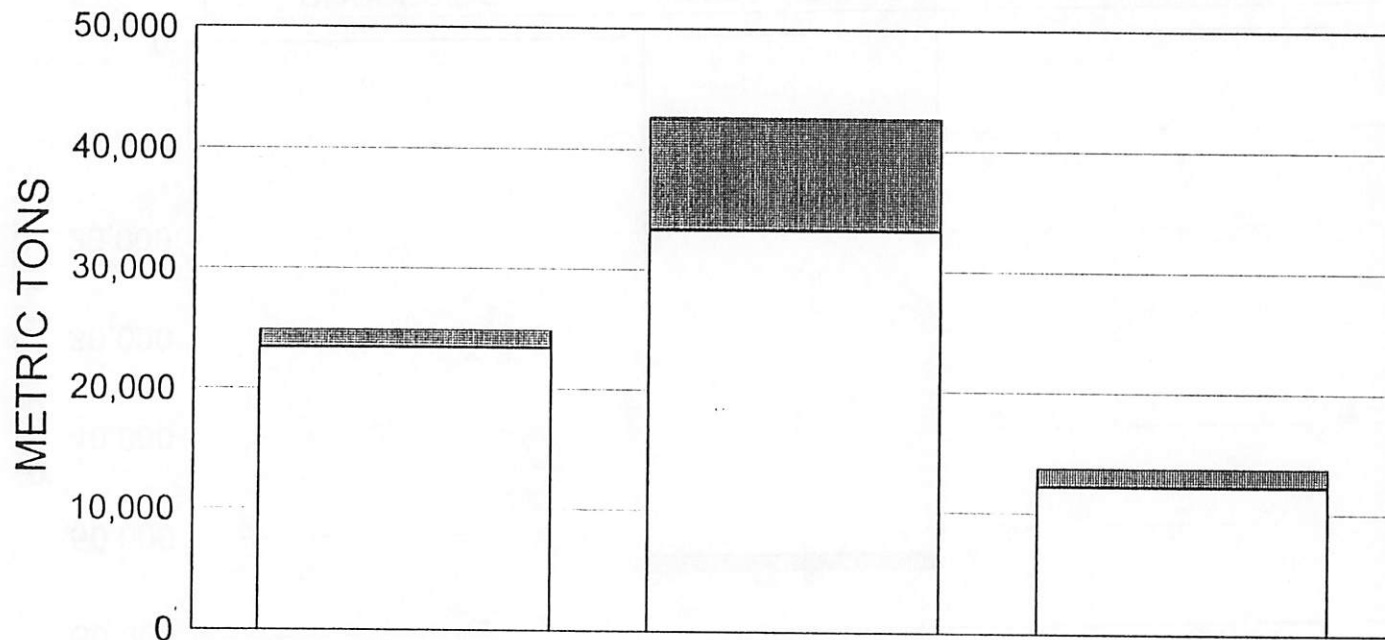
1997 BSAI FIXED GEAR, PCOD DISCARDS, ALL FISHERIES



	SHORESIDE	CATCH/PROC	MOTHERSHIP
RETAIN <input type="checkbox"/>	234	52,333	75
DISCARD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2	1,672	0

(through 3/29/97)

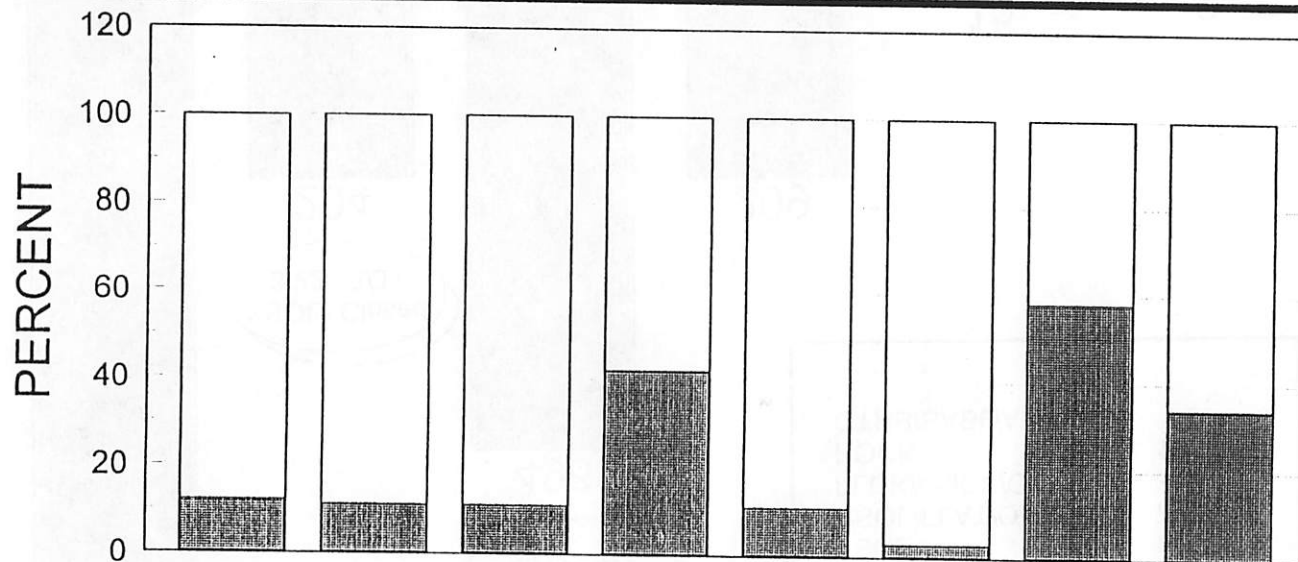
1997 BSAI TRAWL, PACIFIC COD DISCARDS, ALL FISHERIES





	SHORESIDE	CATCH/PROC	MOTHERSHIP
RETAIN <input type="checkbox"/>	23,410	33,346	12,161
DISCARD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1,489	9,347	1,574

(through 3/29/97)

1997 BSAI GROUND FISH DISCARDS BY GEAR & TARGET

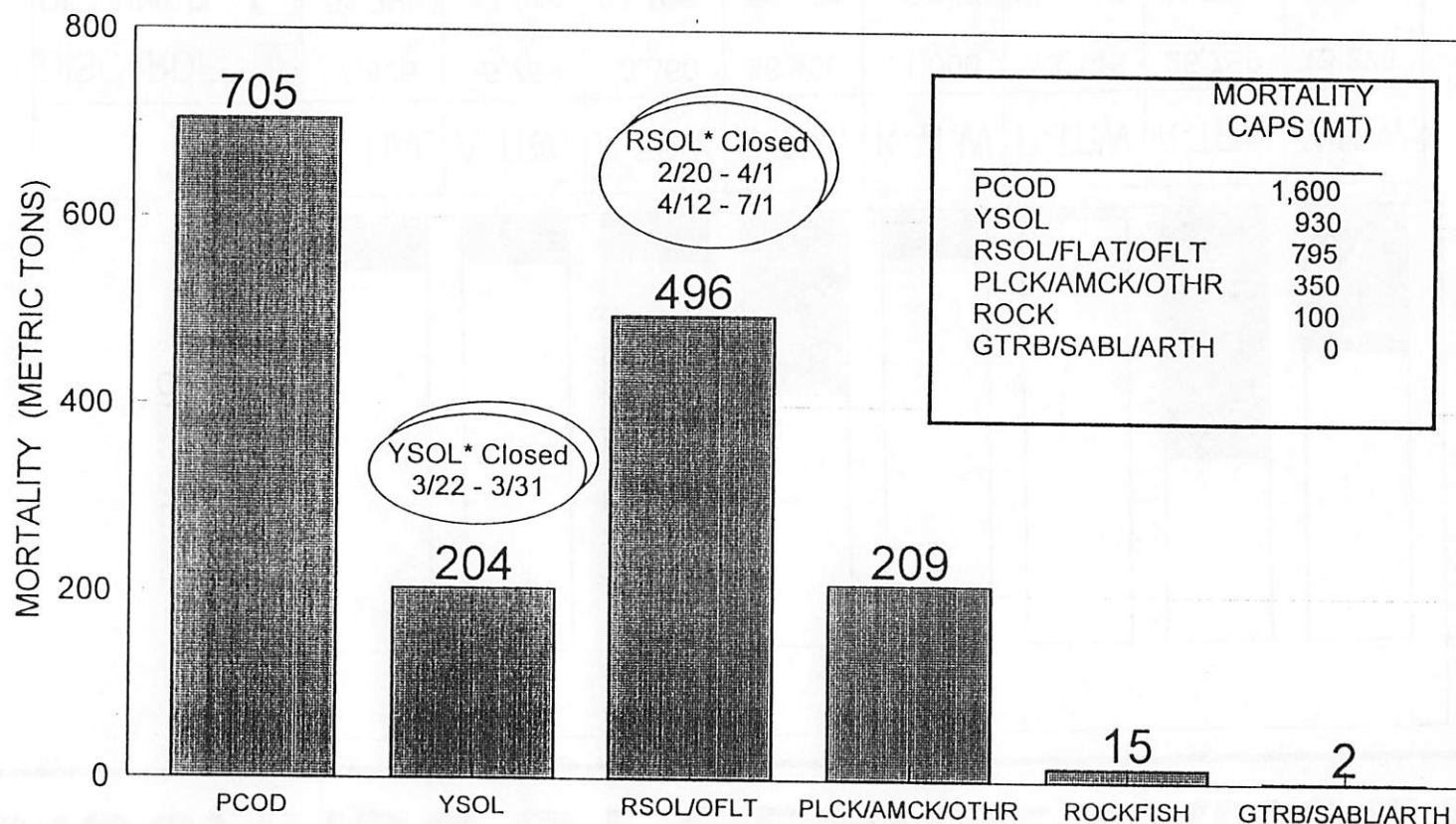


	C--HAL	A-TRW	B-TRW	C-TRW	K-TRW	P-TRW	R-TRW	Y-TRW
DISCARDED 	7,326	5,759	3,350	36,498	1,009	13,148	25,769	13,276
RETAINED 	51,290	44,944	27,166	50,101	8,337	499,317	18,601	25,534

(through 3/29/97)

TARGETS	A - Atka mackerel	P - Midwater pollock
	B - Bottom pollock	R - Rock sole
	C - Pacific cod	Y - Yellowfin sole
	K - Rockfish	

1997 BSAI TRAWL HALIBUT BYCATCH MORTALITY



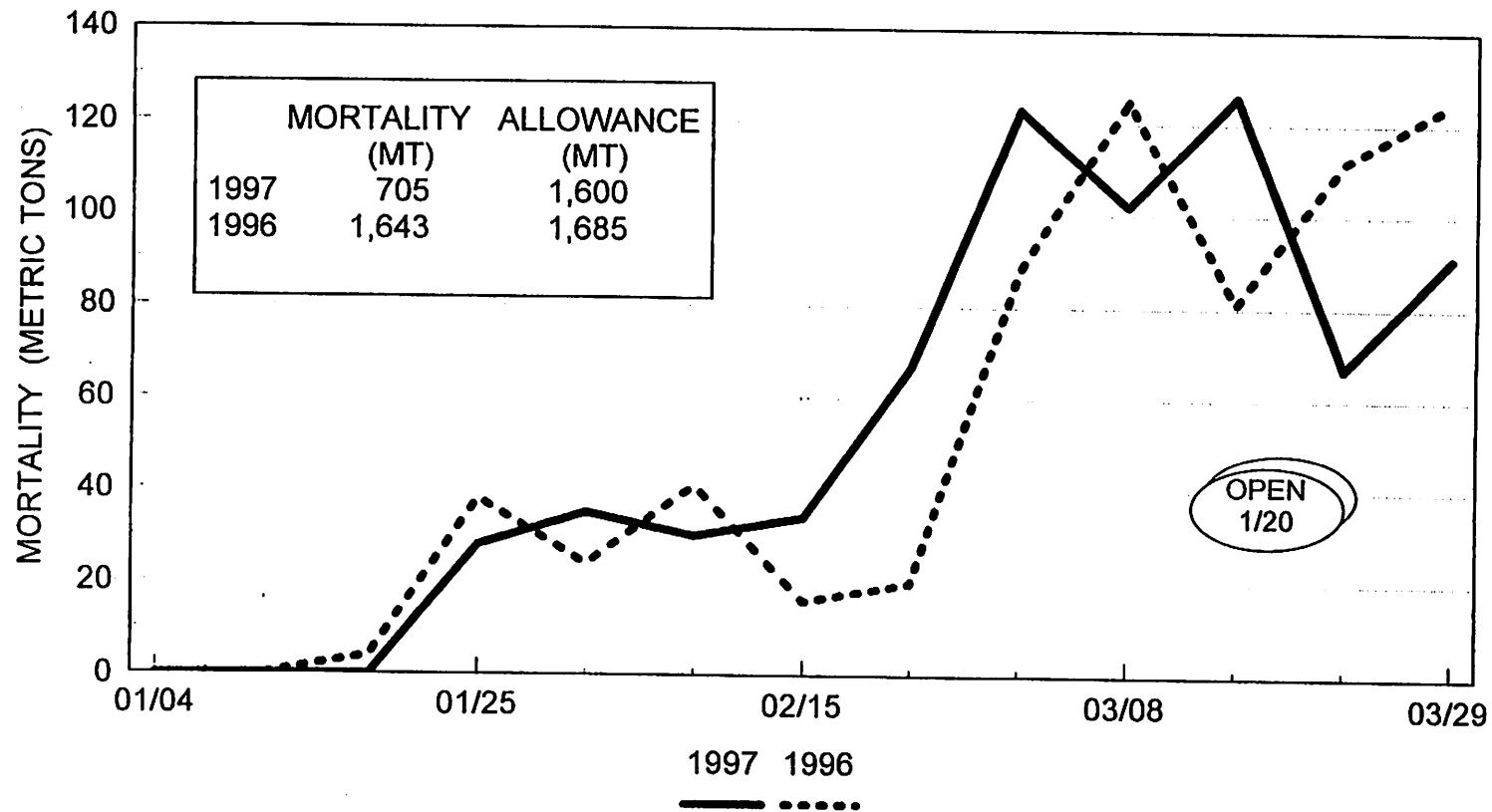
*Closures shown are due to halibut bycatch

Total halibut mortality thru 3/29: 1,613

Annual total halibut cap: 3,775

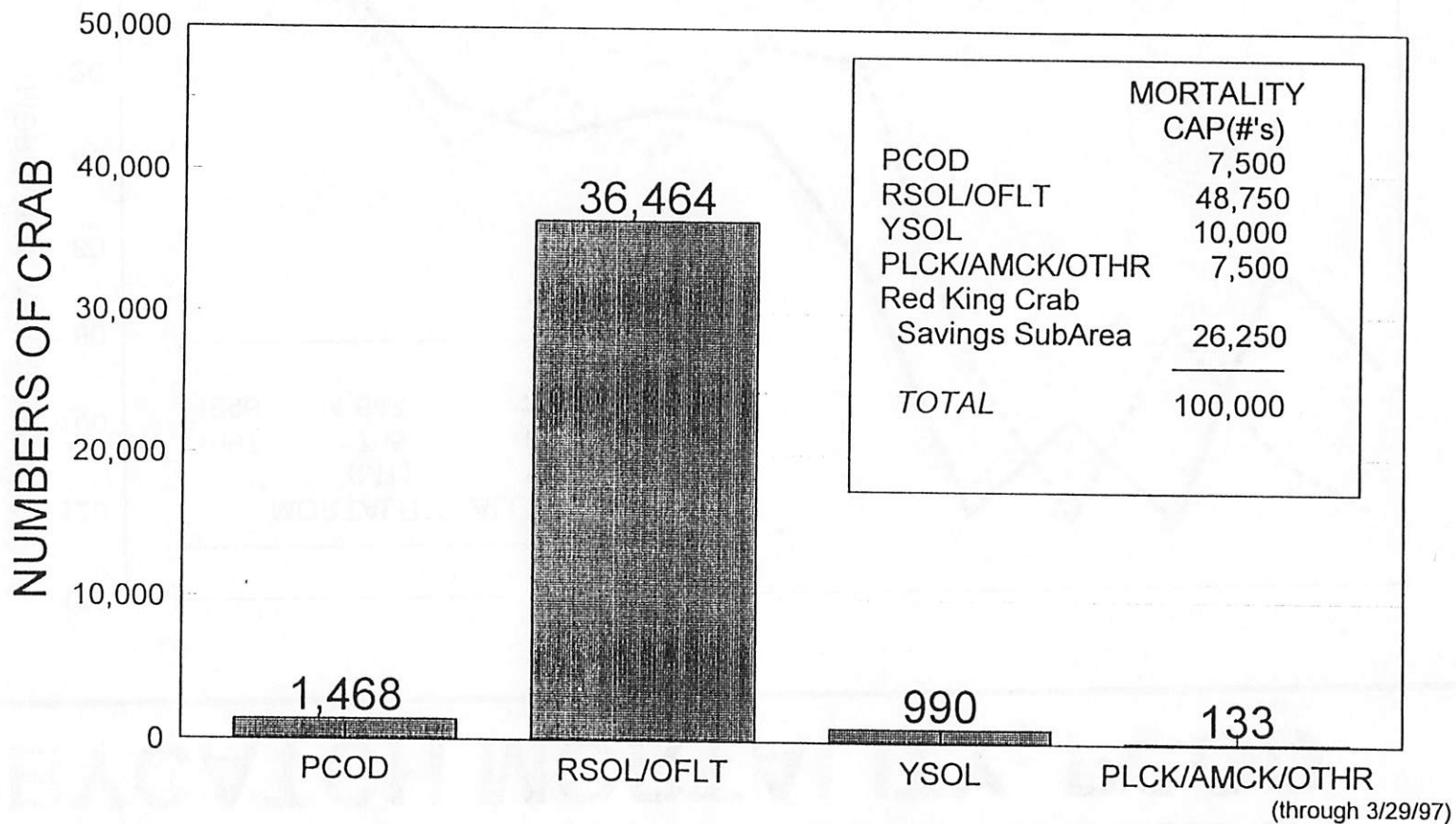
(through 3/29/97)

1996-97 BSAI TRAWL HALIBUT BYCATCH MORTALITY, PCOD

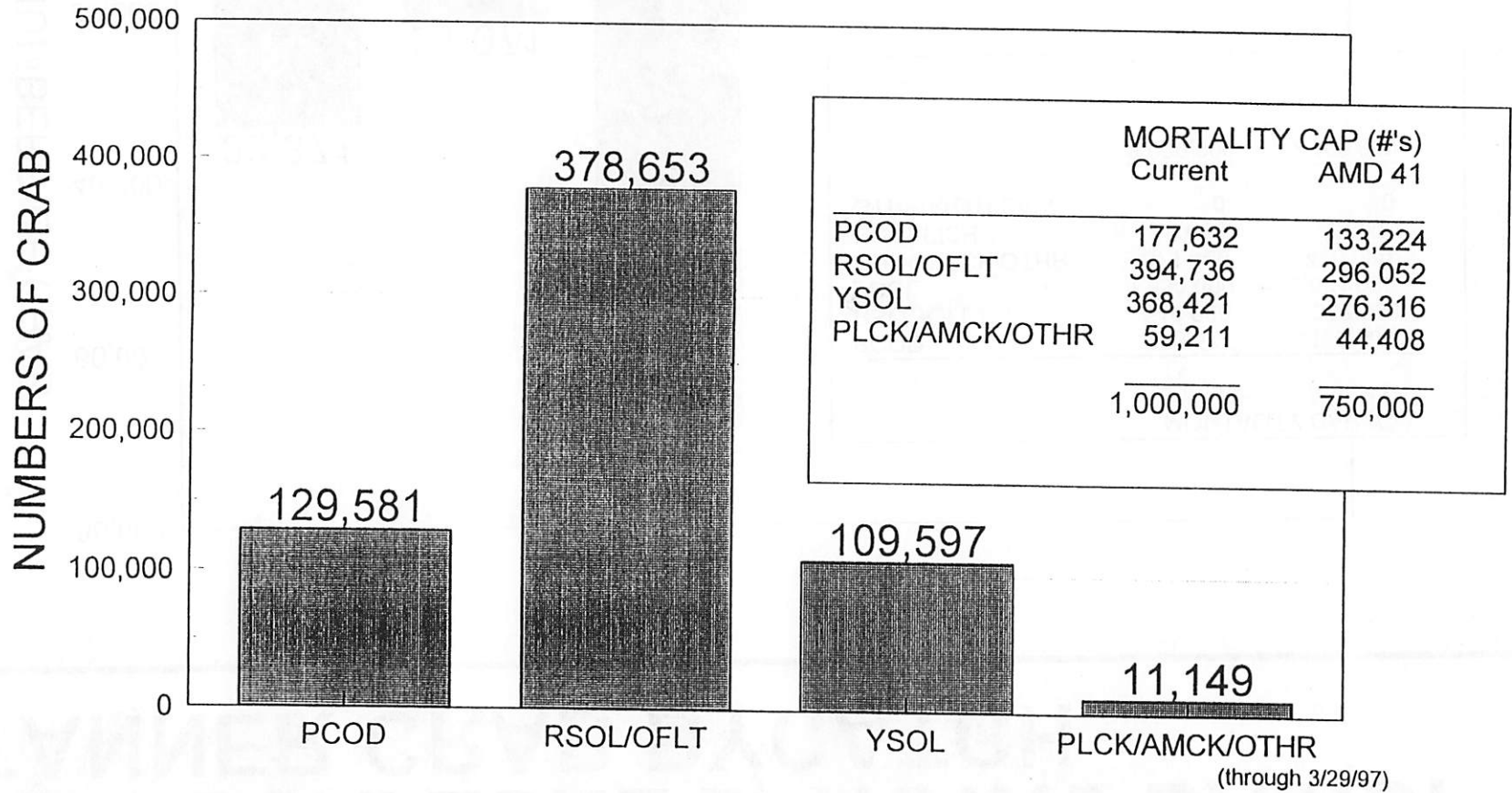


(through 3/29/97)

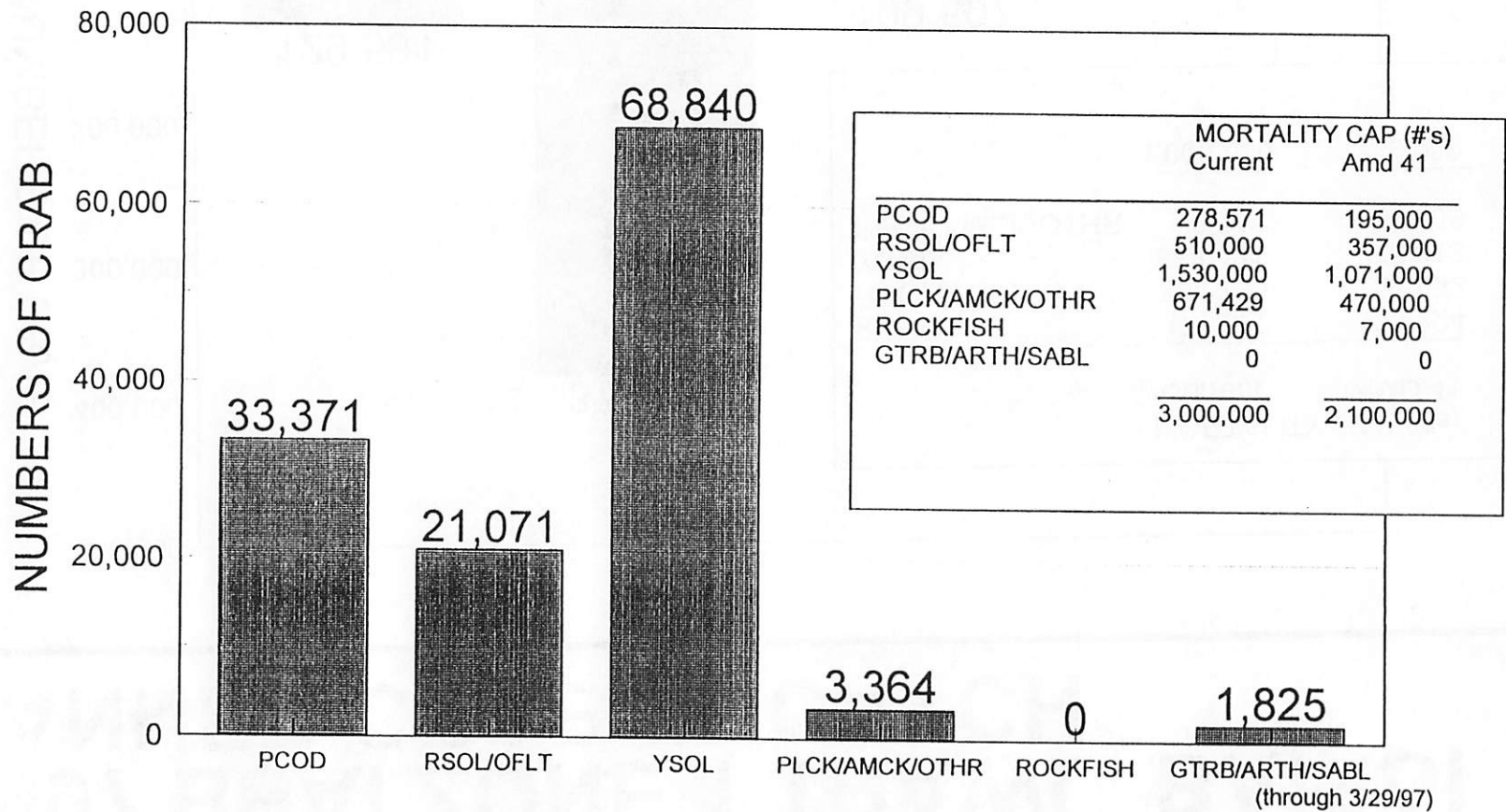
1997 BSAI ZONE 1, TRAWL RED KING CRAB BYCATCH



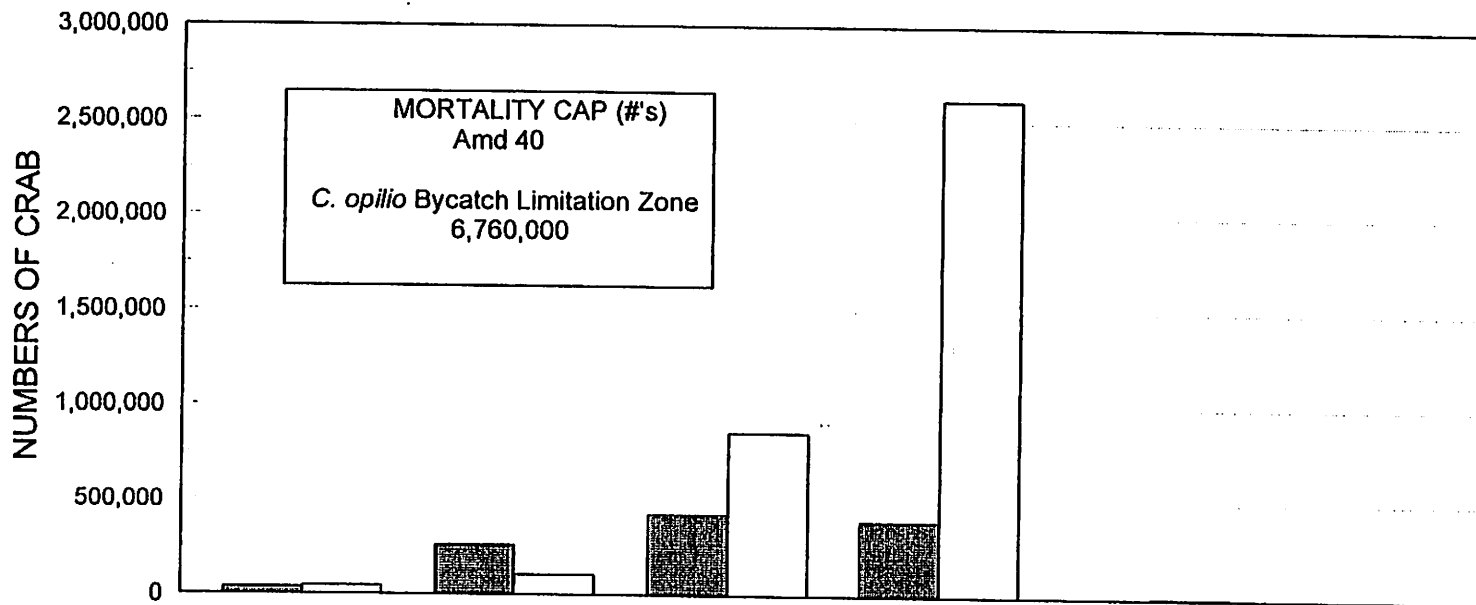
1997 BSAI ZONE 1 TRAWL, BAIRDI TANNER CRAB BYCATCH





1997 BSAI ZONE 2, TRAWL BAIRDI TANNER CRAB BYCATCH



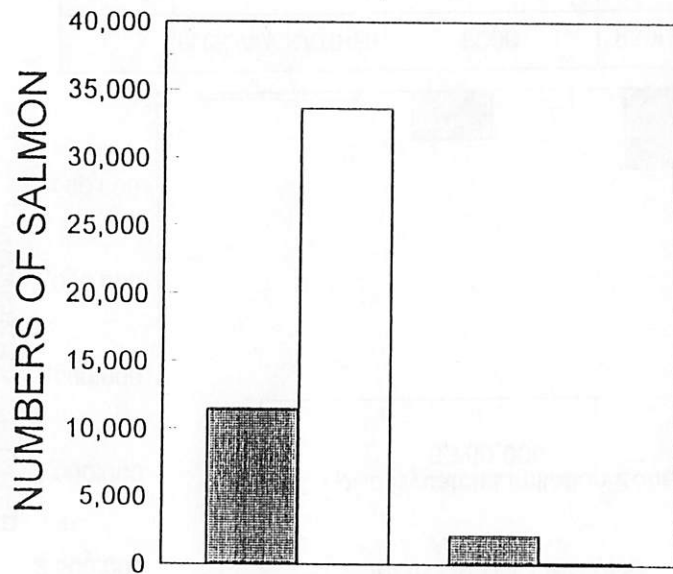
1996-97 BSAI TRAWL, OPILIO TANNER CRAB BYCATCH



	PLCK/AMCK/OTHER	PCOD	RSOL/FSOL/OFLT	YSOL	GTRB/ARTH/SABL	ROCKFISH
1997 	38,085	257,683	420,901	390,925	273	0
1996 	43,707	105,503	857,131	2,615,693	5,927	138

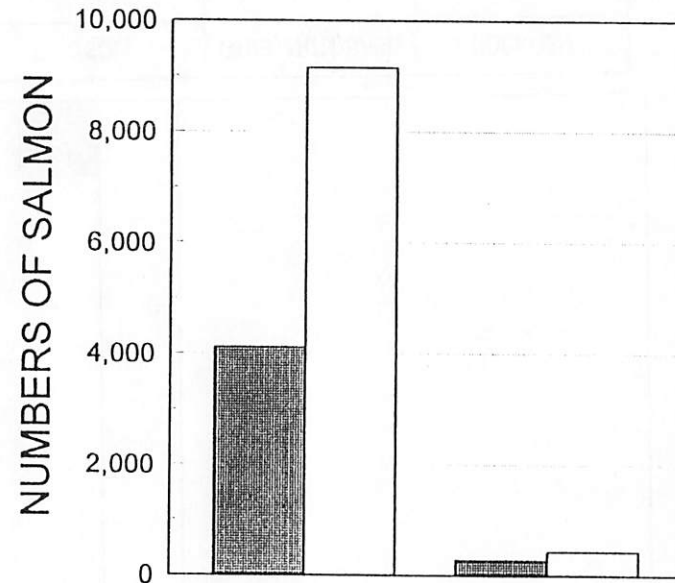
(through 3/29/97)

1996-97 BSAI TRAWL, CHINOOK & OTHER SALMON BYCATCH



	CHINOOK	OTHER SALMON
1997 ■	11,504	2,129
1996 □	33,631	186

MIDWATER POLLOCK



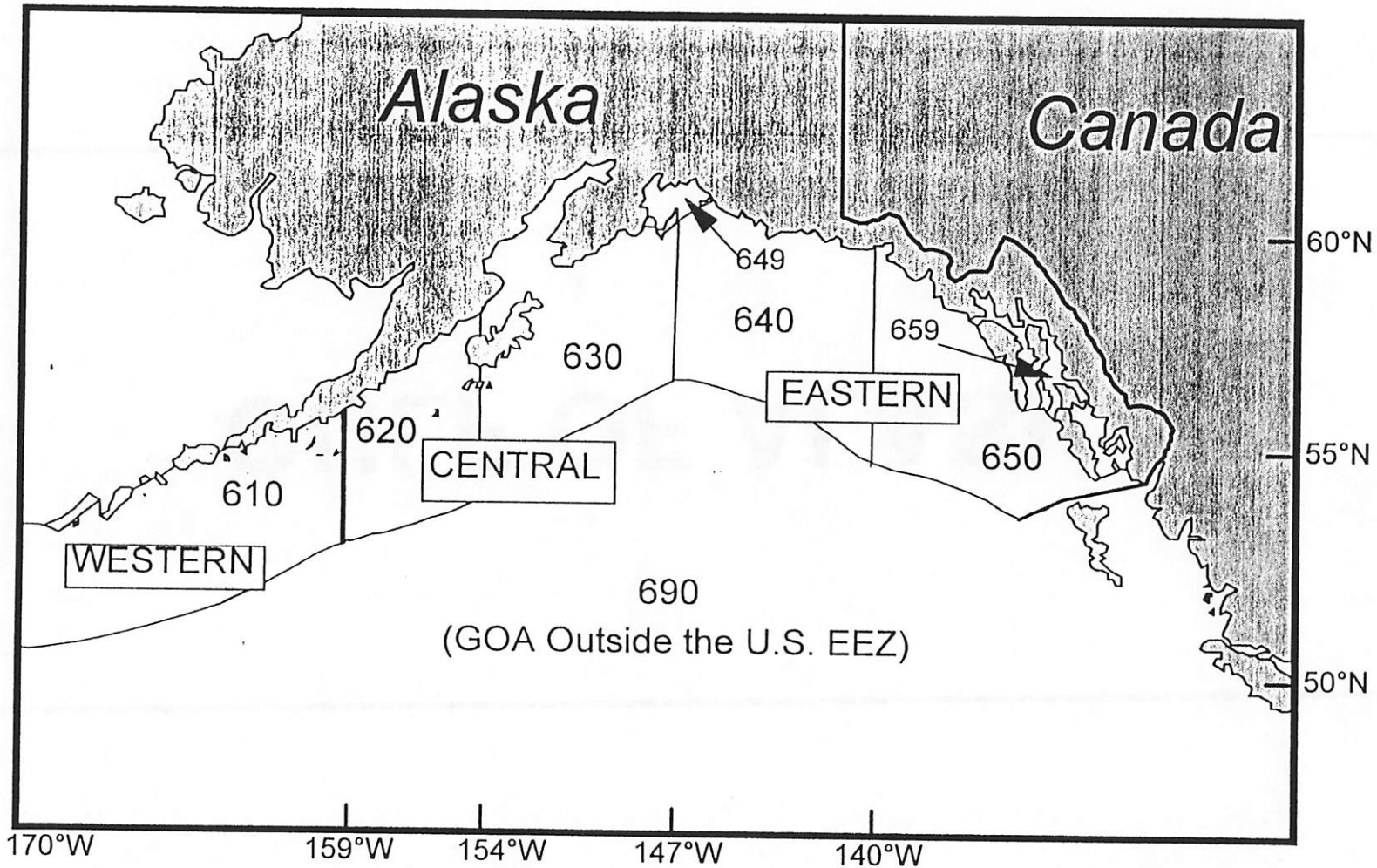
	CHINOOK	OTHER SALMON
1997 ■	4,110	272
1996 □	9,144	430

OTHER FISHERIES

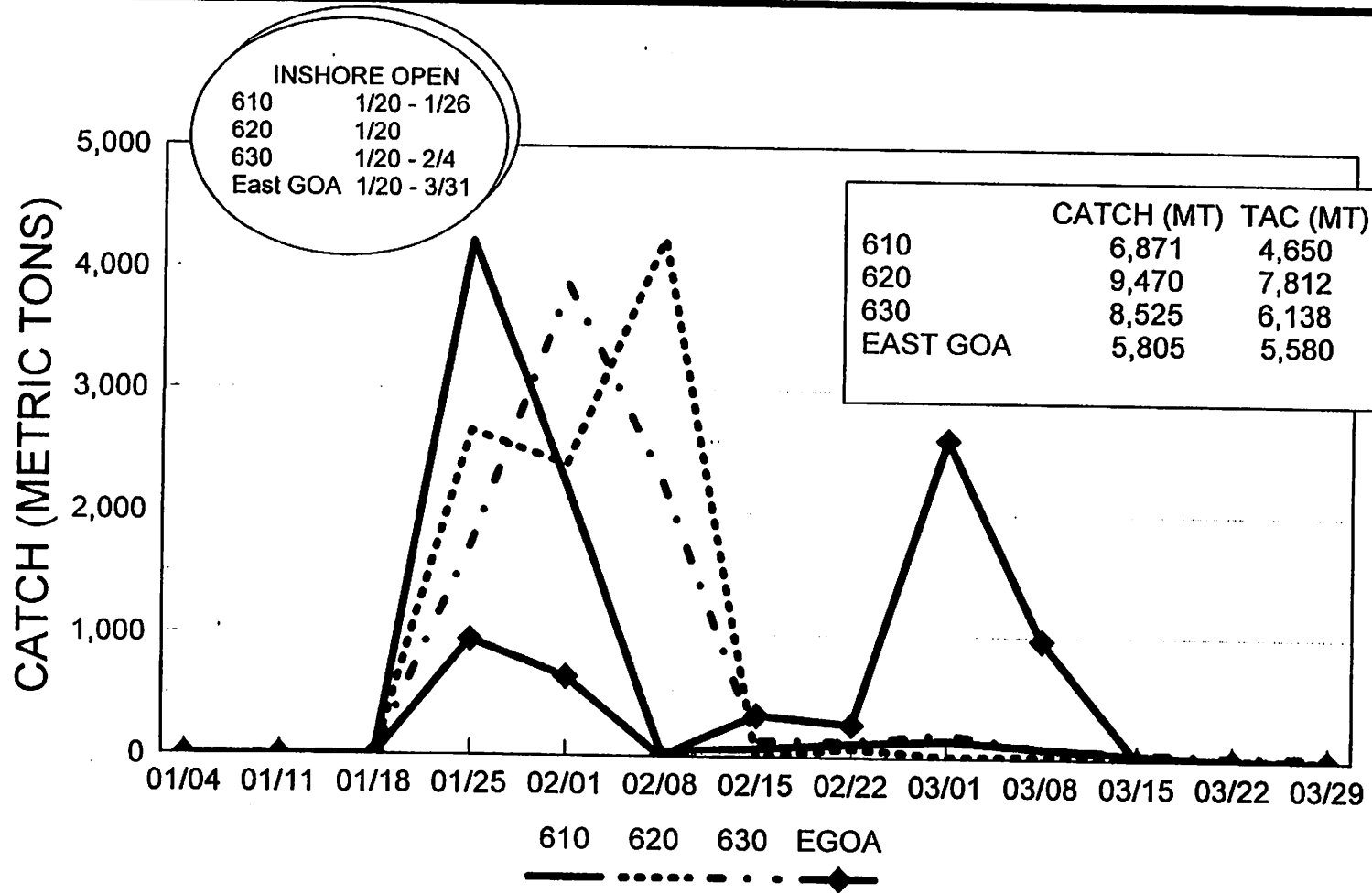
(through 3/29/97 and 3/30/96)

GULF OF ALASKA

1997 REPORTING AREAS OF THE GULF OF ALASKA

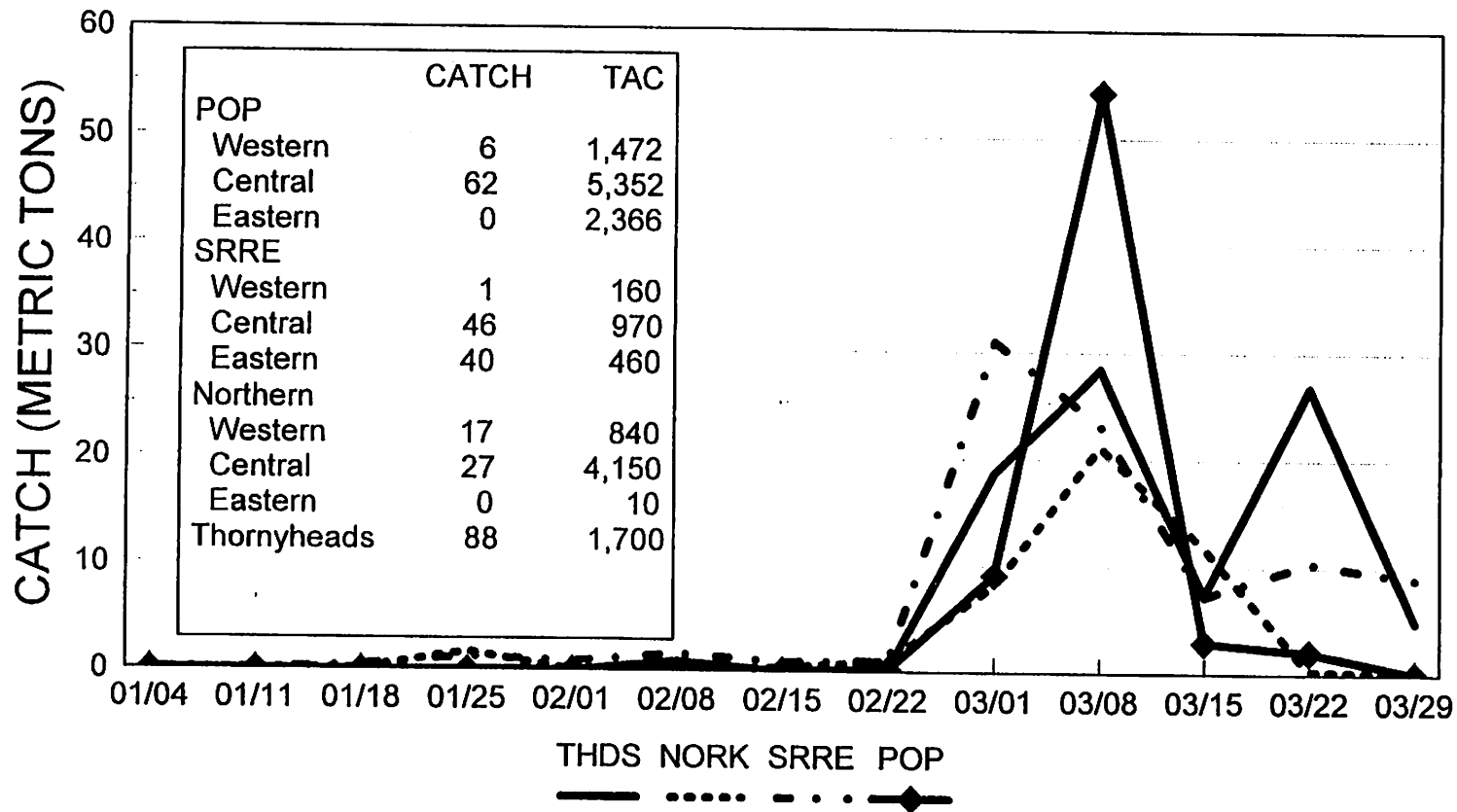


1997 GOA POLLOCK CATCH



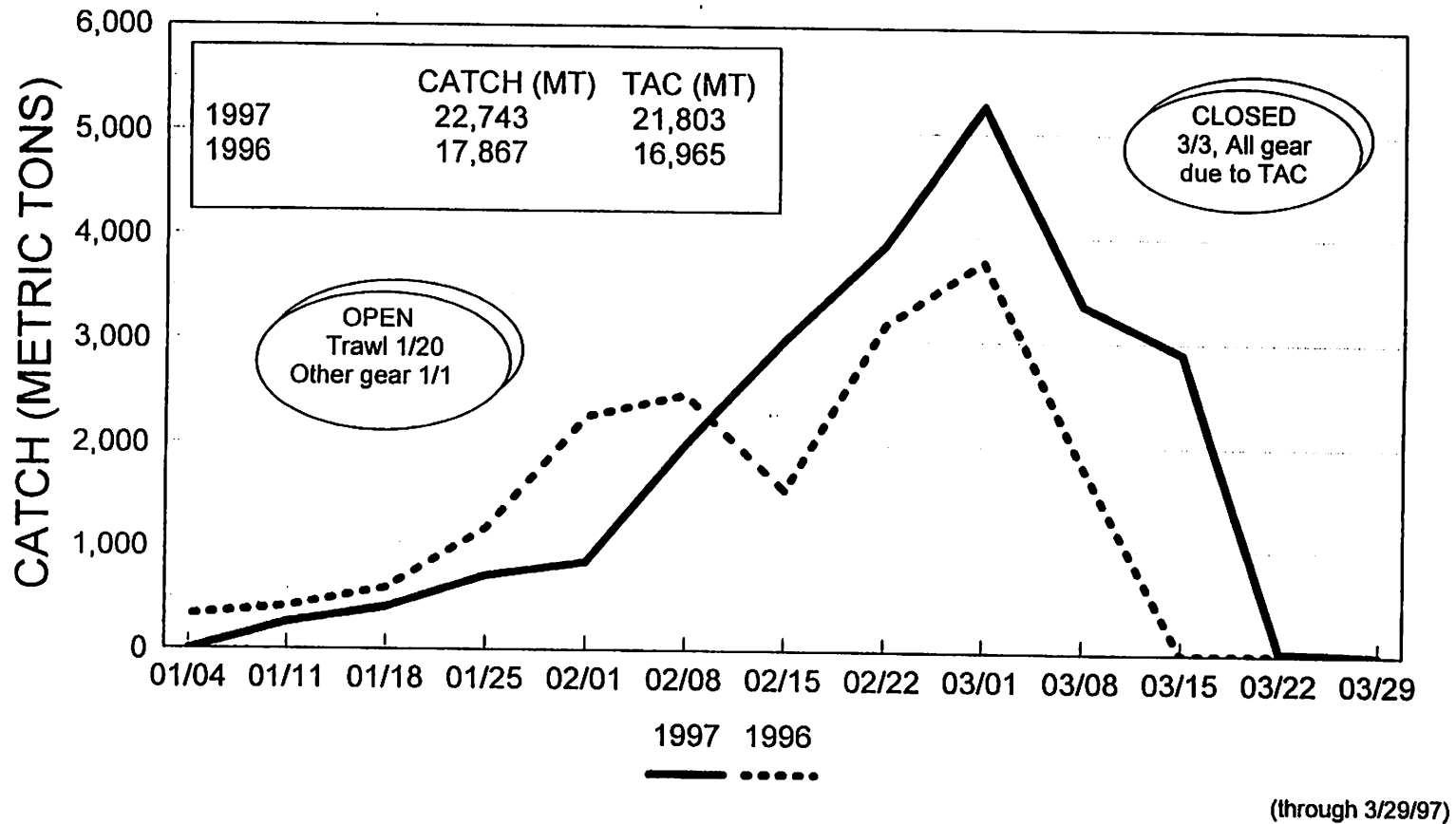
(through 3/29/97)

1997 GOA ROCKFISH CATCH



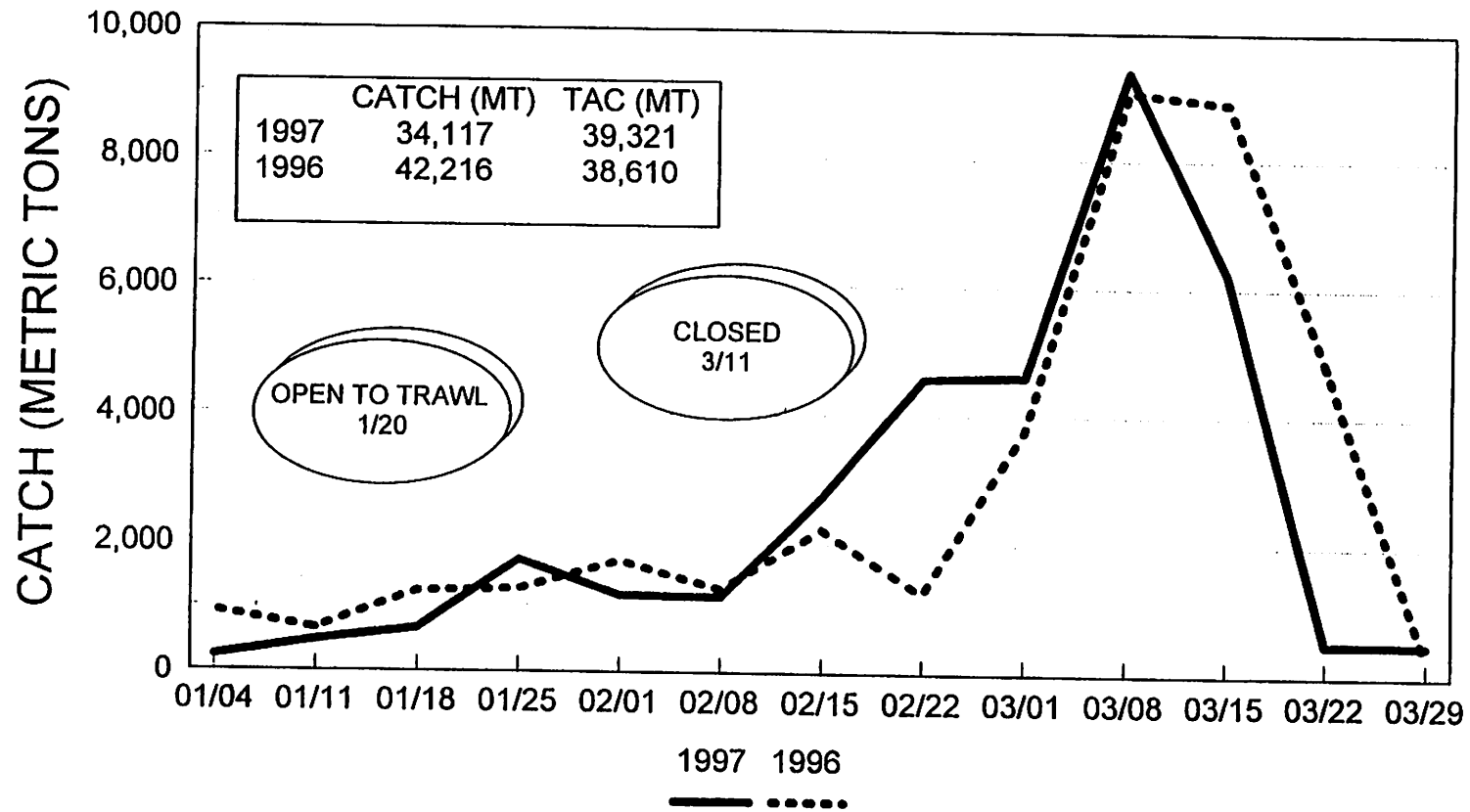
(through 3/29/97)

1997 WESTERN GOA INSHORE PACIFIC COD CATCH



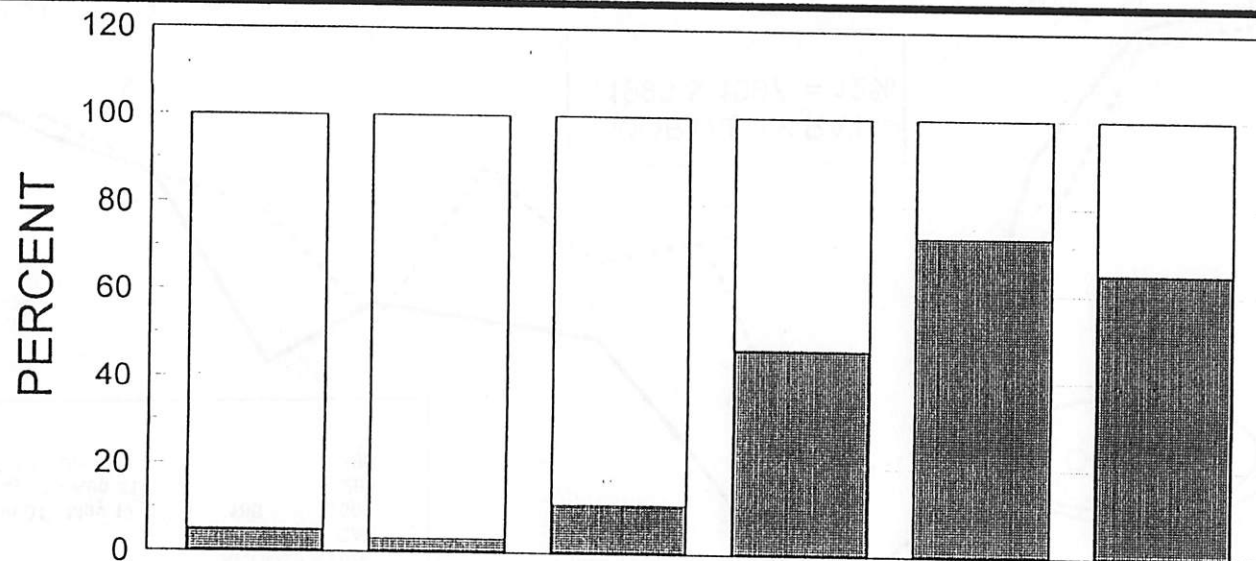
NOTE: Discard of Pacific cod attributed to 610 inshore Pacific cod through 3/29/97 = 422 mt



1997 CENTRAL GOA INSHORE PACIFIC COD CATCH



(through 3/29/97)

1997 GOA GROUND FISH DISCARDS BY GEAR & TARGET

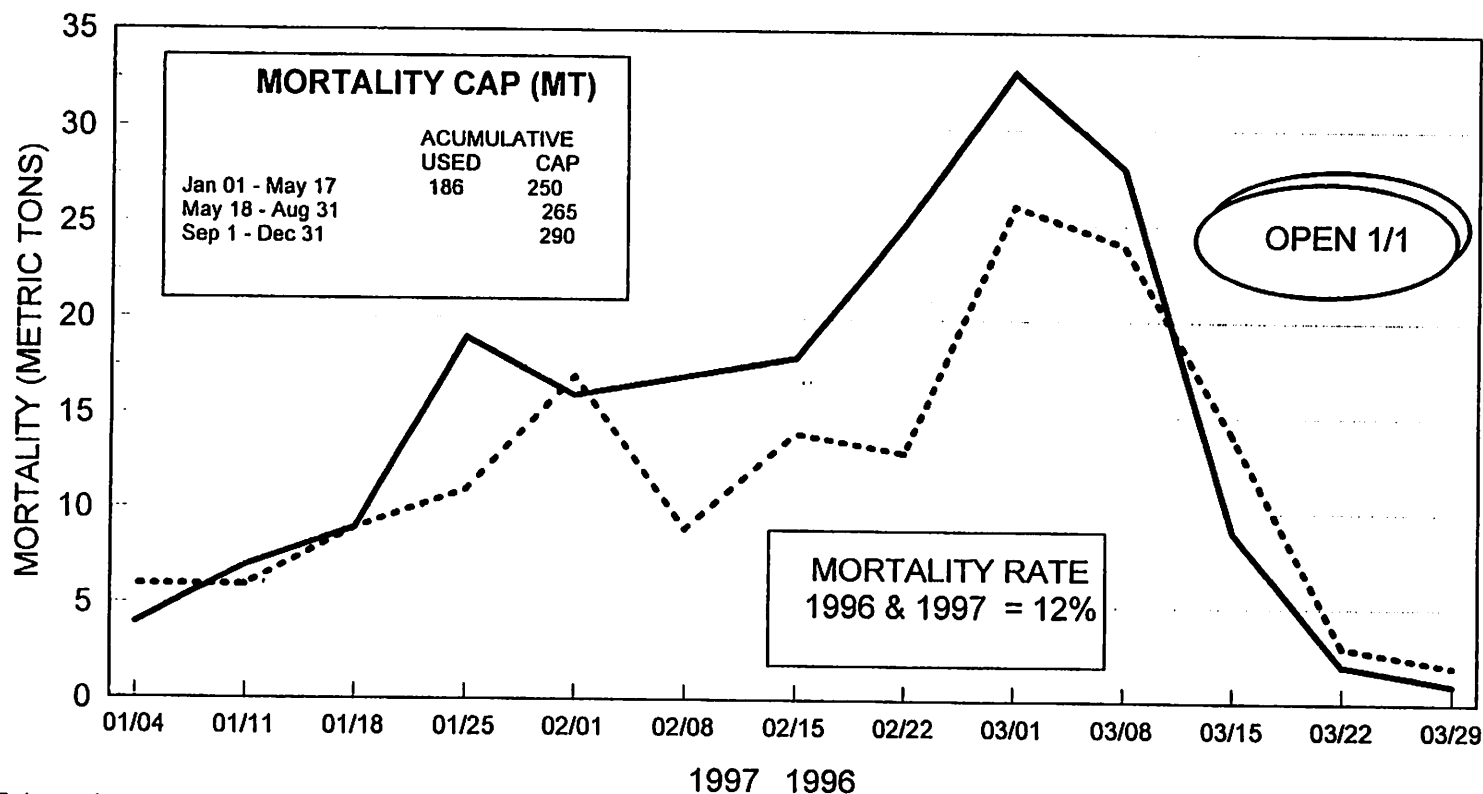


	C-HAL	C-POT	B-TRW	H-TRW	L-TRW	X-TRW
DISCARD 	515	282	544	1,683	988	1,908
RETAIN 	9,711	8,956	4,433	1,898	370	1,502

(through 3/29/97)

TARGETS	B - Bottom pollock	L - Flathead sole
	C - Pacific cod	X - Rex sole
	H - Shallow Water Flatfish	

1996-97 GOA HOOK & LINE*, HALIBUT BYCATCH MORTALITY

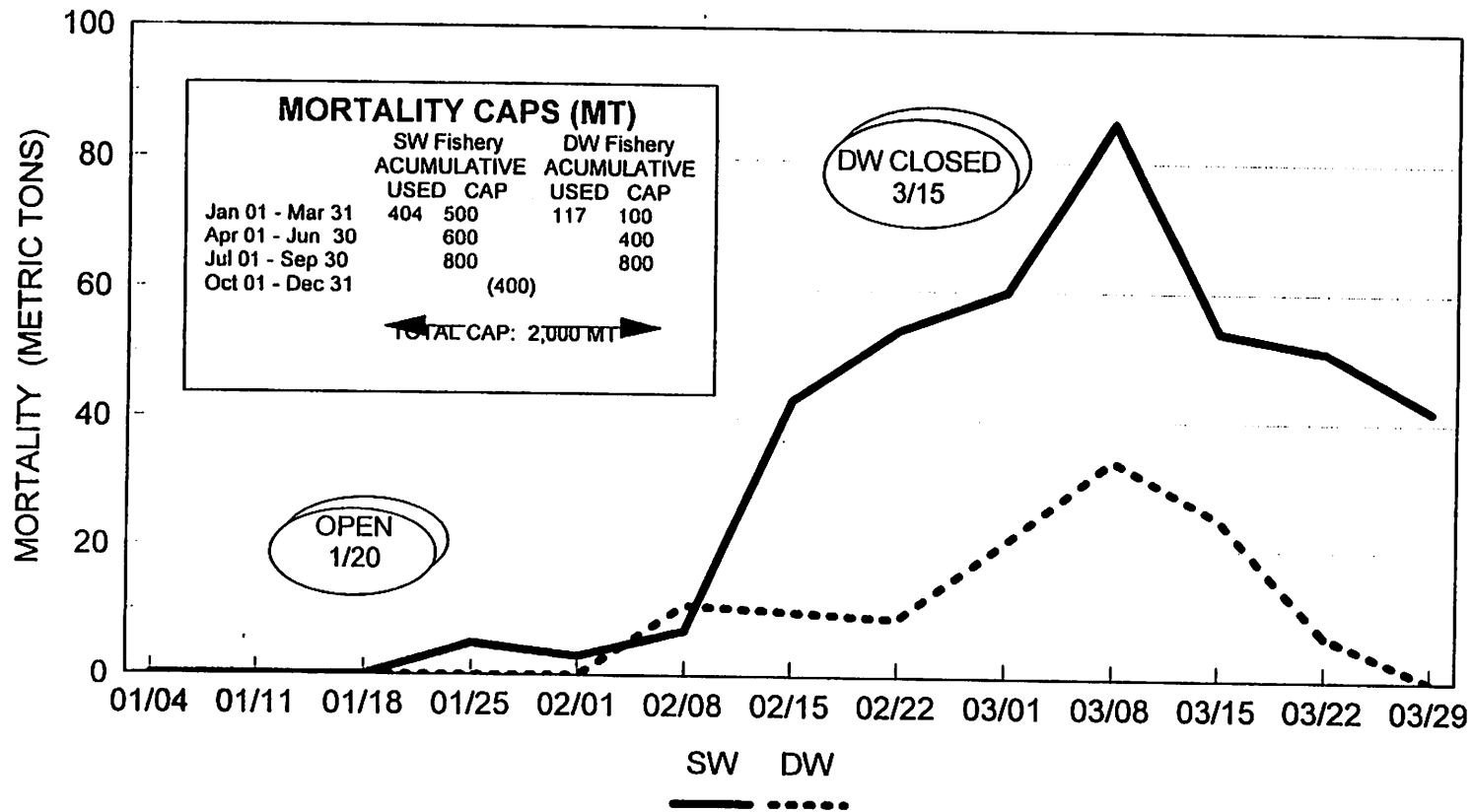


*Sablefish not included

** Demersal shelf rockfish fishery, Southeast District, is not listed due to insufficient observer coverage.

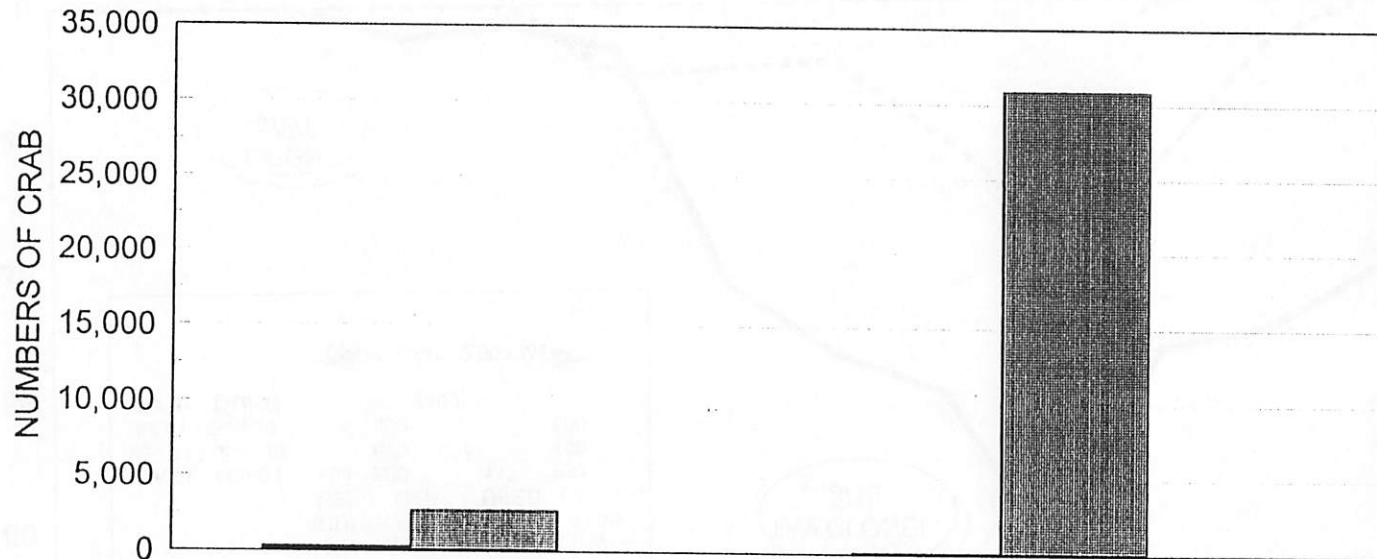
(through 3/29/97)

1997 GOA SW & DW TRAWL HALIBUT BYCATCH MORTALITY



(through 3/29/97)

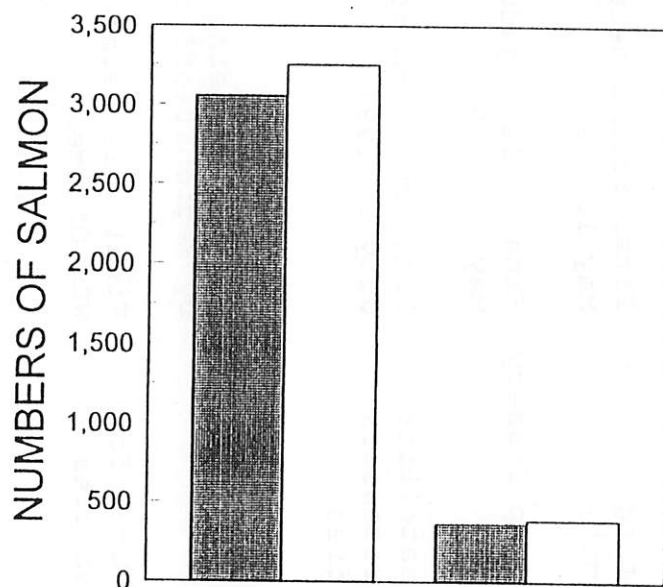
1997 GOA TRAWL, TANNER & RED KING CRAB BYCATCH



	DW FISHERY	SW FISHERY
OTANNER ■	317	128
BAIRDI ■	2,696	30,882
RED KING □	0	5

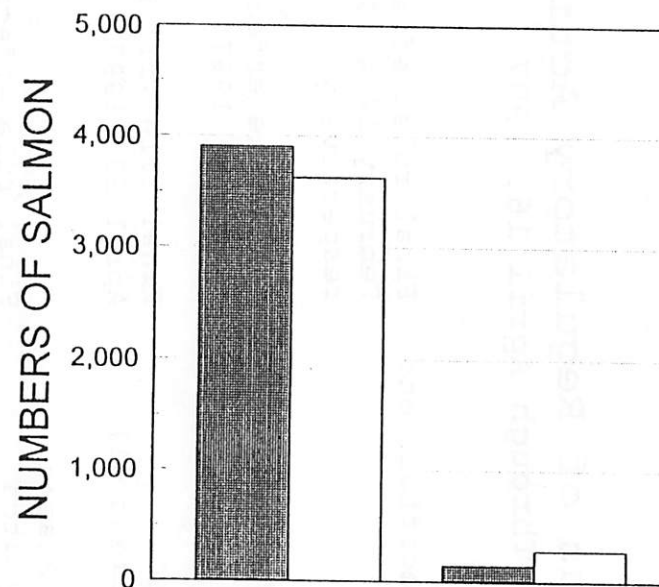
(through 3/29/97)

1996-97 GOA TRAWL, CHINOOK & OTHER SALMON BYCATCH



	CHINOOK	OTHER SALMON
1997 ■	3,057	362
1996 □	3,249	387

MIDWATER POLLOCK



	CHINOOK	OTHER SALMON
1997 ■	3,908	146
1996 □	3,629	276

OTHER FISHERIES

(through 3/29/97 and 3/30/96)

National Marine Fisheries Service
Alaska Region
Juneau, Alaska
04/14/97

Status of Regulatory Actions Through April 16, 1997

1997 BSAI and GOA specifications	Final rules effective February 12 & 19, 1997, respectively
Halibut IFQ use limits in Area 4	Final rule effective March 24, 1997
Bairdi Tanner crab PSC limits in BSAI (Amendment 41)	Final rule will be effective April 23, 1997
Revisions to Gulf of Alaska Maximum Retainable Bycatch percentage for sablefish & Allow arrowtooth flounder as a "basis species"	Final rule effective April 10, 1997
Recordkeeping & Reporting (3-year processor permit)	Final rule scheduled to be effective May 10, 1997
Moratorium in the Scallop fishery (Amd 2 to Scallop FMP)	Final rule scheduled to be effective May 12, 1997
Require computer and satellite/ modem capability by processors for use by NMFS-certified observers	Final rule scheduled to be effective July 1, 1997
IFQ 6-hour prior notice of landings	Final rule being prepared by Regional office
Seabird avoidance measures for the H&L groundfish fisheries	Final rule being reviewed by WDC Offices

Status of Regulatory Actions
Through April 16, 1997 (continued)

Consolidate salmon FMP regulations with Part 679	Technical amendment/final rule being reviewed by WDC offices
Groundfish/Crab License Program and CDQs (Groundfish Amds 39/41 & BSAI Crab Amd 5)	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office
NMFS certified scales program	Proposed regulations being reviewed by Regional office
Opilio Tanner crab PSC limits in BSAI (Amendment 40)	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office
Improved retention/utilization of pollock, cod, rocksole, & yellowfin sole in BSAI (Amd 49)	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office
"Slime and Ice" rule pertaining to halibut and sablefish IFQ fisheries	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office
Require processors to use scales to weigh pollock caught in pollock fisheries	Proposed regulations being prepared by Regional Office
Regulatory amendment to require electronic submission by Alaska groundfish processors of weekly production reports & check-in/out reports (to be effective by 1998)	Proposed rule being prepared by Regional Office

GROUND FISH FISHERIES OF THE
BERING SEA/ALEUTIAN ISLANDS AREA
AND THE GULF OF ALASKA

SEIS SCOPING MEETINGS

1. Juneau - June 11, 1997, 1-3 p.m., Juneau Federal Building, Room 445, 709 West 9th Street, Juneau, Alaska
2. Anchorage - June 13, 1997, 2-5 p.m., Anchorage Federal Building Annex G-6 inside Suite A-18, 222 West 8th Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska
3. Dutch Harbor - June 16, 1997, 2-5 p.m., Grand Aleutian Hotel, 100 Salmon Way, Dutch Harbor, Alaska
4. Kodiak - June 18, 1997, 7-10 p.m., Westmark Hotel, 236 Rezanof Drive, Kodiak, Alaska, in combination with meetings of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.
5. Sitka - June 23, 1997, 1-3 p.m., University of Alaska, Sitka, 1332 Seward Avenue (Duponski Island), Room 133, Sitka, Alaska
6. Seattle - June 25, 1997, 2-5 p.m., Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Building 4, Room 2039, Seattle, Washington
7. Portland - June 27, 1997, 2-5 p.m., Red Lion - Downtown, 310 S.W. Lincoln, Portland, Oregon

STATUS OF COUNCIL TASKING

April 15, 1997

<u>ACTION</u>	<u>STATUS</u>	<u>TASKING</u>
REPORTS:		
1 IFQ Weighmaster Program	Report in April 1997	Region
2 Pollock "B" Season Change	Discuss in December 1997	Council/Region
3 Generic Bycatch Measures	Discuss in June 1997	Council
4 GOA Management Area Boundaries	Discuss in June 1997	Council/Region/Center
5 Scallop SAFE & GHL	Approve in April 1997	Council/ADF&G/Region
6 Gear Storage Areas/Gear Conflicts	Report in June 97	Region/ADF&G
7 Western GOA pollock deliveries by vessel size classes	Info in February 1997	Council
8 Skipper Reporting Program	Report in April 1997	NMFS/ADF&G
MAGNUSON-STEVENS ACT REQUIREMENTS:		
1 IFQ/CDQ Fee Program & NAS Studies	Report in April 1997	Council/Region
2 Central Lien Registry	Report in April 1997	RAM
3 Vessel Buyback Program	Report in April 1997	Council/Industry
4 Essential Fish Habitat Amendments	In Progress	Region/Council/Center
REGULATORY AMENDMENTS:		
1 Halibut Subsistence Program	Initial Review in April 1997	Council/NMFS/IPHC
2 Halibut Charter Management	Initial analysis in Feb 1997	Council
3 VIP Rate Standards	Review in April 1997	Region/Council

	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>STATUS</u>	<u>TASKING</u>
4	Halibut Donations to Food Banks	Final Action in April 1997	IPHC/Council/Region
5	Halibut Area 4 Catch Sharing Plan	Initial Review in April 1997	Council/Region
6	Directed Fishing Standards adjustments	Review in April 1997	Region
7	Sablefish Rolling Closures	Review in April 1997	Region
8	Electronic Reporting Requirements (a) Observer data (b) General reporting	(a) Final rule on Dec 2 Effective July 1, 1997 (b) Final action in Dec 1996 PR in preparation	Council/Region
9	"Slime and Ice" Accounting	Final action in Dec 1996 PR in preparation	Region
10	IFQ Program Amendments	Initial Review in April 1997	Region/Council
11	Reduce MRB for sablefish in GOA (& arrowtooth "ballast")	Effective April 10, 1997	Region
12	Seabird Avoidance (groundfish)	Final Rule in preparation	Region
13	Seabird Avoidance (halibut)	Review in April 1997	Region
PLAN AMENDMENTS:			
1	Halibut/Sablefish IFQ Sweep-up	Effective Dec 20, 1996	Council/Region
2	BSAI Halibut Ownership Caps	Effective March 24, 1997	Council
3	Comp. Rationalization Plan (a) License Limitation/CDQ (PSC trading) (b) IFQ Program for BSAI pollock (c) IBQs/VBAs	(a) PR in preparation (b) On hold (c) Discussion in April 1997	Council Council Council/Center/Region
4	Scallop Moratorium	Approved March 5, 1997	Region/Council/ADFG
5	Scallop FMP/future amendments	Discuss in September 1997	Region/Council/ADFG
6	Total Weight Measurement in Groundfish Fisheries (a) Scale certification (b) Application to at-sea processors (non-CDQ)	(a) PR pending (b) PR in preparation	Region/Council

	<u>ACTION</u>	<u>STATUS</u>	<u>TASKING</u>
7	Demersal Shelf Rockfish License Limitation Program	Pending Development	ADFG
8	Forage Fish Prohibition	Final action in April 1997	Region
9	Crab PSC Cap Analysis (a) bairdi (Am 41) (b) opilio (Am 40)	(a) Approved March 3 Effective April 23, 1997 (b) Action in Dec 1996 PR in preparation	Council/ADFG/Center
10	Designate pollock mid-water only (GOA plan amendment) (framework for BSAI)	Pending other priorities/ data availability. Report in June 1997	Council/Region
11	BSAI Improved Retention/ Utilization	Final Action in Sept 1996 PR in preparation	Region/Council/Center
12	GOA Improved Retention/ Utilization	Initial Review April '97	Center/Region/Council
13	Groundfish Plan Update	In progress. Initial review in fall 1997	Council/Region
14	Limited Processing for Catcher Vessels	Discuss in September 1997	Center/Region/Council
15	Pelagic Shelf Rockfish Mgmt authority to State	Review in June 1997	Council/Region/ADFG
16	Streamline Specs Process	Review in Sept 1997	Council/Region
17	2% Jig Allocation for BSAI Atka mackerel	Initial review in April 97	NMFS/Council
18	Inshore/Offshore & Pollock CDQ Program	Discuss in April 1997	Council
19	Modified Observer Program	Review in June 1997	Region/Council/OAC

OTHER ACTIONS:

1	April 24, 1994 Scallop Control Date	Published on June 15, 1994	Region
2	Halibut Charter Control Date	Never published in F.R.	Region

ACTION

STATUS

TASKING

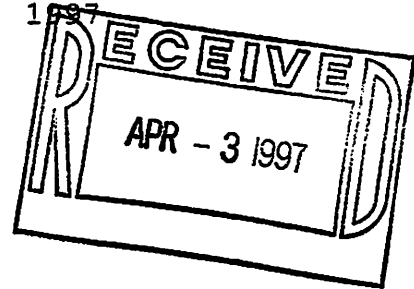
COUNCIL COMMITTEES:

1	Observer Advisory Committee	Meet in May 1997
2	Ecosystem Committee	Discuss in February 1997
3	Crab Rebuilding Committee	Meet as necessary
4	IR/IU Committee	Meet as necessary
5	Enforcement Committee	Meet as necessary
6	VBA Committee	Meet as necessary
7	IFQ Implementation Team	Meet as necessary



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 National Marine Fisheries Service
 P.O. Box 21668
 Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

April 3, 1997



Clarence G. Pautzke
 Executive Director
 North Pacific Fishery Management Council
 605 W. 4th Ave. Room 306
 Anchorage, Alaska 99510

Dear Mr. Pautzke:

In order to remain in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) intends to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on the Federal action by which total allowable catch specifications and prohibited species catch limits in the groundfish fisheries that are conducted in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area and the Gulf of Alaska are annually established and apportioned. NMFS announced this intent in the *Federal Register* March 31, 1997 (FR 62 15151).

The first step in this process will be to hold scoping meetings to provide for public input into the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts that the SEIS should consider. In addition to holding the scoping meetings, NMFS is accepting written comments on the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts that might be considered for this SEIS.

Enclosed is a copy of the Federal Register notice, which could be made available to the Council and the public during the April Council meeting.

Sincerely,

fa *Steven Pennoyer*
 Steven Pennoyer
 Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: AKC Balsiger



pending publication of the Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study full report. This ANPRM is mandated by the ICC Termination Act of 1995.

DATES: Comments to the general ANPRM should be received no later than June 30, 1997. Late comments will be considered to the extent practicable.

ADDRESSES: Signed, written comments should refer to the docket number that appears at the top of this document and must be submitted to the Docket Clerk, U.S. DOT Dockets, Room PL-401, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590-0001. All comments received will be available for examination at the above address between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. Those desiring notification of receipt of comments must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or postcard.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For information regarding rulemaking and operational issues: Mr. David Miller, Office of Motor Carrier Research and Standards, (202) 366-1790; for information regarding human factors and fatigue research programs: Ms. Deborah Freund, Office of Motor Carrier Research and Standards, (202) 366-1790; and for information regarding legal issues: Mr. Charles Medalen, Office of the Chief Counsel, (202) 366-0834, Federal Highway Administration, Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, DC 20590.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On November 5, 1996 (61 FR 57251), the FHWA published an ANPRM requesting answers to numerous questions related to commercial motor vehicle driver hours-of-service regulations, including fatigue, loss of alertness, and hours off duty. The ANPRM set March 31, 1997, as the docket closing date for signed, written comments.

On March 5, 1997, the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety (AHAS) delivered a petition to the FHWA. This petition requested the FHWA to extend this rulemaking's comment period closing date by 60 days. The AHAS believes it and the public should have ample opportunity to review and critique the Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study's full report. The full report has not yet been published or placed in the docket. A 59-page technical summary and a 17-page executive summary have been placed in the docket.

On March 13, 1997, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) petitioned the FHWA to extend this rulemaking's comment period closing date by 60 days. The IIHS believes it

also should have ample opportunity to review and critique the Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study's full report, including its data.

At the time of the original publication in November 1996 (61 FR 57251), the FHWA believed the full report would be published and available well in advance of the comment closing date. The FHWA, however, has experienced unforeseen editorial delays in publishing the full report. The FHWA believes publication will now be accomplished by the end of April 1997. The FHWA believes it should allow the public to review and critique the full report of the Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study.

The FHWA has also conducted listening sessions, specifically listening to drivers, about how the hours-of-service regulations affect their daily lives and their recommended changes to improve the rules. See 62 FR 6161, February 11, 1997. Many interested persons have attended these sessions and would like to review the transcripts of these listening sessions. A few of the transcripts will not be delivered to the FHWA docket prior to March 31, 1997.

For the reasons above, the FHWA finds good cause to extend this ANPRM comment period closing date for 60 days after the expected publication date of the full report of the FHWA's Driver Fatigue and Alertness Study in late April 1997.

List of Subjects in 49 CFR Part 395

Global positioning systems, Highway safety, Highways and roads, Intelligent Transportation Systems, Motor carriers, Motor vehicle safety, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

Issued on: March 26, 1997.

Authority: 23 U.S.C. 315 and 49 CFR 1.48.

Jane Garvey,
Acting Administrator, Federal Highway Administration.

[FR Doc. 97-8198 Filed 3-27-97; 1:06 pm]

BILLING CODE 4910-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[I.D. 032097E]

Groundfish Fisheries of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Area and the Gulf of Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent; scoping meetings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces its intention to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on the Federal action by which total allowable catch (TAC) specifications and prohibited species catch limits in the groundfish fisheries that are conducted in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area (BSAI) and the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) are annually established and apportioned.

NMFS will hold scoping meetings to provide for public input into the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts that the SEIS should consider. In addition to holding the scoping meetings, NMFS is accepting written comments on the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts it should be considering for this SEIS.

DATES: Written comments will be accepted through July 1, 1997. See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for meeting times and special accommodations.

ADDRESSES: Written comments and requests to be included on a mailing list of persons interested in the SEIS should be sent to Lori Gravel, Fisheries Management Division, National Marine Fisheries Service, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802.

See **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** for meeting locations and special accommodations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tamra Faris, (907) 586-7645.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the United States has exclusive fishery management authority over all living marine resources, except for migratory species, found within the exclusive economic zone between 3 and 200 nautical miles from the baseline used to measure the territorial sea.

The management of these marine resources is vested in the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) and in eight Regional Fishery Management Councils. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) has the responsibility to prepare fishery management plans (FMPs) for the marine resources, which it finds require conservation and management, in the Alaska region of responsibility. The Council consists of Federal and State officials having authority for fishery management and of private persons nominated by the governors of the States of Alaska,

Oregon, and Washington and appointed by the Secretary.

The FMPs must specify the optimum yield from each fishery, which would provide the greatest benefit to the Nation, and must state how much of that optimum yield can be expected to be harvested by U.S. vessels. The FMPs must also specify the level of fishing that would comprise overfishing.

The Council prepared and the Secretary approved the Fishery Management Plan for the Groundfish Fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area in 1981. An environmental impact statement (EIS) was prepared for the action implementing the FMP and was filed in 1981. The BSAI FMP has been amended 42 times. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental documents have been prepared for each amendment as well as for subsequent regulatory actions, including the annual process of establishing TAC specifications.

The Council prepared and the Secretary approved the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska in 1978. An EIS was prepared for the action implementing the FMP and was filed in 1978. The GOA FMP has been amended 45 times. NEPA environmental documents have been prepared for each amendment as well as for subsequent regulatory actions, including the annual process of establishing TAC specifications.

The purpose of the original FMPs was to manage the groundfish fisheries for the optimum yield and to allocate harvest between domestic and foreign fishermen. The fisheries have evolved since then through the Council process including FMP amendments, regulations, and continued compliance with other Federal laws and executive orders. The frequencies of marine mammal, marine bird, and fish species in the biological assemblage present now are different from frequencies that existed and were displayed in 1978 and 1981 environmental analyses. Several marine species have been listed under the Endangered Species Act, some of which may be affected by fishery

management actions. New information about the ecosystem, impacts of the fisheries, and management tools has become available since the EISs were prepared.

For the above reasons, NMFS has determined that a SEIS shall be prepared that incorporates the following: The amendments to the groundfish FMPs; the annual process for determining the TAC specifications; and the public processes in place for implementing new regulations, revising existing ones, and incorporating new information. Because the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries utilize similar resources from adjacent locations in the large North Pacific ecosystem, use similar gear deployed by interrelated constituents, and are overseen by the same Fishery Management Council, NMFS has decided to display the impacts of both fisheries in one SEIS.

The SEIS will analyze the process by which annual TAC specifications and prohibited species catch limits are determined, together with the procedures for implementing changes to those processes. The processes encompass decisions about location and timing of each fishery, harvestable amounts, exploitation rates, exploited species, groupings of exploited species, gear types and groupings, allocations, product quality, organic waste and secondary utilization, at-sea and on-land organic discard, species at higher and lower trophic levels, habitat alterations, and relative impacts to coastal communities, society, the economy, and the domestic and foreign groundfish markets. Effects of these decisions are manifested over many years in multifaceted social and biological arenas. Inherent in implementing any groundfish fisheries management regime are commitments to provide in-season management, enforcement, monitoring, stock assessment, and summary analyses. In addition to evaluating the mandated No Action Alternative (i.e., the management process that is in place now would continue to apply), the SEIS will include a full range of alternatives and

discussions of their potential impacts on the biological and socioeconomic environments. NMFS is seeking suggested additional alternatives from the public through the scoping process and written responses to this document.

Preparation of the SEIS is expected to take 1 year and include distribution of a draft SEIS and incorporation of comments on it into the final SEIS.

The scoping meetings for Anchorage, Dutch Harbor, Juneau, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Portland, Seattle, and Sitka will be held at the following times and locations:

1. Juneau—June 11, 1997, 1–3 p.m., Juneau Federal Building, Room 445, 709 West 9th Street, Juneau, AK.
2. Anchorage—June 13, 1997, 2–5 p.m., Anchorage Federal Building Executive Dining Room, 222 West Seventh Avenue, Anchorage, AK.
3. Dutch Harbor—June 16, 1997, 2–5 p.m., Grand Aleutian Hotel 100 Salmon Way, Dutch Harbor, AK.
4. Kodiak—June 18, 1997, 7–10 p.m., Westmark Hotel, 236 West Rezanof Drive, Kodiak, AK, in combination with meeting of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting.
5. Sitka—June 23, 1997, 1–3 p.m., University of Alaska, Sitka, Room 133, 1332 Seward Avenue (Duponski Island), Sitka, AK.
6. Seattle—June 25, 1997, 2–5 p.m., Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE., Building 4, Room 2039, Seattle, WA.
7. Portland—June 27, 1997, 7–10 p.m., Red Lion - Downtown, 310 SW. Lincoln, Portland, OR.

Special Accommodations

Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Rebecca Campbell (907) 586-7228 at least 5 days before the meeting dates.

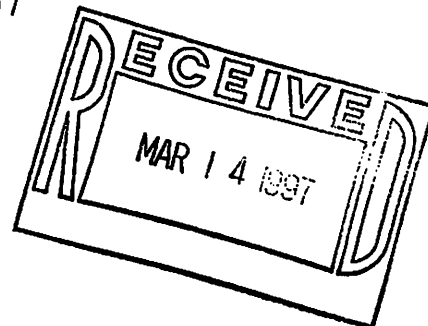
Dated: March 25, 1997.

Bruce C. Morehead,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable
Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 97-8059 Filed 3-28-97; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 3510-22-F



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
 P.O. Box 21668
 Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

March 13, 1997



Brent C. Paine, Executive Director
 United Catcher Boats
 1711 W. Nickerson, Suite B
 Seattle, Washington 98119


Dear Brent:

Thank you for your letter in which you express concerns about the amounts of Pacific cod held as a reserve in the Gulf of Alaska and also our action to maintain Pacific cod for the "offshore component" as bycatch for the time being. We held back the reserve as a management buffer to avoid the harvest overages that have occurred during the past two years. These overages prevented us from being able to provide for bycatch needs in other directed fisheries, resulting in subsequent Pacific cod catches being discarded at sea as prohibited species.

You probably are aware that we released the reserve in the Western Regulatory Area on March 10. Ten percent of the reserve release was allocated to the "offshore component," as required by regulations. We are maintaining, however, the bycatch status of Pacific cod for the "offshore component" in the Gulf of Alaska at this time. As you pointed out, we closed the 1996 directed fishery by the "offshore component" in early March in both the Western and Central areas to provide for bycatch for the rest of the year. All of the bycatch, however, was caught by early May, resulting in our establishing Pacific cod as a prohibited species. This year, we intend to monitor bycatch needs and then provide for a directed Pacific cod fishery later in the year, if appropriate.

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Sincerely,


 Steven Pennoyer
 Administrator, Alaska Region



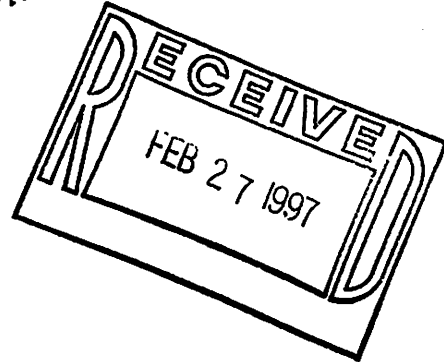
Brent C. Paine
Executive Director



Steve Hughes
Technical Director

February 26, 1997

Mr. Steve Pennoyer
Regional Director
National Marine Fisheries, Alaska Region
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802



Re: GOA P. Cod

Dear Steve,

At the December 1996 Council meeting, the Council recommended a TAC of 24,225 mt for the Western Gulf and 43,690 mt for the Central Gulf. NMFS subsequently apportioned and approved an offshore P cod DAP of 1,938 mt for the Western Gulf and 3,495 mt for the Central Gulf. I understand GOA inshore/offshore regulations provide for an offshore P. cod fishery based on the apportionment of 10% of the P. cod TAC.

My first question: Why isn't the Offshore GOA P cod DAP equal to the TAC recommended by the Council? As of NMFS' 2/20/97 DAP report, the DAP numbers are 80 percent of the Council recommended TAC. My understanding is that for the Offshore P cod fisheries, the Western Gulf DAP should be set at 2,422 mt and the Central Gulf DAP should be set at 4,369 mt.

Review of the 1996 catch data for P. cod reveal the amount of P. cod taken as an inshore or offshore mode fishery, as well as in a directed or non-directed P. cod fishery. My understanding is that NMFS will open a fishery and manage it equal to the TAC available, less an estimated amount for bycatch to be used in non-directed fisheries.

I have reviewed the 1996 blend data and discovered that a total of 68,236 mt of P. cod was caught in Gulf ('96 ABC = 65,000 mt). Of this amount, the offshore fisheries took roughly 7,300 mt of which the directed cod fishery for all gear types accounted for 5,948 mt (trawl: 5,171 mt, H&L: 739 mt, and pot: 38 mt). Total amount of offshore P. cod taken in the non-directed fisheries as bycatch totaled 1,348 mt, or about 18%.

The GOA P. cod offshore component closed to directed fishing in the Western Gulf on March 9, 1996 and on March 13th in the Central Gulf. Prohibiting retention of P. cod in any fishery was enacted on May 5, 1996 for both areas. Closure dates for 1995 were roughly the same as in 1996.

I realize the ramifications of placing a species on PSC bycatch status (such as numerous statements by Clem Tillion at Council meetings). However, under the inshore/offshore regulations, the offshore component is entitled to 10% of the GOA P. cod. With only 18 percent needed for non-directed bycatch purposes, there is roughly 4,455 mt available for a directed offshore-mode fishery. Last year the directed offshore fishery began in the middle of February and finished in middle March. The Western Gulf Offshore fishery lasted about five weeks while the Central Gulf Offshore fishery lasted three weeks. Therefore, we request that you open the offshore component to a directed fishery on March 9, 1997 and also release the 20% reserve at this time. Perhaps a pre-announced closure notice prior to the opening would help to limit unknown effort.

You have a built-in buffer due to the reduction of TAC by 15% reserved for the State 0-3 mile fishery. Data presented at the December NPFMC meeting indicates a very small percentage of this amount will actually be taken this year.

It now seems NMFS is also holding a 20 percent reserve for Gulf P. cod. Combining the three reductions: 15% for the State fishery, 20% NMFS safety reserve and a potential 10% Offshore 'non-fishery', NMFS has effectively reduced the Gulf winter/spring fishery by 45% from last year. Is this really necessary? Are you aware of the negative economic impact to the operations dependent on this resource? Members of UCB believe your actions are unwarranted at this time.

Holding off the directed fishery until the fall is problematic. The fish are quite dispersed, in poorer quality condition, and the fleet is long gone from the fishing grounds. Historic catch data prove that CPUE is high during the winter months. In addition, the timing does not synchronize with the State's 0-3 mile fishery.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request.

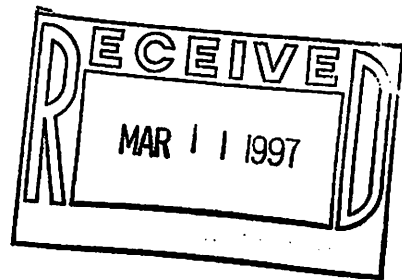
Sincerely,


Brent C. Paine

cc: Rick Lauber
Vince Curry
Joe Plesha

6 March 1997

Mr. Steve Pennoyer, Regional Director
Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service
NMFS - F/AKR
PO Box 21668
Juneau, AK 99802



Re: Electronic Reporting

Dear Steve:

On behalf of the Electronic Reporting Committee, I would like to ask you to consider modifying the position of the National Marine Fisheries Service on one important issue that impedes complete agreement on the electronic reporting system. NMFS proposed system for electronic reporting appears to require that final reports originate from the processing vessel or plant. There is great concern among members of the industry that this could cause liability problems for at-sea processing companies.

Please see the attached minutes from the Electronic Reporting Committee meeting for a complete explanation of this matter.

The Committee was able to reach consensus on all other issues at the meeting. However, this very important issue could not be resolved. As Committee chair, I would like to resolve this single remaining area of contention in order for NMFS and the industry to proceed with implementation of electronic reporting.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

John R. Gauvin

Attachment: Minutes from Electronic Reporting Committee, 20 February 1997
cc: Electronic Reporting Committee members w/o attachment

REC'D by e-mail.

Summary of 2/20/97 Electronic Reporting Meeting

Attendance-- Committee Members: John Jensen, contracted NMFS programmer; Nick Hindman, NMFS AK Region; Bill Karp and Mike Brown, NMFS Observer Program; Bruce Simonson, ADF&G; Lauri Bowen, Tyson (sitting in for Dave Benson); Doug Pohl, Data Marine; Rob Gudmundson, NPLA; Craig Cross, AFTA; Grant Yutrzenka, Unisea (speaker phone); John Gauvin, Groundfish Forum.

Other Attendance: Steve Pitts, Alaska Ocean; Dan Waldeck, Groundfish Forum; Karl Haflinger, Sea State; Dave Wilson, Iquique USA; Flo Wannebo and Jessie Stevens, GSA; Alison Vijgen, Kim Dietrich, Assoc. of Professional Observers; Lindy Reys and John Henderschedt, Golden Age Seafoods

Objective for committee meeting and development of implementation list It was decided that the group would work through the agenda with the goal of achieving resolution on all issues listed as "remaining implementation issues" (see agenda). If this could be accomplished, future meetings would deal with potential adjustments in the electronic reporting program due to unforeseen factors and circumstances, or implementation tasks that require further industry/NMFS consideration.

Members and other attendees were asked to add any additional issues to the listed implementation issues (items listed under #2 on agenda). The following were added: security, submission of revised reports, transmission protocol.

Software (item g) was taken up first so that NMFS could present their latest demo version of the reporting software. Nick Hindman and John Jensen made a presentation describing the new program. The new software application is more conventional than the last version, most attendees found it much easier to use and understand. Several questions were asked and suggestions made about the specifics of the software. NMFS agreed that the software would be available on a demo basis as soon as it was completed and more specific comments and suggestions could be made at that time. Committee members thought the software (with some minor modifications) would work for most companies to use for their reporting.

Grant Yutrzenka pointed out that some companies already have internal data management systems. These companies may want to continue using their systems and send and/or export data in a NMFS specified flatfile format that would be completely compatible with NMFS software fields and format. NMFS agreed that this could happen and they were willing to work with companies in this situation by providing the necessary formats for the flatfile. The data validation (in terms of quality control) steps that NMFS has set up in the software would have to be written into the company software so that the same checks against entering erroneous data exist in alternate software.

One final issue was raised on the check-in, check-out capability of the software. Industry wants the software to be able to accommodate multiple check in/out reports for multiple areas simultaneously because this matches the reality of fishing under the current regulations. The software can and will accommodate such. There are two issues: 1) the application to fixed gear, and 2) the application to mobile gear. NMFS agreed to modify the software to allow fixed gear vessels to be checked into multiple areas under the current regulations. However, changes in the mobile gear boundary shift reporting rule are a management call. The regulations allow more flexibility in recording areas, but the technical limitations of the NMFS database have lead NMFS to question the ability of NMFS to allow the use of such flexibility for mobile gear vessels. In the end, it was decided that this is a management/enforcement call, not a software issue, even though NMFS's difficulty tracking check-in and check-out reports may have been used as an explanation for the revised application of the regulations.

File transmission to/from Home Office NMFS proposed electronic reporting system appears to mandate that final reports be sent from the vessel, not the home office. NMFS believes that a feature of the new system should be to assure NMFS that the reports on the vessel are identical to the reports issued from the vessel's home office. The current practice, however, for many companies is that the home office sends the final report. The issue for the industry is that the liability for the accuracy of that report rests with the owner of the vessel and companies believe that since vessel owners are responsible for the reports, vessel owners should have final control over the transmission of the reports to NMFS.

In the end, the industry wants an alternative approach to be created wherein some companies could designate the home office as the place from which final reports are sent to NMFS. When the final report is sent from the home office, a "simultaneous" report would go to the vessel and reside there for purposes of enforcement, etc. For vessels reporting in this manner, the boat would send an "in process" report to the home office via the means set up in the software and the home office. The home office would check over the vessel report and, if complete, send it to NMFS and the vessel. Some companies may chose to designate the vessel as the site for the final report to be generated and sent, depending on the structure of the vessel's operation or other factors.

NMFS views this as a departure from what they were proposing and needs to explore this alternative approach internally before they can sign off on it.

Transmission Systems The committee discussed systems from the point of view of whether they were capable of modem to modem, or modem to electronic mailbox connections. It was discussed that boats with Standard C systems cannot report on a modem to modem basis, so an exemption would have to be made in any case. The discussion also turned to a piece of correspondence between the Regional Director and Data Marine. Doug Pohl paraphrased NMFS's position in the letter as "willing to accept any transmission system that worked as long as it were capable of meeting the electronic reporting requirements". Thus, systems that rely on modem to mailbox connections are acceptable, according to the Mr. Pohl's interpretation of correspondence with NMFS. The industry expressed satisfaction with this apparent willingness to remain flexible on transmission systems because a number of new technologies are coming on line and these may very well be able to meet the reporting requirement, yet offer lower transmission costs. This discussion also touched on the question of whether reports sent through electronic mailboxes were manageable in terms of verification of the time the report arrived, and where and from whom it originated.

Enforcement Issues: backup systems, system failure contingencies The plan is that paper copies would be the standard backup for the first part of implementation of this system on a temporary basis, until the cause of the failure was remedied. Software or computer failures would mean that the vessel would revert back to the current paper system. Committee members stated that they did not want a hardware or software breakdown to result in a situation where the vessel would be required to stop fishing. Also discussed was the possibility that a vessel's communication system could fail and the vessel would have to find other means of reporting (for example, radio conveyance of information to another vessel which would then transmit the information electronically).

Data import/export to/from other systems, dedicated computer for electronic reporting The committee learned from the NMFS programmer that the software will allow file downloads so that reports "in progress" can be transferred to another computer on the vessel for revision or for transmission. This alleviates the situation where a computer on the bridge would be the dedicated computer and it would be tied up mainly with electronic reporting. The discussion on data import/export also touched on the software issue where a company that has its own internal software system would be able to created a flatfile compatible with the NMFS software format.

Security NMFS does not expect that digital signatures to ensure the origin of a report are necessary. The discussion touched on the fact that the contents of the weekly report are not exceptionally proprietary and the interception of a report sent to NMFS would be very difficult to begin with.

Transmission Protocol NMFS expects to use Z modem which everyone agreed was a reasonable protocol. Mr. Pohl pointed out that the later versions of Z modem were better for electronic reporting because they feature "break-restart" so that a transmission that is prematurely terminated starts where the break occurred.

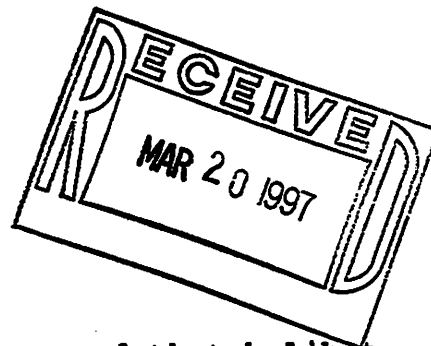
Conclusion: There was one issue that was not resolved at the meeting (home office as source of final report). The committee agreed that the chairman would write a letter to NMFS Regional Director asking him to consider accepting the alternative approach outlined above



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
 P.O. Box 21668
 Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

March 18, 1997

John Elverum, Operations Manager
 Alaska Trawl Fisheries, Inc.
 100 Second Avenue S. Suite 200
 Edmonds, Washington 98020



Dear Mr. Elverum:

Thank you for your letter in which you recommend that halibut bycatch be attributed to the "rock sole/flathead sole/"other flatfish" (rock sole) fishery and not to the yellowfin sole fishery based on the species composition of retained catch, even if the rock sole fishery is closed.

As you know, the "yellowfin sole fishery" is defined as:

Fishing with trawl gear during any weekly reporting period that is defined as a flatfish fishery and results in a retained amount of yellowfin sole that is 70 percent or more of the retained aggregate amount of rock sole, "other flatfish," and yellowfin sole.

The flatfish fishery is a rock sole fishery if the retained amount of yellowfin sole is less than 70 percent of the retained aggregate amount of rock sole, "other flatfish," and yellowfin sole.

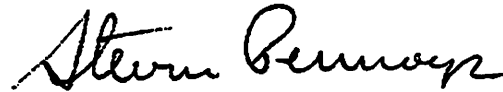
Separate halibut bycatch allowances are specified for the yellowfin sole and rock sole fisheries. Once the halibut bycatch allowance specified for the rock sole fishery is reached, directed fishing for rock sole, flathead sole and "other flatfish" is closed. After these fisheries are closed, we cannot continue to credit halibut bycatch against this bycatch allowance. To do so would allow halibut bycatch amounts to exceed the specified bycatch allowance and potentially exceed the halibut bycatch limit established for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area trawl fisheries. Nonetheless, vessel operators may "top off" their catch of yellowfin sole or other species open to directed fishing with rock sole up to the maximum retainable bycatch (MRB) amount. When this occurs, the halibut bycatch amounts associated with the yellowfin sole fishery increase. Over the past several years, industry members have expressed concerns about the resulting potential for premature closure of the yellowfin sole fishery.



Options to address this situation include revision of the current definitions of the yellowfin sole and rock sole fisheries or a reduction in the MRB percentage established for rock sole. When presented with these options in the past, the flatfish industry has been unable to reach consensus on an appropriate change or adjustment.

We are willing to work with the industry and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to develop options to address concerns arising from topping off activities in the flatfish fisheries. Until regulatory changes can be made to implement a recommended option, we must continue to attribute halibut bycatch in the flatfish fisheries to the yellowfin sole fishery once the rock sole fishery is closed.

Sincerely,



Steven Pennoyer
Administrator, Alaska Region