

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Mr. Robert W. Schoning, Director
National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA
3300 Whitehaven, Page Bldg. 2
Washington, D.C. 20235

Dear Bob,

The North Pacific Council discussed the National Marine Fisheries Service proposals for changes in the preliminary management plans and optimum yield figures for 1978 at its recent meeting in Kodiak. While they are not prepared at this time to give exact figures for changes in the proposed OY, they do want to flag some areas where it appears changes will be necessary.

Bering Sea Herring

Testimony at recent Council/NMFS public hearings indicates that interest in the Bering Sea herring resource by U.S. industry will be even greater than was formerly estimated. While it remains difficult to get exact figures, it appears that the 10,000 metric tons suggested for U.S. capacity in 1978 may be low. In addition to the fishery for roe herring, recent market inquiries for food fish from both before and after the spawning period may spark a fishery for this species that could well exceed the 10,000 MT figure.

Sablefish, Gulf of Alaska

Recent data on catch trends by the Japanese fishery in the Gulf of Alaska indicates a sharp downward trend in catch per unit of effort. Rather than an OY of 22,000 MT, it appears that equilibrium yield is really in the 18 to 20,000 MT area. OY, if a U.S. fishery is to be taken into account, with its requirements for larger fish than are currently available in the sablefish stocks, may require scaling down OY to as low as 12 to 12,500 MT. The Council should have enough material to refine this figure at its September meeting.

Reserve Allocation

The Council is very strongly in favor of holding a reserve allocation for sablefish, herring and any other stock in which there may be a developing U.S. fishery. This includes Pacific Cod in the Gulf of Alaska and along the Aleutians and other groundfish in the Gulf of Alaska. They would prefer to see a reserve allocation of 30 percent of the OY rather than 30 percent of the foreign allocation. This would give a much safer margin in those fisheries where U.S. take is expected to be as large as or nearly as large as the foreign allocation. Without some form of reserve the danger of exceeding OY appears to be too high. An accurate assessment of U.S. catch is virtually impossible until the season is underway. The rapid development of interest in herring and sablefish by U.S. fishermen the past six months gives us some indication of the explosive growth possible in the industry.

The Council plans to develop OY figures and estimates of domestic annual capacity for Gulf of Alaska groundfish stocks at its meeting in September, when they will decide on the various options in the draft plans for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fishery. Until that plan is finalized I think we should be very careful about tentative allocations to foreign nations from those stocks.

Sincerely,

Jim H. Branson
Executive Director

cc: D. L. Alverson
H. Rietze
B. Larkins
All Council members

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