

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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NEWSLETTER

Groundfish Plan Amendments Dominate May Council Agenda

The Council met in Anchorage May 21-24 to approve changes in groundfish management in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. These changes are detailed below and, when approved by the Secretary of Commerce, will be effective for 1986. The Council also adopted a regulatory amendment for the Gulf of Alaska to allow continued fishing in a management area when the optimum yield for a single species is attained.

The Council also approved several joint venture requests for yellowfin sole and sent a joint venture policy review document out for public comment. Reports on the domestic and foreign fisheries were heard and the Council scheduled a special session for August to review the Gulf groundfish plan. These and other Council actions are discussed in this newsletter.

Council to Review Gulf Groundfish Plan in August

The Council will meet the week of August 12 to consider ways to revise the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. Implemented in 1978 this plan is one of the Council's oldest and is badly out of date. Procedures for annual management adjustments need to be streamlined to make the plan more responsive to the rapidly evolving fishery. For example, each species has a separate optimum yield and even a minor change in harvest level necessitates a formal plan amendment requiring eleven months to process. In addition, more specific goals and objectives are needed to guide the development of the fisheries and the revision of the plan.

In August the Council will develop a work plan for revamping the FMP. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee and Advisory Panel will be represented by their respective chairmen. Because of problems finding hotel space in the summer, the meeting will be held at Alyeska Resort south of Anchorage. Further notice will be sent to the public in July.

Advisory Panel Elects New Officers

The Council's 25-member Advisory Panel elected Larry Cotter Chairman and Bob Alverson Vice-Chairman for the remainder of a one-year term ending December 31, 1985. Larry Cotter has been on the AP since 1980 and is President of Local 200, International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union in Juneau. Bob Alverson has been on the AP since 1976 and served as Chairman for five years. He is Manager of the Fishing Vessel Owners' Association in Seattle.

Seven Changes to Gulf of Alaska
Groundfish Fishery Management Plan Approved

The Council approved Gulf of Alaska Amendment 14 to go forward to Secretary of Commerce review. The seven issues addressed by the amendment are summarized below.

Sablefish Management. Gear conflict, grounds preemption, OY allocation, and fishing seasons were among the sablefish management issues acted on by the Council. Following extensive public testimony and analysis of alternatives, the Council recommended:

- (a) Designating the Eastern Regulatory Area (east of 147°W) as hook and longline only and allowing trawlers a maximum bycatch of 5% of the optimum yield;
- (b) Apportioning the Central Regulatory Area (147-159°W) OY to gear types as follows: hook and longline (55%), pots (25%), and trawl (20%), with a one-year phase out of pot gear and the pot OY allocation then going to hook and longlines;
- (c) Apportioning the Western Regulatory Area (159-170°W) OY to gear types as follows: hook and longline (55%), pots (25%), and trawl (20%), with a three-year phase out of pot gear and the pot allocation then going to hook and longlines.

The decision followed the recommendation of the Advisory Panel except that the trawl apportionment in the Central and Western areas was reduced from 25% to 20% based on public testimony that trawl operations required less sablefish for bycatch purposes. All three gear apportionments are from OY and can be landed and sold. However, once a gear type reaches its limit, its fishery will close. The Council believes that their action will reduce gear conflict and grounds preemption problems, provide necessary bycatch amounts of sablefish for continued trawl operations on other species, and minimize the economic impact on existing pot fishermen.

The Council also adopted an opening of April 1 in all areas for the hook and longline and pot fisheries. This delay from the usual January 1 opening was proposed by the fishing industry to mitigate weather and fish quality problems. The season opening for trawl gear remains January 1.

"Other Rockfish" Management. After reviewing the current status of other rockfish stocks, the Council established a Central Southeast District (between 56° and 57°30'N) within the existing Southeast Outside District and set a 600 mt OY for demersal shelf rockfish to protect this species group from overfishing. The 600 mt quota was based on the 1984 harvest and will limit this fishery until a more comprehensive management program can be developed. The shelf demersal quota will be subtracted from the "Other Rockfish" OY as specified for the remainder of the Gulf. Language was included in this amendment to allow the State of Alaska to place additional, more restrictive regulations on this fishery in the FCZ for boats registered under the laws of Alaska.

1985 OYs for Pollock, POP, Other Rockfish, Atka Mackerel and Other Species. Last December the Council amended, by emergency rule, the OYs for pollock, Pacific ocean perch, other rockfish, Atka mackerel, and other species based on current stock status and harvest information and projected U.S. needs. Last week the Council reaffirmed its earlier decisions by adopting the OYs shown in the attached table (page 4) as a plan amendment.

Catcher/Processor Reporting Requirements. The domestic groundfish fleet has grown rapidly and timely reporting of domestic harvests is required to ensure OYs are not exceeded. Vessels delivering shoreside land frequently enough to allow timely reporting of catch. However, vessels that process at sea can remain on the fishing grounds for extended periods and their catch reports are often so delayed that OYs may be overrun. The resulting overharvests could damage future production from groundfish stocks. Therefore the Council adopted a requirement for all catcher/processing vessels that hold their catch for more than two weeks to provide weekly catch reports and check in and out of regulatory areas. The latter requirement will enable assessment of total harvest capacity to determine when an optimum yield will be reached.

Measures to Control Pacific Halibut Bycatch. Prohibited species catch ceilings (PSC) now are used to limit halibut bycatch. When a ceiling is reached, all groundfish fishing in the regulatory area ceases. With the rapid growth of domestic groundfish fisheries and the successful rebuilding of the halibut resource there is a higher potential for unintentional trawl catches of halibut. To increase management flexibility the Council adopted a procedure for setting annual halibut PSC limits that eliminates the lengthy plan amendment process and provides for periodic review of bycatch needs by the trawl fleet. The amendment also gives the NMFS Regional Director authority to allow those fisheries using gear types that do not take halibut to continue when an area PSC has been reached.

NMFS Habitat Policy. The Council adopted an amendment that incorporates the NMFS Habitat Policy into the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMP. It highlights Council concerns for the marine habitat and gives them the authority to adopt regulations to protect the marine environment. One such regulation approved at this meeting prohibits discarding fishing gear at sea by domestic vessels.

Council Encourages Voluntary Measures to Reduce Salmon Bycatch by Trawlers

Joint venture and foreign trawlers in the Gulf of Alaska caught about 71,000 salmon while fishing pollock last fall. Most were taken in pelagic trawls southeast of Kodiak. Last week trawler representatives proposed voluntary measures to reduce the salmon bycatch this fall. They included monitoring bycatch which, if exceeded, would require moving to new grounds. While the Council recognized the value of the industry proposals, it felt that additional measures are needed to protect these important salmon stocks. A special workgroup is scheduled to meet in Anchorage on June 18-19 to explore ways to minimize salmon interceptions. A report on their progress is scheduled for the September Council meeting. Please call the Council office for further information on this meeting.

1984 Gulf of Alaska Groundfish OY, DAP, JVP,
Reserves and TALFF by Area (mt)

<u>Species</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>OY</u>	<u>DAP</u>	<u>JVP</u>	<u>Reserves</u>	<u>TALFF</u>
Pollock	W/C	305,000	44,371	212,500	23,129	25,000
	E	16,600	13,280	0	3,320	0
Pacific cod	W	16,560	2,539	3,209	3,312	7,500
	C	33,540	19,901	4,431	6,708	2,500
	E	9,900	7,920	0	1,980	0
Flounders	W	10,400	7,398	922	1,880	200
	C	14,700	8,292	3,468	2,690	250
	E	8,400	6,720	0	1,680	0
POP	W	1,302	1,302	53*	0	30*
	C	3,906	3,906	98*	0	16*
	E	875	875	0	0	0
Sablefish	W	1,670	1,670	245*	0	140*
	C	3,060	3,060	545*	0	31*
	W. Yakutat	1,680	1,680	0	0	0
	E. Yakutat	1,135	1,135	0	0	0
	S.E. Outside	1,435	1,435	0	0	0
Atka mackerel	W	4,678	50	3,692	836	100
	C	500	350	30	100	20
	E	100	80	0	20	0
Rockfish	Gulfwide	5,000	4,600	133	267	25*
Thornyhead	Gulfwide	3,750	2,990	10	700	50
Squid	Gulfwide	5,000	3,990	10	950	50
Other species	Gulfwide	<u>22,460</u>	<u>16,544</u>	<u>1,400</u>	<u>4,191</u>	<u>325</u>
W/C Total		305,000	44,371	212,500	23,129	25,000
Western Total		34,610	12,959	7,823	6,028	7,800
Central Total		55,706	35,509	7,929	9,498	2,770
Eastern Total		40,125	33,125	0	7,000	0
Gulfwide		36,210	28,124	1,553	6,108	425
TOTAL		471,651	154,088	229,805	51,763	35,995

*Prohibited species catch limits, which are not part of the above totals.

Council Addresses Single-Species OY Closures

Gulf of Alaska groundfish regulations now require a management area to close to all fishing when the optimum yield for any particular species is caught, even if other fisheries catch only minimal amounts of the species in question. In Southeast Alaska, for example, current regulations preclude a rockfish fishery after the sablefish OY is taken, even though there are very few sablefish caught in that fishery.

The Council had discussed this problem in March and directed the plan team to develop solutions for review in May. Four alternatives were discussed last week and the Council adopted an amendment that exempts fisheries known to take negligible amounts of the species for which the season has been closed, authorizes the NMFS Regional Director to close the directed fishery for a particular species before its OY is attained to leave a small bycatch for other fisheries, and authorizes the Regional Director to reopen a fishery by field order on the basis of new scientific information.

Council Reaffirms 20-Mile Closure in Aleutians

Draft Amendment 9 to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Plan addressed five issues. The Council acted on three of these to go forward to Secretarial review and maintained the status quo on the other two.

20-Mile Closure in the Aleutians. The Council reaffirmed their action of last December, closing the area within 20 miles of the Aleutians to foreign trawling but rejected a "zero TALFF" proposal that would have eliminated all foreign fishing. They stated that the U. S. would benefit from the reduction of trawl bycatches of those species which are fully utilized by American fishermen.

Catcher/Processor Reporting Requirements. Reporting requirements for vessels which hold their catch for more than two weeks were approved. Such reports are necessary to ensure adequate inseason management and to prevent TACs from being exceeded. This is similar to action taken for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish plan.

Habitat. The Council approved incorporation of a habitat section into the plan after significant revisions were made to the original text at the recommendation of the Scientific and Statistical Committee. The Council also adopted a regulation prohibiting the intentional discard of fishing gear by U.S. fishermen. A similar regulation has been in effect for foreign fishermen for several years.

Increase the Optimum Yield (OY). The Council voted to retain the existing OY range of 1.4-2.0 million metric tons for the groundfish complex. The proposed increase in the upper end of the OY range was not seen as a benefit to the U. S. in the foreseeable future. The Council suggested that the Plan Team evaluate alternative methods of frameworking OY for the 1986 amendment cycle.

Joint Venture Salmon Bycatch. The Council did not impose mandatory restrictions on joint ventures to reduce the bycatch of chum salmon in the Bering Sea. They did approve an industry request to allow the participating joint ventures to establish voluntary measures to reduce the bycatch and directed the Plan Team to begin work on an amendment to implement these or similar measures in the 1986 cycle.

Gulf Pollock and Bering Sea Cod to be Less Abundant Next Year

The National Marine Fisheries Service projects fewer pollock in the Gulf of Alaska in 1986 based on year-class strength information developed from recent hydroacoustic surveys and the commercial fisheries in Shelikof Strait. The spawning stock covered an area less than half that observed in 1981, and the schools are in a layer only 20-25 fm thick compared to 40 fm in 1981. One bright spot is high juvenile abundance, the downward trend in harvestable pollock is expected to reverse in 1987 as these juveniles recruit to the fishery. This forecast will be updated in September.

NMFS also reported on Pacific cod stocks in the Bering Sea and Aleutians. Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center scientists earlier had predicted declining cod abundance through 1987 as the strong 1977 year class passed from the fishery. Preliminary fishery data for 1985 show that cod catches per unit effort for U.S. factory trawlers and joint ventures in the southeastern Bering Sea east of 170°W have declined 34-37% from last year. As anticipated, average cod size increased because the catch is composed mainly of the older 1977 year class. The reported decrease in catch per effort is very close to the forecasted population decline of 36%. The status of cod stocks will be reviewed in September after the Bering Sea summer survey is completed.

U.S. Factory Trawlers Request Lower Harvest Quota for Cod

The Council reviewed a request by the U.S. factory trawler fleet for emergency action to lower the total allowable catch (TAC) for Pacific cod in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. The limit is now set at 220,000 mt and the request was to lower it to 132,000 mt because of the declining catch rates these trawlers and the joint venture fleets are experiencing in the southeastern Bering Sea. National Marine Fisheries Service scientists noted that those decreases were anticipated as a result of the strong 1977 year class passing from the fishery and concluded there was little evidence of any biological emergency. There is no provision in the Bering Sea groundfish plan for the Council to reduce TAC inseason for socioeconomic reasons and little evidence that the few thousand tons of cod that could have been held back from reserves would increase factory trawler catch rates. The Council concluded it was unable to lower the TAC since there is no biological emergency but intend to monitor the cod stocks closely so appropriate catch limits and apportionments to benefit U.S. industry can be set in December for the 1986 fishing year.

No Action on Salmon FMP

Action on the Salmon Plan was postponed until after the newly formed U.S.-Canada Salmon Commission goes into operation.

Halibut Workshops

Last December the Council directed its Halibut Workgroup to prepare material on management options for presentation at a series of workshops planned for this fall. Because of funding problems and the critical need to devote substantial staff time to rewriting the Gulf of Alaska FMP, the Council decided to defer the workshops indefinitely. They stressed the need for a continuing dialogue on ways of improving halibut management but, since Council resources are limited, asked other groups, perhaps Sea Grant or the National Coastal Resources Research & Development Institute to furnish the forum.

Council Requests More Information Before North Aleutian Oil Lease Sale

The Council heard from the Minerals Management Service (MMS), State of Alaska, and the United Fishermen of Alaska concerning the proposed North Aleutian Shelf oil lease sale No. 92 scheduled for December 1985. MMS described their consultation process for assessing the biological and oceanographic information available on the proposed lease area and identifying critical information needs and concerns associated with the biological resources of the area.

In a letter to U.S. Secretary of Interior Donald Hodel, the Council expressed concern for the fisheries resources at risk and requested that the information needs as identified by the State of Alaska and the United Fishermen of Alaska be fully addressed prior to leasing. While recognizing the need for the nation to discover and develop oil reserves, the Council feels strongly that the fisheries resources of the North Aleutian Basin and vicinity are a national resource of equal value and need to be protected.

Yellowfin Sole Joint Ventures Approved

Three Japanese joint venture requests were approved for a combined harvest of 5,990 mt yellowfin sole and flounders and 1,520 mt other species. Company arrangements involve Whitney-Fidalgo Seafoods/Ohtori, Alyeska Ocean/Hoko, and Alaska Contact/Japan Small Trawlers. Joint venture requests for yellowfin sole from all countries now total about 100,000 mt in the Bering Sea and Aleutians and U.S. processors plan on using an additional 1,769 mt. The total allowable catch for this species is 226,900 mt for 1985.

The Council also reviewed a Portuguese request for a 5,000 mt joint venture for Pacific cod between ProFish International and Solseca in the Gulf of Alaska. The venture's permit will expire May 31 and they have harvested only 750 mt. The Portuguese have yet to follow through on earlier commitments to purchase 4,000 mt wet-salted cod from U.S. processors and establish the required import quota. In addition, they allegedly have unpaid bills for ships' chandlery services in Dutch Harbor. Therefore, the Council recommended no further action on their request, but is prepared to move ahead quickly on permit renewal once the above problems are resolved.

Joint Venture Policy Document Sent to Public Review

The Council is requesting public comments on the following issues involving joint ventures: (1) conditions and restrictions on permits for foreign processing vessels operating in joint ventures; (2) joint venture allocations to companies, and (3) guidelines for implementing the Council's Interim Policy on Joint Ventures and Allocations. A discussion document on these issues was sent on May 29 to the Council's mailing lists for groundfish and joint ventures. Persons who did not receive the document but are interested in commenting should contact the Council office at (907) 274-4563.

ADF&G Reports on Domestic Fisheries

The winter troll fishery took 22,437 chinook salmon averaging 13.2 pounds each between October 1984 and April 14, 1985. Last year's winter fishery caught 32,645 chinooks, the average size was 14 pounds.

The sablefish fishery east of 140°W closed on March 18 and then reopened from April 16 to 21. Total catch from the area is 2,549 mt, just shy of the 2,570 mt optimum yield. This year 116 vessels fished, down from the 133 vessels in 1984. Effort shifted westward and the West Yakutat area (140°-147°W) closed on May 15 with the reported catch near the 1,680 mt quota. The Central Area (147-159°W) has an optimum yield of 3,060 mt and closed May 23; reported catch is 2,989 mt. The Western Area (159-170°W) has an OY of 1,670 mt and is projected to close by mid-June. Only 253 mt has been reported taken so far in the Western area. The total sablefish catch in the Gulf of Alaska has been harvested 68% by longlines, 27% by pots, and 5% by trawls. The top four ports of landing are Sitka (1,265 mt), Seward (1,104 mt), Seattle (900 mt), and Kodiak (898 mt).

U.S. (DAP) groundfish operations off Alaska have harvested 37,668 mt groundfish. In addition to 6,060 mt sablefish, the total includes 29,384 mt Pacific cod taken mainly by U.S. factory trawlers, 1,632 mt pollock, 183 mt rockfish, 126 mt Pacific ocean perch, and 59 mt flatfish.

Joint Venture Update

The total joint venture catch off Alaska through May 4, 1985 was 371,047 mt. In the Gulf of Alaska, joint venture trawlers caught 219,460 mt pollock, 940 mt Pacific cod, 13 mt Pacific ocean perch, 73 mt flatfish and 1,914 mt other groundfish, for a total of 222,400 mt. In the Bering Sea and Aleutians, the joint venture catch was 148,647 mt including 109,393 mt pollock, 14,715 mt Pacific cod, 7,853 mt flatfish, 9,432 mt yellowfin sole, 5,900 mt Atka mackerel, and 1,354 mt of other species. There were about 75 U.S. trawlers involved in these harvests. Last year by early May joint ventures had taken 276,000 mt.

Foreign Fisheries Update

Japan has been the only foreign country to fish the Gulf of Alaska so far this year. Their catch by May 10 was 8,933 mt, almost all being Pacific cod taken by longliners.

Foreign fleets from Japan, Korea, Poland and the USSR harvested 90,428 mt by May 10 from the Bering Sea and Aleutians. Their catches included 49,427 mt pollock, 21,524 mt yellowfin sole, and 12,530 mt Pacific cod.

There were 74 foreign vessels off Alaska on May 17, 1985, 23 from Japan, 22 from the USSR, 18 from Korea, 6 from Poland, 4 from Taiwan, and one cargo/transport from Greece. Last year at this time there were about 40 foreign vessels off Alaska.

U.S. Coast Guard Reports on Enforcement Activities

The USCG reported that enforcement effort through May 14, 1985, totaled 291 cutter patrol days and 897 aircraft patrol hours covering over 122,870 miles. Since March 24, enforcement efforts have resulted in 11 reports of violation and 26 written warnings being issued to foreign fishing vessels. These included such infractions as failure to submit required activity messages, not monitoring the appropriate radio channel after being hailed for boarding, improper log keeping, for Soviet vessels fishing east of the U.S./U.S.S.R. Convention line of 1867, and failing to properly return prohibited species to the sea.

The Coast Guard also enforced the IPHC halibut opening April 27-29 and conducted 19 boardings. Two vessels were detected by patrol aircraft pulling their gear after the fishery closure.

Upcoming Council Workgroup and Committee Meetings

The following workgroups and committees are scheduled to meet during the next three months:

Council MFCMA Workgroup	June 17	Room C121 Federal Bldg. Anchorage
Council Ad-hoc Committee on JV Interception of Salmon	June 18-19	Place to be announced Anchorage
Council Workgroup on Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Goals	August 1-2	Place to be announced Seattle
Special Council Meeting on Gulf of Alaska FMP	August 12-14	Alyeska Resort Girdwood, Alaska
Council Permit Review Interim Policy on Joint Ventures and Foreign Allocations	August 14-16	Alyeska Resort Girdwood, Alaska

Council Meetings for 1986

Some minor revisions have been made in the 1986 Council meeting schedule. The schedule now is:

Week of January 13	Sitka
Week of March 17	Anchorage
Week of June 23	Kodiak
Week of September 22	Anchorage
Week of December 8	Anchorage

New Council Documents Available

Council Document #29, "Chinook Troll Data Analysis," is available from the Council office upon request. The document, prepared by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, contains a summary of available information from the winter salmon troll fishery, a comparison with troll fisheries at other times, and an analysis of impacts of shifts in harvest from the April-June period on stocks of different origins.

Another document, "Feasibility of Using Scale Analysis Methods to Identify Bering Sea Herring Stocks," prepared by the Fisheries Research Institute, University of Washington, has been approved as a Council document and will be available soon for distribution.

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