


MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke
Executive Director 

DATE: April 9, 1999

SUBJECT: Non-pelagic Trawl Ban in Cook Inlet

ESTIMATED TIME
8 HOURS
(for all D-1 items)

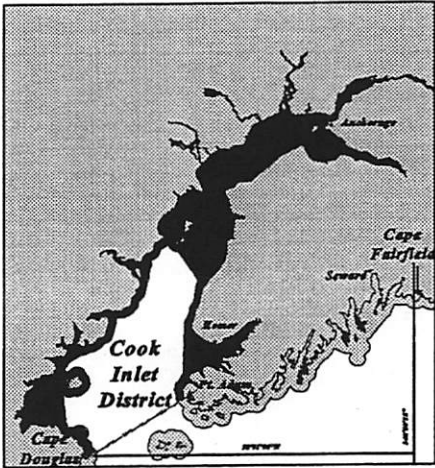
ACTION REQUIRED

Initial review of an analysis to prohibit the use of non-pelagic trawl gear in Cook Inlet.

BACKGROUND

At its October 1998 meeting, the Council requested that staff prepare an analysis of alternatives to prohibit the use of non-pelagic trawl gear in federal waters of Cook Inlet in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). This was in response to a proposal submitted during the summer 1998 call for proposals by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

Historically, Cook Inlet supported significant fisheries for king and Tanner crab and currently supports limited fisheries for Pacific cod. King and Tanner crab resources in the Cook Inlet portion of the GOA remain depressed. King crab fisheries have remained closed since 1984. Commercial Tanner crab fisheries have remained closed since 1994. In the absence of federal management of crab stocks in the GOA prior to August 1, 1996, the State has jurisdiction for managing all crab stocks in the GOA EEZ.



To protect and promote rebuilding of king and Tanner crab resources, the Alaska Board of Fisheries prohibited the use of non-pelagic trawl in state waters of Cook Inlet. However, a significant portion of critical habitat for these crab resources occurs in federal waters of Cook Inlet. Although little fishing effort has occurred with non-pelagic trawl gear, previous efforts to prohibit non-pelagic trawling in this habitat have largely been reactive. Greater long-term, proactive protection is needed for this habitat to promote rebuilding of these resources. The EA/RIR for this change to the GOA FMP analyzes four alternatives for gear specifications for the federal portion of Cook Inlet in the GOA. The following alternatives were developed for analysis, which was mailed to you on April 6, 1999. The executive summary is attached at Item D-1(c).

- Alternative 1: No action.
- Alternative 2: Prohibit the use of non-pelagic trawl in federal waters of Cook Inlet.
- Alternative 3: Defer management of groundfish in federal waters of Cook Inlet to the State of Alaska.
- Alternative 4: Remove waters of Cook Inlet from the Gulf of Alaska FMP.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Magnuson-Stevens Act emphasizes the importance of bycatch effects on achieving sustainable fisheries. National Standard 9 mandates that conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable: minimize bycatch; and to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimize the mortality of such bycatch. This analysis addresses the use of non-pelagic trawl gear in federal waters of Cook Inlet in the Gulf of Alaska north of a line from Cape Douglas to Point Adam. This area is currently managed as part of the Central Regulatory area in the Gulf of Alaska. Historically, Cook Inlet supported significant fisheries for King and Tanner crab and currently supports limited fisheries for Pacific cod. King and Tanner crab resources in the Cook Inlet portion of the Gulf of Alaska remain depressed. King crab fisheries have remained closed since 1984. Commercial Tanner crab fisheries have remained closed since 1994. In the absence of federal management of crab stocks in the GOA prior to August 1, 1996, the State has jurisdiction for managing all crab stocks in the GOA EEZ.

To protect and promote rebuilding of King and Tanner crab resources, the Alaska Board of Fisheries prohibited the use of non-pelagic trawl in state waters of Cook Inlet. However, a significant portion of critical habitat for these crab resources occurs in federal waters of Cook Inlet. Although little fishing effort has occurred with non-pelagic trawl gear, previous efforts to prohibit non-pelagic trawling in this habitat have largely been reactive. Greater long-term, proactive protection is needed for this habitat to promote rebuilding of these resources. The EA/RIR for this change to the Gulf of Alaska Fishery Management Plan analyzes four alternatives for gear specifications for the Cook Inlet portion of the Gulf of Alaska:

Alternative 1: No action.

Alternative 2: Prohibit the use of non-pelagic trawl in federal waters of Cook Inlet.

Alternative 3: Defer management of groundfish in federal waters of Cook Inlet to the State of Alaska.

Alternative 4: Remove waters of Cook Inlet from the Gulf of Alaska FMP.

The status quo alternative was not recommended by the State of Alaska as it would allow crab stocks to continue to be vulnerable to bycatch mortality by non-pelagic trawling in federal waters of Cook Inlet.

Alternative 2, the preferred alternative by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), would prohibit the use of non-pelagic trawl gear in federal waters of Cook Inlet. The Alaska Board of Fisheries (Board) has prohibited the use of non-pelagic trawl gear in state waters of Cook Inlet. The proposed closure in federal waters would provide long-term protection to depressed King and Tanner crab resources in Cook Inlet and would provide concurrent management approaches with ADF&G. Because little fishing with non-pelagic trawl gear has occurred in this area, this will not significantly impact existing fisheries. Alternative 2 would implement consistent gear restrictions in this area to optimize protection and rebuilding of crab resources.

Alternative 3 would defer management of groundfish in federal waters of Cook Inlet north of a line from Cape Douglas to Cape Elizabeth to the State of Alaska. It would expand upon the management authority proposed under Alternative 2, by authorizing ADF&G and the Board to manage all groundfish stocks within federal waters of Cook Inlet, while retaining ultimate management authority under the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), in consultation with the Council. This area currently supports fisheries for Pacific cod.

Alternative 4 would withdraw Cook Inlet from the Gulf of Alaska FMP. The State of Alaska would assume management authority of groundfish in the absence of federal management, as constrained by Section 306(a)(3) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The primary groundfish fishery in this area is currently Pacific cod. The Alaska Board of Fisheries has prohibited the use of non-pelagic trawl gear in Cook Inlet state waters. Because little

fishing with non-pelagic trawl gear has occurred in this area, this alternative will not significantly impact existing fisheries. Alternative 4 would clarify fishing opportunities by establishing a single management agency for groundfish in Cook Inlet, while also optimizing protection and rebuilding of crab resources.