North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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MINUTES

Scientific and Statistical Committee Minutes
September 22-24, 1986
Anchorage, Alaska

The Scientific and Statistical Committee met in Anchorage, Alaska on September 22-24, 1986. Members present were:

Donald Rosenberg, Chairman
Richard Marasco, Vice Chairman
Bill Aron
Don Bevan
Robert Burgner
Doug Eggers
Larry Hreha
Phil Rigby, Alternate for Phil Mundy
Tom Northup
Terry Quinn

D-1 Tanner and King Crab FMP

The SSC reviewed the status of crab stocks in the Eastern Bering Sea during 1986 as presented in the paper included under Agenda item B-6. Additionally, we discussed the status of C. bairdi Tanner crab with Dr. Otto of NWAFC. Although the overall population has increased slightly, this increase is due to small crab. The SSC does not support a directed C. bairdi Tanner crab fishery.

D-2 Gulf of Alaska Fishery Management Plan

Amendment 15

The SSC reviewed the RIR/IRFA and public comments for Amendment 15 to the FMP for Gulf of Alaska Groundfish.

Goals and Objectives

The SSC has developed and accepted a set of definitions for the various terms used by the Council. These are contained in Attachment I. The SSC recommends that the Council adopt these definitions for use by the Council family in the future.

In light of these definitions the SSC recommends Objective 7 be changed to read "Population threshold will be established for each major species or species complex under Council management on the basis of the best scientific information." This is being proposed to simplify the statement of that objective.

Given the national attention in the use of terms such as ABC, and the Pacific Council action on this subject at their last meeting, we suggest the two Councils approve a common set of definitions.

Problem 1 - Inability to Efficiently Adjust Harvest Guidelines

The SSC reviewed the proposed management regime provided in Alternatives 1 and 2. The SSC is unable to recommend either of these two alternatives. Our concerns are:

1. The SSC was unable to determine how the management system being proposed will actually work.

2. There are terminology uses which we felt will cause confusion.

3. The alternatives do not include an adequate description of how PSC will be handled in the context of the framework.

Recognizing the administrative difficulties that the Council is experiencing under the status quo, the SSC proposed a third alternative (Alternative 3) for Council consideration (Attachment II). The SSC feels this alternative addresses these administrative difficulties. The alternative establishes an OY range for the groundfish complex and establishes quotas on a species-by-species basis. No further plan amendment will be required as long as the sum of the quotas is within the OY range.

The proposed alternative does not include any change to the way the Council currently addresses bycatch concerns.

Problem 2 - Inadequate Reporting Requirements

The SSC supports Alternative 1 and has no specific comments.

Problem 3 - Inadequate Protection of King Crab in the Vicinity of Kodiak Island

The SSC is still concerned about the condition and status of the red king crab resource in the Kodiak area. In light of this concern the SSC does not support the status quo alternative.

The SSC does recognize that closing these areas will cause a shift in effort. As indicated in the public comment, this shift in effort could have an effect on other prohibited species. However in the case of halibut, there is a 2,000 mt Gulfwide cap.

In light of the information supplied to the Council by public comment the SSC questions the degree of protection offered red king crab by Alternatives 1 and 2. Time constraints prevented the SSC from conducting an evaluation.

The RIR/EA made strong statements regarding the degree of protection offered by these alternatives. The SSC suggests that these statements be carefully evaluated in light of this public comment.

Problem 4 - Inadequate inseason Management Authority

The SSC supports Alternative 1. We are unable to support Alternative 2, including social economic factors in an emergency action.

Status of Stocks

The SSC reviewed the Resource Assessment Document for the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery dated August 29, 1986, and received a presentation from the Plan Team.

Based upon this report and the discussion with the team, the SSC recommends the following preliminary ABCs be adopted for public review. It should be noted that this recommendation is made using the SSC definition of ABC as associated with the process described in Alternative 3.

Species	Preliminary ABCs
Pollock	113,600
Pacific Cod	125,000
Flounder	340,000
Pacific Ocean Perch	10,500
Sablefish	20,000
Atka Mackerel	-0-
Other Rockfish	2,700
Thornyhead Rockfish	3,750
Squid	5,000

The SSC has requested that the team reanalyze the ABC for Pacific ocean perch, Atka mackerel, other rockfish, thornyhead rockfish and squid prior to the next Council meeting.

The SSC would like to encourage the Council to continue the pollock fishery outside of Shelikof Strait during January to April.

D-3 Bering Sea/Aleutian Island FMP

The SSC received a presentation by the Northwest and Alaska Fisheries Center on the status of the eastern Bering Sea crab stocks. This presentation indicated that there still is a conservation problem with red king crab and C. bairdi Tanner crab.

The SSC also received a presentation from the Halibut Commission on the status of the halibut stock in the Bering Sea. It was indicated that the current (1985) biomass is at 76% of the MSY biomass. The SSC does not see a conservation problem with the halibut resource in this area. Therefore, the bycatch problem is one of allocation between the various resource users.

Amendment 10

The management problems addressed by this amendment are:

1. Inadequate control of crab and halibut bycatches in DAH Fisheries.
2. Inadequate catch reporting requirements in DAP fisheries.

3. The need to formalize the procedure of reapportionment of unneeded DAP and JVP.
4. Inadequate authority to manage biological emergencies inseason.

Problem 1 - Inadequate Control of Bycatches of Crabs and Halibut in DAH Fisheries

The SSC feels that of the five alternatives being considered, Alternatives 1, 4 and 5 are not viable. Alternatives 1 and 5 were rejected because they do not provide protection for depleted crab stocks. While Alternative 4 would allow adjustment of bycatch caps as the condition of prohibited species stocks changes, it has several serious problems. First, definitions given for the stock status levels of bycatch species are not biological defensible. Second, the bycatch rates specified when the status of bycatch species is high are more restrictive than those that would be used when the stocks are depressed. And third, the proposed groundfish cap of 6000 mt for the DAP Pacific cod fishery operating between 160°W and 162°W longitude, south of 25 fathoms would institutionalize a bycatch rate of 2 king crab per metric ton of groundfish. The SSC feels that this cap should be developed using the best scientific information, i.e. using information collected during the 1986 fishery.

The following comments are offered on Alternatives 2 and 3.

Alternative 2 - The emergency rule as implemented by NMFS

The major drawback associated with this option is its lack of flexibility with respect to both bycatch limits and area closures. In the case of both king crab and C. bairdi Tanner crab catch limits have been set by zone. The SSC feels that this is overly restrictive, since the possibility should exist to adjust the bycatch limits when changes occur in the status of stocks.

Recent NMFS surveys of the eastern Bering Sea crab populations indicate that 95% or more of the red king crab resource is contained in the area south of 58°N latitude and east at 165°W longitude. The highest concentration of mature female red king crab was found between 160°W and 162°W longitude. The survey also indicated that this area contains concentrations of legal male and large female C. bairdi Tanner crab. While the closure of the area south of 58°N latitude and north of a straight line approximating the 25 fathom line between 160°W - 162°W longitude has the potential for providing protection to crabs at present, the amount of protection provided will change as the distribution of crabs shift.

The SSC notes that the bycatch limits specified under this alternative are for the DAH fishery, with the exception of the DAP cod fishery inside of 25 fathoms.

Conduct of the fishery during 1986 under an emergency rule that contains all of the provisions of this alternative has indicated that implementation of this alternative will reduce the bycatches of king crab, C. bairdi Tanner crab and halibut below those that would be experienced under Alternative 1 (Status Quo). This experience suggests that the benefits associated with this alternative are likely to exceed the costs.

Alternative 3 - The Emergency Rule as recommended by the Council

Differences between this alternative and Alternative 2 are the inclusion of halibut bycatch caps and specification of how the DAP fishery will be treated.

With respect to this alternative's treatment of the halibut bycatch issue, the SSC feels it is flawed since it doesn't provide a comprehensive solution to minimize bycatch. The JVP flatfish fishery covered by this measure accounted for about 40% of the 1985 DAH and crab/shrimp (directed fishery) halibut bycatch.

An examination of groundfish catch patterns for the 1986 fishery indicated that if the halibut measures proposed by this alternative had been included in the emergency rule that was implemented, Zone 1 would have been closed to the flatfish fishery at approximately the same time as the C. bairdi Tanner crab cap did close the fishery. The total halibut cap proposed would have closed the JVP and foreign flatfish fisheries in late August. This would have resulted in a substantial reduction in the JVP flatfish fishery catch. It would have also had a serious impact upon the foreign flatfish fishery, since a large portion of the catch, 50% in 1985, is taken late in the year.

In light of the information provided, the SSC is not clear that the benefits associated with this alternative exceed the costs.

The SSC notes that any changes in these management measures (Alternative 2 and 3) will require plan amendment. We are concerned about the time required to get plan amendments through the system.

The SSC also notes that 100% observer coverage is not necessary for scientific data collection.

Problem 2 - Inadequate Reporting Requirements in DAP fisheries

The SSC supports Alternative 2. The SSC notes that this amendment only partially addresses the data collection problems. It was brought to the attention of the SSC that the Regional Office of the NMFS has prepared a 1987 domestic groundfish data collection report. The SSC did not have time to review this document.

Problem 3 - Inadequate Authority for Inseason Reapportionment among Domestic Fisheries

The SSC supports Alternative 2. We have no comments or changes.

Problem 4 - Inadequate Authority to Manage Inseason Biological Emergencies

The SSC supports Alternative 2. We have no comments or changes.

Status of Stocks and Preliminary TACs

The SSC reviewed the document entitled "Resource Assessment Document for Bering Sea/Aleutian Island Groundfish for 1987 and Recommended Catch Levels for 1987," dated July 1986. We discussed each species or species group with the team. The SSC recommends that the EY/ABC (SSC Table 1) be used by the Council

in establishing the preliminary TACs to be released for the public review. During our discussion with the team, three species were identified having new data or new analysis that could result in a change in the EY/ABC. These possible changes are:

Pollock (EBS)	-	EY may be adjusted upward to 1,200,000 mt.
Pacific Cod	-	ABC may be adjusted upward to as high as 400,000 mt.
Greenland Turbot	-	EY may be adjusted upward to as high as 30,000 mt.

It is expected that the analysis to support these possible changes will be provided in the RAD supplement. The SSC recommends the Council notify the public of these possible changes to the EY/ABC. These changes are presented as footnotes in Table 1.

The SSC also notes that the team has recommended establishing a separate EY/ABC for one component of the "Other Flatfish" group. The team is recommending that rock sole be given a separate TAC. This recommendation is not based upon a conservation problem with this species but because of a change in the composition of the catch and apparent recent interest in rock sole by the domestic industry. The SSC does not have any suggested modifications to the team's recommendation on preliminary TACs.

E. Contracts, RFP

ADF&G Groundfish Data Monitoring Contract

The SSC reviewed the draft final report for the groundfish data monitoring contract. We find that the contractor has met the terms of the contract and recommend that the Council accept the final report.

RFP for Survey on Groundfish Management Alternatives

The SSC reviewed the draft RFP to conduct a fishery industry survey to determine the preferred management alternative for the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea Groundfish fisheries. We have the following comments:

1. If the "results of this survey will be used by the Council to determine whether management methods other than the status quo are desirable or necessary..." (pages 2 and 3), then the SSC believes the survey needs to include industry opinions on the status quo.
2. We suggest that a statement of work (1a) be included which would allow the Council or a Council appointed group the opportunity to review the draft survey before it is used.
3. The SSC feels that statement of work (3) would be better stated as "The contractors shall structure the survey in a manner that results in a response error of no more than + or - 5% with a 95% confidence level.
4. As written the survey will only provide information by a randomly selected related cross section of harvesting and processing sectors of the groundfish industry. If the intent is to provide information by some breakdown of that sector, this will need to be specified (i.e., gear type, size of vessel, size of processing plant, etc.).

TABLE 1

	EY/ABC	Preliminary TAC
Pollock		
BS	1,100,000(1)	1,100,000
AI	100,000	100,000
Pacific Ocean Perch		
BS	3,000	3,000
AI	11,900	11,900
Rockfish		
BS	550	550
AI	1,900	1,900
Sablefish		
BS	5,000	5,000
AI	5,000	5,000
Pacific Cod	265,000(2)	265,000
Yellowfin Sole	187,000	187,000
Turbots		
Greenland	5,500(3)	5,500
Arrowtooth	33,400	33,400
Other Flatfish		
Rock sole	70,500	70,500
Other	89,200	89,200
Atka Mackerel	30,800	30,800
Squid	10,000	10,000
Other Species	36,700	36,700
	1,995,450	1,995,450

(1) Analysis of new data indicates that the EY may be adjusted upward to 1,200,000 mt.

(2) Analysis of new data indicates that the ABC may be adjusted to 400,000 mt.

(3) A reanalysis may indicate that the EY may be adjusted upward to as high as 30,000 mt.