

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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NEWSLETTER

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council will meet in Anchorage, Alaska at the Old Federal Building, 605 W. 4th Avenue, September 25-28, 1984. Wednesday, September 26, has been set aside to discuss Tanner crab management with the Alaska Board of Fisheries. The Council's four-day agenda is packed and several evening sessions may be required to complete business by Friday afternoon. The following topics will be among those on the agenda when it is mailed around September 10.

Election of Officers

The Council will hold elections for Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the next one-year term in office.

Special Reports

Alaska Department of Fish and Game will report on domestic fisheries with special emphasis on the chinook salmon season, the Western Alaska/Aleutians herring harvest, and the growing sablefish fishery. NMFS will report on foreign and joint venture fisheries and the Coast Guard will give an overview of their enforcement and surveillance activities during the summer. Finally, NMFS will report on the results of their 1984 Bering Sea/Aleutian crab surveys.

Halibut Fishery Management

The Council will review its role in management of the halibut fishery off Alaska. While the halibut stocks have rebounded dramatically, increased fishing effort has kept the seasons extremely short and produced a glut of fish for the processors and markets. This has contributed to lower ex-vessel prices and considerable spoilage on the docks. The Council must first decide if it should have a substantive role in managing this fishery and if so, what strategy to use.

Comprehensive Fishery Management Goals

Eight draft comprehensive goals for fisheries management off Alaska were drafted by a Council workgroup last spring and sent to public review on June 11, 1984. The written comment period ended August 15. In September, the Council will have the goals before them for final adoption, and then will establish a process to define fishery-specific objectives and strategies. In addition Council workgroups will be appointed to draft those specific objectives which should be ready for adoption sometime next spring after thorough analyses of their consequences and extensive public review.

Joint Venture/Foreign Allocations and Permit Review Policies

The Council has drafted and sent to public review policies on reviewing joint ventures, recommending foreign allocations, and reviewing foreign fishing vessel permit applications. Written comments are due by September 15. The Council will review public input and formalize policies in these areas. This will allow time for permit applicants to respond appropriately by the Council's December meeting when the vast majority of permit applications are reviewed for the next calendar year.

Joint Venture Permit Restrictions

The Council has been asked by NMFS to review the restrictions NMFS attaches to foreign fishing vessel permits for vessels buying over the side from U.S. trawlers. Permits now place a 1.5% limit on the amount of sablefish that can be received by the foreign processor relative to total groundfish delivered by the U.S. boats. Permits also stipulate that the entire joint venture fishery must close when the quota for any single species is reached. Various industry representatives have asked NMFS to rescind these requirements. Though the Council may advise NMFS at this meeting or in December on the permit restrictions, any proposed amendments to the Council's groundfish plans will be processed when the formal management plan cycle begins for groundfish in January 1985.

Portugese Vessel Permits Up For Review

The Council will review directed fishing permits for Portugese vessels to use sunken gillnets for cod in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands where Portugal recently received a 5,000 mt Pacific cod allocation. The Council will also review joint venture permits for the Portugese to receive cod and pollock from U.S. trawlers working for one or more joint venture partnerships this fall. The Portugese have agreed to also buy wet-salted cod from U.S. shorebased processors.

Bering-Chukchi Sea Herring

A Council Request for Proposals to conduct offshore herring research using U.S. trawlers starting next January was sent out for industry review on June 13. Any responses that are received will be reviewed in September.

There also has been a request from industry to NMFS to draft and implement a Secretarial Plan for management of the offshore herring fishery. The Council's plan was put on hold last May until further research could be conducted. In September NMFS will report on the request for a Secretarial Plan.

Tanner Crab Management

The Council and Board of Fisheries will meet jointly on Wednesday, September 26, to discuss proposals to the Board on exclusive registration areas and pot limits. They will also review an in-depth study on exclusive areas and pot limits recently completed by staff of the Council, ADF&G, and NMFS. The Council will then provide direction to the Tanner crab plan team on any amendments to the FMP that may be needed as a result of Board actions at this meeting.

The Council will also review the status of Amendment 9 to the Tanner crab plan. This amendment would have given the NMFS Regional Director authority to set seasons using rulemaking notices and change seasons using field orders based on either biological or socioeconomic needs. The amendment has just been partially disapproved by NMFS.

Gulf of Alaska Groundfish

The Council will consider requesting the Secretary of Commerce to implement emergency regulations to raise the incidental halibut bycatch ceilings for the domestic trawl fisheries in the Gulf and to close the Southeast Alaska Fishery Conservation Zone cul-de-sacs to sablefish fishing until the traditional opening dates.

The Gulf groundfish plan limits the cumulative halibut bycatch from December 1 through May 31 for U.S. trawlers to 29 mt in the Western Area and 52 mt in the Central Area. Last December the Council requested emergency regulations to increase the limits in both areas and to exempt pelagic trawls from the limits altogether. The increased limits, 270 mt in the Western Area and 768 mt in the Central Area, more accurately reflect the current high abundance of halibut and the operational needs of the developing U.S. groundfish fishery. These regulations expired June 21, 1984 and need to be continued for the period beginning December 1 until the Council can permanently amend its fishery management plan.

Similarly, emergency regulations closing the sablefish fishery in the FCZ cul-de-sacs in Southeast Alaska will expire on September 1 and need renewal. The Council initially requested these regulations last February to make the sablefish seasons in the cul-de-sacs consistent with those for surrounding state waters. In September the Council will request new emergency regulations designed to keep the cul-de-sacs closed from January 1, 1985, until state waters open. State waters normally open on March 15 in southern Southeast and on September 1 in northern Southeast. The FMP will then be amended formally to include these provisions.

In September, the Council will also reexamine its proposed ban on the use of pots for sablefish in Southeast. The original ban was proposed in Amendment 12 which was passed by the Council in July 1982 but has had several procedural problems.

Finally, the Council will review the status of groundfish stocks in the Gulf of Alaska and put out for public review preliminary estimates of optimum yield and apportionments to domestic and foreign fisheries for 1985. Final action on these estimates is scheduled for the December Council meeting.

Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Groundfish

The Council will review the latest assessments of groundfish stock abundance in the Bering Sea/Aleutians for 1985 and set preliminary levels of total allowable catch for each species and initial apportionments to the domestic and foreign fisheries. These estimates will be sent out for public review and a final decision made in December.

Council Advisory Groups Will Meet Beginning September 24

The Council's Advisory Panel and Scientific and Statistical Committee will meet beginning at 10:00 a.m. on September 24 and continue as necessary on September 25 and 26 to discuss the various topics noted in this newsletter. The Council and SSC may meet in closed session some time during the week to discuss personnel matters. With the exception of closed sessions, all meetings are open to the public. A draft agenda should be available by September 10.

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