



June 2, 2023

Mr. Simon Kinneen, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
1007 West Third, Suite 400
Anchorage, AK 99501-2252

Mr. John Kurland, Regional Administrator .
NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Region
709 West Ninth Street
Juneau, AK 99802-1668

Agenda item D2: Programmatic EIS

Dear Chairman Kinneen and Council members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the initial draft of the Purpose and Need and framework of Alternatives for a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) provided by the Ecosystem Committee. We appreciate the work done by the Ecosystem committee to advance the draft language to the Council.

We encourage the Council to define the regions under consideration in the proposed action, provide expanded language to clarify the biological scope of the action and provide direction for Alternatives which meets the intent of the initial Purpose and Need statement. We encourage the Council to adopt a Purpose and Need Statement and alternatives and request the National Marine Fisheries Service begin the formal scoping process.

We recommend the Programmatic analysis include the Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea, and Aleutian Islands in geographic scope. The PEIS needs to focus on management policy and objectives as they relate to historic as well as ongoing commercial fishing activity and the impacts of those policies and management actions on fishery-dependent communities, especially considering subsistence communities and Indigenous peoples. While the impacts of climate change have consequences that are important to anticipate, the scope of this analysis must include consideration of how *historic* management policies and conservation procedures have or have not contributed to ecosystem and community resilience in order to provide a valuable and useful product going forward.

We do not support inclusion of the Arctic region in a programmatic analysis which considers amendments to management objectives, policies and procedures for all federal fisheries managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the Halibut Act. It is not appropriate to include the Arctic region, with its fragile ecosystems that are undergoing rapid and unpredictable

change and an absence of commercial fisheries in this analytical process. The Arctic region is uniquely different and the inclusion of the region is generating substantial confusion and concern that this process could serve as a stepping stone to open up the region for commercial fishing.

The Arctic FMP recognizes international treaties, positions and claims between Russia, Canada and the United States and is structured to assist the United States in discussions with other circumpolar Nations appropriate management measures for a changing Arctic. The Arctic FMP supports the U.S. law initiated and signed in 2008 which “calls on the U.S. to enter into international discussions and take necessary steps with other Arctic nations to agree on management of migratory, transboundary, and straddling fish stocks in the Arctic Ocean and establish a new international fishery management organization(s) for the Arctic. This law recommends consultation with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and Alaska Native communities of the Arctic.”

<https://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/uploads/ARCTICflier209.pdf>

The Arctic Management Area is closed to commercial fishing until such time in the future that sufficient information is available with which to initiate a planning process for commercial fishery development. By prohibiting commercial fishing, the FMP provides protection to marine resources that may be used by those living in the Arctic region, particularly those dependent on marine resources for subsistence. (Arctic FMP pg. 66) Under the management policy, the Council’s fisheries management goals for the Arctic are to “provide sound conservation and sustainability of fish resources, provide socially and economically viable commercial fisheries for the well-being of fishing communities, minimize human-caused threats to protected species, maintain healthy habitat for marine resources, and incorporate ecosystem-based considerations into management decisions. This policy recognizes the complex interactions among ecosystem components, and seeks to protect important species utilized by other ecosystem component species, potential target species, other organisms such as marine mammals and birds, and local residents and communities.”(Arctic FMP pg. 4)

Given the complexities and magnitude of differences surrounding the Arctic, including the analytical and workload complexities in the unique region, the Programmatic EIS should focus on a suite of alternatives and analysis which looks at the cumulative ecosystem effects and impacts to the human environment of FMPs where fisheries are occurring.

We want to emphasize that climate change and ecosystem change are interrelated and include the effects of human behavior, such as fisheries management. Analysis should consider both individual and cumulative effects of all federal fishery management programs in the Alaska EEZ. Consideration should also be given to the understanding that during times of ecological crisis and dramatic change, fishing activity needs to be scaled back to allow for ecosystem resiliency, not maximized according to longstanding policy.

AMCC encourages the biological scope of the action to consider all fisheries for which we have Fishery Management Plans and commercial fisheries occurring. The action should include the two groundfish FMPs for the BSAI and GOA, the BSAI Crab FMP, the Scallop and Salmon

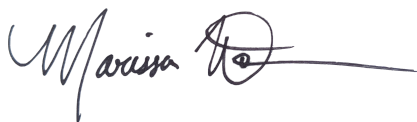
FMPs, and regulations governing the management of halibut fisheries off Alaska. **We encourage the Council to explicitly note in the preamble and Purpose and Need that the biological scope will include evaluation of habitat functionality (including fishing effects) and protections, as well as bycatch and prohibited species catch (including unobserved mortality) such as halibut, salmon, crab and herring and ecosystem components such as marine mammals, seabirds and forage fish.**

The draft Purpose and Need also contains several key themes to advance the discussion, inform draft alternatives and approach an extensive PEIS in a meaningful way. We recommend the Council outline a range of alternatives which includes status quo and more precautionary approaches to management. We agree with the Ecosystem Committee's (EC) identification of the four pillars of fisheries policy and management, and the necessity for their inclusion in any framework for this proposed action. The foundational pillars provide a container within which to build alternatives which are responsive to the Purpose and Need and can inform meaningful management changes to Fishery Management Plans.

More specific language can be developed in the formal NEPA scoping process to further structure the alternatives. Ultimately these alternatives should describe potential changes to the policy approach, goal statements, objectives and management actions for each fishery. and make it explicit that the Council intends to ensure that the management framework recognizes the rights, contributions and needs of Alaskan Native peoples and communities that rely on subsistence resources, considers the cumulative impacts of current allocation schemes in changing climate conditions and science-management interface which is responsive to the needs of fishery management and incorporates Indigenous science and Traditional Knowledge.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and we encourage the Council to initiate a Programmatic EIS and begin the process of the proposed action. We look forward to engaging in the scoping process and the opportunity to provide more specificity to the alternatives which will guide an analysis responsive to the purpose and need statement, ecosystem based fishery management and strengthening an inclusive fishery management in a changing marine environment.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marissa Wilson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marissa Wilson

Executive Director