

**Summary of the Second meeting of the Stakeholder Panel on Steller Sea Lions and Pacific Cod Fishing EA/RIR and State Policy on ESA Actions.**

**October 3, 2000  
Sitka, Alaska**

**Staff:** Kevin Duffy & Earl Krygier

**Stakeholders:**

Fred Yeck

Joe Plesha

Terry Schaff

Jay Stinson <Al Birch sat as one time alternate>

Dick Jacobson

Michelle Ridgeway

Jerry Bongdon <Jeff Stephan sat as one time alternate>

Kevin Duffy outlined the roll of the Governor's Steller Sea Lion (SSL) Restoration Team: They would focus on (1) ways in which fisheries could occur within Critical Habitat and not impact SSL recovery; and (2) help define research that would help resolve the unanswered questions in this conflict (i.e. do some or all fisheries impact the ability of SSLs to recover?). The second meeting of the Stakeholder Panel reviewed and commented on the "Council Action on Steller Sea Lion/Pacific Cod Interactions" (September 11, 2000 Final Draft). This material was the final draft Council motion (AGENDA Item C-1(a) October 2000 NPFMC) that added additional alternatives to the proposed EA/RIR that analyzed alternatives to minimize possible competitive interactions between Pacific cod fisheries and SSLs. The following is a summary of that discussion.

Comments on P. 1. Alternatives for splitting the season P. cod TAC in the GOA

It was noted that longline gear has a 350 mt halibut bycatch cap. Longliners will be disadvantaged if their P. cod season is split. The reason is that if they fish the first season and then turn to other directed species where they will likely hit the halibut cap and thus be unable to prosecute their 2<sup>nd</sup> P. cod season.

(In Gulf only) Processors want product throughout the season. Two seasons pose problems for the CGOA. Cod are very spread out during the summer season. If cod cannot be taken when they are aggregated, vessels and processors lose financially. Trawl fisheries receive maximum economic benefit when vessels first trawl for pollock and then switch to P. cod when the milt is firm.

There is also a concern over the bycatch of pollock and salmon, the timing of which differ between the CGOA and the WGOA. With an "A-Season" split, bycatch of salmon would go up early in the season but decrease by May. In the WGOA no trawl cod are available in the fall, because by September the fish are spread out too much for a successful trawl fishery.

Clearly many variables dictate how the season proceeds. Some members thought there may be different ways to look at a split. For example, 2 shorter seasons within January 1 - May 15. But small TAC's can be extremely difficult from a management perspective.

### Option C: 1 & 2

When considering alternatives under Option C, panel members felt that research needed to be conducted to validate the underlying assumptions and proposed alternatives. Since the scientific link between fishery/SSL impacts are not known, and distribution of fish stocks are defined by summer surveys, research plans must focus on these unknowns. Most panel members felt that the sooner we can get winter biomass surveys going, the better. Some questioned whether new federal dollars were available to expand the ADF&G Bottom Trawl Survey from the summer into a fall and winter surveys with the R/V Resolution. It was suggested that additional survey work with the Resolution should occur in October and during the peak fishing periods (end of February/early March). It was asked whether we wanted to look at critical habitat when cod aggregations are at their lowest or at their highest?

Under Option 2 it was suggested that pots should be included as a safe option within 0-3 nmi from rookeries.

It was noted that this federal action could have a dramatic impact inside of state waters. There are 62 extra vessels (from 60-120 ft) that qualify to fish under the LLP in the Western GOA parallel fishery. In addition, any of the Bering Sea pot vessels could fish State waters. It was suggested that the BOF may want to look at 60 pot limits so that localized depletions are not a result of LLP spill over in state waters. Others argue that a 60 pot limit for cod are not economical, even for smaller vessels. But that any state water pot limit must include any pots that are concurrently fished in federal waters, i.e. – any pots they control!

In reviewing the motion, members felt that the effect of rolling or not rolling over the annual TAC between seasonal apportionments was critical. The concept of no rollover of TAC from one season to another was discussed by Council. Panel members felt that NMFS should explain if Alternatives A & B include a rollover.

Some panel members felt that the 60' trawl vessel restriction should be put back in under Option 2. Other panel members stated that eliminating vessels > 80 ft would eliminate 80% of the cod and pollock production (compared to last year) within 20 miles.

### Option 1: Alternatives for splitting the season P. cod TAC in the BSAI

It was noted that the Draft EA did an inadequate job of evaluating the impacts on the processing industry, particularly the shore-based facilities. Shoreside investments were made under the scenario that processing would occur at least at a scale that would keep plants in production. Some of the alternatives in both the BSAI and GOA would so reduce deliveries as to make it financially impossible to operate crews and plants at a profit. The plants are not likely to not stay open for small amounts of product, because the cost to “clean” (meet EPA/DEC standards) a plant is too high for pulse fisheries. This obviously impacts small coastal communities that rely on these operations for their livelihood. NMFS’ ESA approach lacks a useful socioeconomic study that evaluates such restrictive management impacts on Alaskan communities. It was questioned whether it is possible to show (before it happens) that “x” number of processors will likely go away as a result of such protective measures?

While it was noted that the rate of extraction of SSL food (pollock/P. cod) was the issue NMFS’ alternatives were trying to address, members noted that there were no clear scientific connection between cod fisheries and SSLs.

Page 4, items 6 & 7

There was concern with the quality of the SSL data used to develop fishery restrictions. It was noted that the most recent summer survey on SSLs occurred in June, where only 3 days of clear weather were available for accurate surveys.

Page 4 Option 2 (Bering Sea East of Seguam Pass). Suggested that in 3-10 nmi range that the Council consider 60-75-100 pots as alternate options. The point being that a restriction of 60 pots for large vessels may be similar to putting trawlers 20 miles offshore.

Page 5, Option B

Some members felt that more options were needed under this alternative. Such as a new Option 3: "may consider operational dependence within CH by gear type" and that the costs to the communities and the State must be considered. Some thought that the historical gear shares needed to be maintained.

It was suggested that as gear types move out of one area into another that NMFS should evaluate changing levels of bycatch of salmon, crab and halibut. Should the new proposed changes increase bycatch rates? What are the adverse impacts from such proposed changes?

C:/SSLissues/StakeholderMin2.doc