North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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NEWSLETTER

Council's July Meeting Held in Homer

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council met on July 27 and 28 in Homer, Alaska at the Land's End. The Council agenda included reports by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, National Marine Fisheries Service, the U.S. Coast Guard and the International Pacific Halibut Commission, in addition to staff reports and public testimony on the Council's fishery management plans. The Council voted to raise the optimum yield for pollock in the Central Gulf of Alaska, gave final approval of a Tanner crab amendment that establishes a framework for adjusting fishing seasons and updates acceptable biological catches, and sent to public review an amendment to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Management Plan which would establish field order authority for conservation closures. Details of Council actions on these and other items are included in this newsletter.

Next Council Meeting to be Held in September

The next meeting of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council will be held September 28 and 29 in Anchorage at the Old Federal Building, 605 W. 4th Ave. The Scientific and Statistical Committee will meet on September 26 and 27 at the Old Federal Building and the Advisory Panel will meet on September 27 at a location yet to be named. The agenda will include review and final action on the Council's Herring Fishery Management Plan, a report on management options for the halibut fishery, consideration of a Taiwanese joint venture permit application, and preliminary consideration of groundfish yields and their apportionment to the domestic and foreign fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and Sea/Aleutian Islands. A draft agenda will be available September 19. Items for inclusion in the Council reference books distribution to the Council at the meeting should be in the hands of Council staff at least one week before the meeting.

Farewell to Clem Tillion and Joe Demmert

July was the last Council meeting for Clem Tillion and Joe Demmert. Mr. Tillion has served on the Council since its inception in 1976 and has presided as Chairman since October 1978. His Chairman's gavel along with a plaque was presented to him in appreciation for his long and devoted service.

Joe Demmert, Jr., of Ketchikan, ended his three-year term with the July meeting. Though Mr. Demmert, a long-time Southeast fisherman, was not able to attend the meeting, he was given fond farewells and appreciation for his association with the Council.

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Two New Members Named to Council

Two new appointments to the Council have been made by Secretary Baldridge. John Winther, Jr. of Petersburg, Alaska, and Sara Hemphill of Anchorage were named to replace Council members Tillion and Demmert. The appointments become effective August 11 and their terms will last three years. Mr. Winther is a long-time Alaska fisherman and a Director of Icicle Seafoods. Ms. Hemphill is now the Director of Alaska Trading Co. based in Anchorage, and was the first Executive Director of the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation. Both will bring to the Council a wealth of experience with fisheries issues in Alaska.

Future Council Meetings Scheduled

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has set their schedule of meetings for the remainder of 1983 and for 1984. The Board of Fisheries has cancelled their December 1983 meeting, and so the Council will meet alone on December 7 and 8 at the Old Federal Building, 605 W. 4th Ave., Anchorage, Alaska. In 1984, the Council will meet as follows:

February-1st week Juneau (with Alaska Board of Fisheries)
March 28-29 Anchorage (with Alaska Board of Fisheries)

May 23-24 Anchorage
July 25-26 Anchorage
September 26-27 Sitka

December Anchorage (with Alaska Board of Fisheries; dates yet to be determined)

Council Votes to Raise Pollock OY in Central Gulf

After receiving a report from the Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center indicating that the pollock resource in the Western and Central Gulf of Alaska is in excellent condition, the Council voted to increase this year's pollock optimum yield in the Central Gulf by 40,000 mt, from 143,000 mt to 183,000 mt. This action will allow the foreign fishery the same catch levels in that area as in 1982. The Council did not wish to penalize foreign purchases of domestically-caught groundfish by immediately reducing the foreign directed catch if the resource can support larger catches. The NMFS report cited said that the pollock stocks in the Central area could sustain a harvest of at least 183,000 mt with no danger of adverse biological effects.

Bering Sea/Aleutians Groundfish Amendment Approved for Public Review

After review of supporting documents, the Council approved for public review Amendment 9 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. The proposed amendment would give the Regional Director field order authority to close foreign and domestic groundfish fisheries for conservation reasons. It was sent to everyone on the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands groundfish mailing list August 4, comments are due by September 9. The Council will probably not act on the amendment until December to allow for the appropriate analyses of the issues raised by the public.

Resource Assessment Document Available Domestic Industry to be Surveyed for 1984 Fish Needs

We have sent a summary of a Resource Assessment Document (RAD) outlining the status of groundfish stocks in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands and proposing acceptable biological catches for those stocks in 1984 to the Council's groundfish mailing list. The Council will base its optimum yield determinations on those estimates, discussing them at the September meeting and finalizing them at the December meeting.

The Council will also begin discussing the projected requirements of the U.S. fishing industry in 1984 for both joint ventures and domestic catching and processing off Alaska. These discussions will lead to apportionments of the groundfish optimum yields for 1984 between the domestic and foreign industries at the December Council meeting. Those involved in processing or catching groundfish off Alaska should be sure to respond to an upcoming survey by the National Marine Fisheries Service designed to determine U.S. requirements for next year.

Council re-affirms Fishery Development Zone

After reviewing an economic analysis of the possible affects on the U.S. fishing fleet of the Fisheries Development Zone they established last September (Amendment #6 to the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Groundfish Management Plan), the Council re-affirmed its previous action by a vote of six to four. The analysis, prepared by the Council staff, confirmed that closing the rich fishing area north of Unimak Pass to foreign directed fishing should have immediate benefit to U.S. fishermen by reducing competition and probably increasing their catch per unit of effort. Those benefits would be relatively short range, however, ending when U.S. effort approached the same level as the current combined U.S. and foreign effort in that area.

Tanner Crab FMP Amendments Considered by Council

The Council acted on two amendments to the Tanner Crab Fishery Management Plan.

Amendment 9, establishing a framework procedure utilizing pre-season notices for setting Tanner crab fishing seasons, was approved for Secretarial review. This amendment responds to the continuing problem of coordinating federal season dates with those established by the State of Alaska. Public comments were solicited by the Council on June 1, 1983; that comment period ended on July 27, 1983.

The Council reviewed Amendment 10 and started it through the public review process. That amendment is designed to bring federal and state regulations into conformity by establishing two new exclusive registration areas (Alaska Peninsula and Southeastern) and lowering the Kodiak pot limit from 250 to 200. The 45-day comment period should begin August 15, 1983 with the Council taking final action on the amendment in late September.

IPHC Reviews the 1983 Halibut Fishery

Dr. Donald McCaughran, Director of the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), reported on the 1983 halibut fishery. All areas off Alaska are now closed with quotas being reached or exceeded, except for Area 3B which will open again August 27 for an expected 3-day period. Dr. McCaughran said that 430 new permits were issued to documented vessels by IPHC in 1983 and because of the influx of effort, management measures for next year may include early seasons, seasons which conflict with the salmon seasons, or, in Southeast, possible one-day-a-week openings until the quota is taken. He also noted that the short season has resulted in quality problems because processors cannot handle the large amount of product arriving in such a short time.

Council Halibut Workgroup to Review Management Objectives

The Council directed the halibut workgroup to meet and prepare recommendations on management objectives for the halibut fishery and whether they should adopt a moratorium on new entrants into the fishery before the 1984 season. These recommendations will be presented to the Council at the September meeting. The workgroup includes members of the Council, Advisory Panel, Scientific and Statistical Committee, and industry representatives from Seattle and throughout Alaska. The meeting is tentatively set for September 7-9 at the Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center in Seattle.

ADF&G Reports on Domestic Commercial Fisheries

ADF&G reported that preliminary catch figures for the Bering/Chukchi coastal herring fishery for 1983 are 30,750 mt. The total Southeast sablefish harvest is approximately 1,900 mt with about 30 vessels currently participating in the fishery. They estimate the fishery in the FCZ of the Southeastern and Eastern Yakutat areas will achieve the upper end of the 2,500 mt guideline harvest level by mid-August and close by emergency order. Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska groundfish catches caught and processed by U.S. industry through June were 31,143 mt. Statewide Tanner crab catches are estimated at 59.7 million pounds.

Joint Venture Update

In the Gulf of Alaska, joint ventures harvested 133,260 mt of pollock and other species through June 25. By that date in the Bering Sea, joint ventures had harvested 80,059 mt, consisting of 50,933 mt pollock, 18,803 mt flatfish, 5,668 mt Pacific cod, and 4,092 mt Atka mackerel. Most ventures are finishing out their seasons in the Bering Sea and along the Aleutian Chain. Currently there are six companies employing about 25 U.S. catcher boats in joint ventures off Alaska.

Foreign Fisheries Update

By July 9 foreign fleets working the Gulf of Alaska had caught 32,037 mt of groundfish or about 25% of the current foreign allocation for the Gulf. The catch was about 47% Pacific cod and 24% pollock.

In the Bering Sea and Aleutians the foreign fisheries had caught 421,294 mt, about 51% of the current foreign allocation. The catch was about 80% pollock, 14% flatfish, and 4% Pacific cod.

There were 369 foreign vessels off Alaska on July 20, including 343 from Japan, 16 from South Korea, nine from the USSR and one from West Germany.

U.S. Coast Guard Enforcement Report

The U.S. Coast Guard has issued ten reports of violation (civil penalty procedures) and sixteen citations (written warnings) since the Council's May meeting. Infractions included failure to submit the required activity messages twenty-four hours prior to beginning or ceasing fishing activity in the FCZ, failure to maintain readability of International Radio Call Signs, failure to maintain the accuracy of Daily Cumulative Catch Logs, failure to return a catch of prohibited species (halibut) to the sea in a timely manner, failure to return a catch of an unallocated species (Pacific herring) to the sea in a timely manner, and gross underlogging.

In addition, on June 15, the USCGC CAPE HATTERAS seized the Canadian fishing vessel SALMON KING in the vicinity of Dixon Entrance for fishing within the U.S. Fishery Conservation Zone without a valid permit. Over 500 pounds of halibut were found on board.

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