


MEMORANDUM

TO: Council and Board Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke
Executive Director 

DATE: February 1, 2000

SUBJECT: License Limitation Program for Groundfish and Crab

The Council's License Limitation Program (LLP) for groundfish and crab, passed by the Council in 1995, is just now being implemented this year. It only applies to federal waters of the exclusive economic zone, thus leaving an opportunity for further influx of capacity into state waters fisheries. It is very clear from a review of the administrative record that the Council never intended the program to apply to state waters. The joint Board/Council committee requested the full Council and Board to take this up as an issue on February 8th.

Extended Remarks
Mr. Richard Lauber, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
before the
Senate Subcommittee on Oceans and Fisheries

Tom Casey
@ BOF/once
Jat Metz

January 18, 2000

Good morning, Senators. As always, it's an honor for me to appear before you, particularly with my esteemed colleagues from NMFS, the State of Alaska, and U.S. Coast Guard.

It's a good time to have a hearing. We all made it through the end of the century, and appear to be Y2K compliant, and I think now is an appropriate time to take stock of how we're doing in fisheries management. The really good news to me, from my vantage point of over a quarter century being involved in Alaska fisheries, and almost ten years as the Council chairman, is that I believe we may be onto "sustainable fisheries management" for most of our fisheries up here. That can be a very illusive goal, as we all know from our collective experience in other regions of the U.S. and around the world.

For the most part, resource managers have not received very good marks. And it's not for lack of strong legislation such as the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which with all its myriad provisions and amendments, provides a very sound foundation for sustainable management. Rather, the vital ingredient that seems to be missing in many areas is a political will to establish effective management constraints so that fish stocks can flourish, while still allowing for an economically viable fishing industry.

We have achieved a balance up here that has allowed Alaska to remain the U.S. leader in fisheries production. Over 50% of the nation's landings come from Alaska stocks, and we are proud of that. We have strong support from NMFS and the State of Alaska, in providing comprehensive stock assessments, and we have constrained harvest levels through firm season closures once the harvest is taken. Last month our scientists again informed us that our groundfish stocks continue to be in good health, with Bering Sea pollock stocks rebounding with a very strong 1996 year class. That's good news for the industry and hopefully for the sea lions. Our flatfish stocks seem to have topped out for now and are cycling downward. Each of our stocks has its own unique cycle and we cannot keep all of them high all the time. But for the most part, the fisheries remain healthy off Alaska as we head into this next decade.

On the fishing capacity side of the equation, the North Pacific Council over the past ten years has limited entry into every fishery under its jurisdiction, and moved beyond that for the sablefish and halibut longline fisheries, to the use of individual fishing quotas, the largest such experiment in the U.S. to date. Overlaying most of our fisheries is a complex array of allocations of target species by industry and gear sector. Additional regulations control bycatch and waste of non-target species.



We will take final action next month in Anchorage and I have heard that there will be well over 300 people there to testify. This is our Council's first big foray into the classic commercial-recreational struggle that has played out for years elsewhere in the nation. I'm not sure what the outcome will be, but whatever restrictions we choose, will only apply to charter boat fishermen. Unguided sport fishermen will not be impacted by the restrictions. But I'm sure you'll hear from everyone.

Overfishing

As I noted earlier, we have been very fortunate in the North Pacific in that our stocks are robust and in good shape. One groundfish stock, Pacific ocean perch, was depleted by heavy Japanese and Soviet fisheries in the 1960s and early 1970s. It remained in low abundance for years despite little in the way of catch. We approved a rebuilding plan in 1993, and were very fortunate that some good year classes came along shortly thereafter and the stock has recovered nicely.

Our shellfish resources have not been so lucky. Three stocks, Bering Sea Bairdi and Opilio Tanner crab and St. Mathew blue king crab, have declined sharply despite the best efforts of ADF&G and very sound science provided by researchers such as Dr. Gordon Kruse. We approved a rebuilding plan for the Bairdi stock last October, and will approve plans for the other two stocks next June. It's very difficult to predict if the stocks will come back according to schedule, but we will be making every effort to protect them.

We will be watching with great interest, any proposed changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Act concerning overfishing definitions. Somehow we have to ensure that we balance the need for protective overfishing measures with the natural tendency of stocks to fluctuate widely over time. Just because a stock takes a cyclical bounce to low abundance levels as a result of environmental shifts, does not necessarily mean that we should drop everything else we are doing to establish a rebuilding plan right away. I fully agree that we need to be precautionary and conservative in our management, especially when a stock is low, but we need to be reasonable and methodical in our approach, and not shut everything down as some environmental groups would have us do.

Essential Fish Habitat

A few brief comments on essential fish habitat: Our Council responded quickly to the SFA amendments of 1996 to add descriptions of EFH to our fishery management plans. We fully understood that within the same 24-month timeline for the descriptions, the SFA also called for concurrent measures to minimize fishing impacts on habitat to the extent practicable. Because of the workloads involved, we chose a deliberate two-step approach. First we worked at identifying EFH and adding those descriptions to our plans by June 1998. Then we established a process for considering the fishing impacts, and are now concentrating on identifying habitat areas of particular concern, based on ecological function and vulnerability to man-made impacts.

This is not to say that we have not acted to protect habitat. We've closed a unique pinnacle area off Sitka to bottom fishing. We've banned non-pelagic trawling for Bering Sea pollock. We've closed

From: Gary Painter <gpainter@actionnet.net>
To: Tom Casey <tcasey@wolfenet.com>
Date: Thursday, January 06, 2000 10:21 AM
Subject: FW: Otto

-----Original Message-----

From: Gary Painter [mailto:gpainter2@actionnet.net]
Sent: Thursday, January 06, 2000 8:02 AM
To: Gary Painter
Subject: FW: Otto

-----Original Message-----

From: Gary Painter [mailto:gpainter2@actionnet.net]
Sent: Wednesday, January 05, 2000 9:01 PM
To: Tom Casey
Subject: Otto

Mr. Casey: Here it is!

At our last Pnciac meeting, Bob Otto said that changing the exploitation rate from 58% to 22% "...won't change the reproductive potential of the stock."

On a 12/1/99 telephone discussion with Bob Otto, I was discussing the Pnciac meeting. I asked him if I could quote him as saying "...not one of us here (The NMFS & ADF&G biologists.) believes that reducing the GHM will help the recovery of the stock." He said "Yes." He also said (12/1/99) "At this point in time, I don't think that reducing the GHM is going to do very much."

Gary, Bob Otto told me that
67% of the 4-inch
Males will die of
natural mortality
in one-year. R

1/12/00

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