

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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NEWSLETTER

Council's May Meeting Held in Anchorage

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council met on May 25 and 26 in Anchorage at the Old Federal Building, 605 W. Fourth Avenue. The agenda included reports by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, National Marine Fisheries Service, and the U.S. Coast Guard in addition to staff reports and public testimony on the Council's fishery management plans. The Council also considered a proposal by NMFS for an appeals procedure for the proposed halibut moratorium, and a request to raise the pollock OY in the Western and Central Gulf of Alaska. Details of Council action on these and other items are included in this newsletter.

July Meeting to be Held in Homer

The July 1983 meeting of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council will be held in Homer, Alaska. The Council is scheduled to meet on July 27 and 28 at the Land's End. The Scientific and Statistical Committee will meet at the Land's End beginning at 2:00 p.m. on July 25 and continuing through July 26. The Council's Advisory Panel is scheduled to meet on July 26 at the Elks Hall. The main discussion topics will include final action on an amendment to the Tanner crab plan which will address problems that NMFS has had coordinating Tanner crab fishing seasons with the State's, review of a resource assessment of groundfish stocks in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands area, a progress report on prohibited species management in the Gulf of Alaska, and final action on the Council's herring plan. A draft agenda will be mailed to the public approximately two weeks before the meetings.

Council Sets Limits on Incidental Salmon Catch in Bering Sea

The Council unanimously approved salmon prohibited species catch limits of 38,441 fish in 1984 and 27,957 fish in 1985 for the Bering Sea foreign groundfish fisheries. The amounts were agreed to by representatives of the Western Alaska residents who depend on the salmon resource and the Japanese trawl industry, principle harvesters of Bering Sea groundfish.

This action is part of a comprehensive Council effort to reduce the foreign by-catch of salmon by 75% in the Bering Sea by 1986.

Council Maintains Pollock Optimum Yield at 200,000 mt
in the Western and Central Gulf of Alaska

By a vote of seven to four, the Council left the pollock optimum yield (OY) in the Gulf of Alaska at 200,000 mt for the Central and Western areas. The Council had been requested by the Japanese trawl industry to raise the OY to 344,000 mt based on a status of stocks report that showed the pollock biomass had increased substantially between 1977 and 1981.

Council members noted that the status of stocks report was two years out of date, that there was a risk of overfishing the pollock stocks, and that increased foreign fishing could result in a halibut by-catch of 733-977 mt over two years. The Council will consider pollock OY adjustments for 1984 at its September meeting when the scientific analyses have been updated.

Halibut Limited Entry Objectives and Report Considered

The Council accepted the recommendations of a workgroup recently appointed to reevaluate the Council's objectives for halibut limited entry. The workgroup, made up of Council members Clem Tillion (as Chairman), Jim Campbell, Joe Demmert Jr., and Keith Specking, Richard Marasco from the SSC, and Tom Stewart from the AP, recommended only minor modifications to the objectives adopted earlier by the Council. Any halibut limited entry system that may be adopted by the Council in the future will have to achieve these nine objectives:

1. Distribute the hook and line halibut fishery in time and space to ensure resource conservation.
2. Reduce capitalization, thus encouraging development of an economically viable and efficient year-round domestic halibut hook and line fishery that, unconstrained by regulatory seasons, potentially could provide high quality fresh and frozen fish to the consumer twelve months of the year and that:
 - (a) is made up of owner/operator holders of halibut fishing privileges; and
 - (b) makes it possible for some fishermen to earn a major share of their income from hook and line halibut fishing.
3. Ensure that the costs of administration and enforcement do not exceed the benefits of the program.
4. Ensure that the extraction of royalties from the fishery at least sufficient to cover program costs is not precluded at some point in the future.
5. Minimize adverse biological impacts of the program on related fisheries.
6. Ensure that no particular entity acquires excessive control of halibut fishing privileges.

7. Attempt to be compatible with IPHC objectives.
8. Minimize disruption of the present fleet by using past participation to distribute initial halibut fishing privileges.
9. Use the market to transfer halibut fishing privileges after initial distribution.

The Council also reviewed a staff synopsis of the Northwest Resources Analysis report, "Limited Entry in the Pacific Halibut Fishery: The Individual Quota Option." The Council wanted this synopsis prepared because the full report was approximately 200 pages in length and highly technical. This synopsis was approved for public distribution. A copy of the full report will also be sent if requested.

Council Rejects Hardship Appeal on Halibut Moratorium

The Council considered and rejected a NMFS request that the proposed rule on the halibut moratorium adopted at the March meeting contain a provision that would allow exemptions to the moratorium eligibility criteria for hardship reasons. The Council reaffirmed its support of the moratorium as written by a vote of 8 to 2 with one abstention. The majority of the Council believed that the moratorium as adopted provided sufficient consideration of all equities involved and satisfied constitutional due process requirements.

Council Reviews State King and Tanner Crab Regulations and Adopts Two Tanner Crab FMP Amendments for Public Review

The Council reviewed the Alaska Board of Fisheries' regulatory actions taken on king crab at their Spring meeting and accepted their report. This review is required by a joint statement of principles adopted by the Board and the Council in October 1981.

The Council also reviewed the Board's Tanner crab actions and heard reports on the inconsistencies that now exist between state and federal Tanner crab fishery regulations. The Tanner crab plan maintenance team had prepared two draft amendments which, if adopted, would eliminate the inconsistencies from the plan. Specifically, the amendments address problems NMFS has had coordinating Tanner crab fishing seasons with those set by the State (Amendment #9); and the recent change in State exclusive registration area and pot limit regulations (Amendment #10). The Council approved these amendments for public review and will take final action in July. (Amendment #9 was sent out to public review on May 27 and comments will be accepted through July 27, 1983.)

Council Reviews Changes to Herring Plan

The Council reviewed an amendment proposed by its Scientific and Statistical Committee which clarifies certain critical areas of the fishery management plan for Bering/Chukchi Sea Herring. The Council approved the incorporation of the language changes into the plan text and directed its plan team to prepare draft regulations and accompanying documents for the July meeting. NMFS will prepare a prohibited species amendment and regulations which may also be incorporated at the July meeting. At that meeting the Council will

take final action on the revised text, the draft regulations and accompanying documents. If approved, the package will be sent forward for Secretarial review.

Fishermen Withdraw Sablefish Joint Venture Permit

The Council reconsidered a permit for a Japanese longline vessel to receive 400 mt of sablefish in August from U.S. longliners in the Eastern Gulf of Alaska. The permit had been approved by the Council in March, but for procedural reasons needed to be reconsidered at this meeting. Testimony from U.S. processors indicated that local processors were prepared to buy the quantities of sablefish that otherwise would have gone to the foreign processor. Additionally, U.S. fishermen party to the joint venture operations testified that with the procedural delay, even if the Council again approved the permit, there would not be sufficient time to put the operation together. The representative for the Japanese longline vessel indicated that the permit would be voluntarily withdrawn. This resulted in no action being taken by the Council.

ADF&G Reports on Commercial Fisheries

ADF&G staff reported that the total harvest to date for the herring fishery in the Togiak area of the Bering Sea is approximately 26,800 short tons (gillnet 19%; purse seine 81%). The harvest began on May 3 and the catch was composed of predominately 5- and 6-year-old fish and few 4-year-olds. The average roe percentage in the catch was approximately 9%. The overall effort included about 250 gillnet boats, 160 purse seine boats, and 21 companies. The roe-on-kelp fishery harvested approximately 271,000 pounds. The harvest to date for other areas was reported at 306 tons for Norton Sound, 362 tons for Cape Romanzof, 958 tons for Security Cove, and 373 tons for Goodnews Bay.

The troll salmon summer fishery opened on May 15. Early reports indicate that fishing is somewhat slow. The winter troll fishery harvested approximately 28,600 chinooks between October 1 and April 14.

Joint Ventures Move to Bering Sea and Aleutians

The Shelikof Strait joint venture fisheries for pollock have wound down after achieving an all-time high catch by U.S. fishermen of about 131,000 mt. Seven companies using over 30 U.S. trawlers delivering to 19 foreign processors operated in this fishery mainly during February and March.

Joint venture operations have now moved around to the Bering Sea where three companies are fishing for yellowfin sole, cod, Atka mackerel and pollock. These operations, employing over 20 U.S. trawlers delivering to 9 processors, had taken 16,000 mt pollock, 7,400 mt flounders, and 5,300 mt of other species by May 7. Four more companies will commence operations in June.

Foreign Fisheries Update

By April 23 foreign fleets working the Gulf of Alaska had caught 11,549 mt of groundfish or about 10% of the current foreign allocation for the Gulf. About 86% of the catch was Pacific cod and 10% was pollock.

In the Bering Sea and Aleutians area, foreign fisheries had caught 171,092 mt by April 23. This catch was 75% pollock, 17% flatfish, and 5% Pacific cod, and represents about 21% of the current allocated TALFF in the area.

There were 118 foreign vessels off Alaska on May 19, including 88 from Japan, 20 from South Korea, nine from the USSR and one from West Germany. In May for the past three years, there usually has been over 220 vessels.

In April U.S. observers were aboard foreign vessels about 44% of their operating time and about 64% of the foreign vessels were sampled at least once. Since the beginning of the year, observers have been aboard foreign vessels off Alaska about 33% of the time and about 77% of the vessels have been sampled at least once.

U.S. Coast Guard Reports Violations

The U.S.C.G. issued six reports of violation (civil penalty procedures) and ten citations (written warnings) since the March Council meeting. In addition, three foreign fishing vessels were seized for severe MFCMA infractions, including gross logging violations, failure to submit the required activity message twenty-four hours prior to beginning or ceasing fishing activity in the FCZ, failure to maintain the accuracy of the Daily Cumulative Catch Log, failure to begin fishing activity at the time and in the position indicated in the submitted activity message, and fishing within the U.S. FCZ without a valid permit.

On March 28, the USCGC STORIS seized the Japanese cargo ship HIYO MARU in the central Bering Sea for gross logging violations. On May 11, the USCGC RUSH seized the Japanese stern trawler YURYO MARU No. 31 in the central Bering Sea for grossly underlogging its catch of Pacific cod. Also on May 11, the USCGC CAPE HATTERAS seized the Canadian fishing vessel CASSIAR No. 67 in the vicinity of Dixon Entrance for fishing within the U.S. FCZ without a valid permit.