NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
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C2 Description of Alternatives *(in Brief)*
Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch Management

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At this meeting, the Council may provide a final recommendation on proposed changes to Federal regulations and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Island Groundfish FMP to reduce chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery, particularly Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch. The range of management alternatives being considered includes limits or "caps" on the number of chum salmon that may be caught in the pollock fishery and closure of all or part of the Bering Sea to pollock fishing once a cap is met as well as changes to the pollock industry's incentive plan agreements (IPAs).

Given the complexity of the alternatives, this document provides a description of the alternatives *in brief* and is intended to aid the Council in its consideration of these alternatives and increase the accessibility of this information for members of the public. Note this document does not contain a complete description of all the options and suboptions of the alternatives and instead focuses on the substantive components of the alternatives. Chapter 2 of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), as well as the Executive Summary, contain a detailed description of the alternatives. Additionally, Table 1-11 of the DEIS contains the decision points related to each alternative, option, and suboption.

Range of Alternatives Being Considered

The Council is considering five different management alternatives, which represent either maintaining the existing regulations (Alternative 1) or different ways to modify the current chum salmon bycatch regulations in the Bering Sea (Alternatives 2–5). At this meeting, the Council will make a final decision on whether to recommend a preferred alternative to the Secretary, and the substance of that preferred alternative. Some of the alternatives can work together, so note that most can be selected in combination with each other. All the alternatives would apply to the pollock B season (June 10 – November 1) which is when chum salmon are encountered.

Alternative 1, No Action

The Council is required by law to consider a "No Action" alternative. If Alternative 1 is selected, the existing regulations for chum salmon bycatch management would remain in place. Alternative 1 cannot be selected alongside any other alternative described below. The existing regulations include a system of dynamic closures throughout the pollock B season where areas with high chum salmon bycatch encounters on the pollock fishing grounds are closed for approximately one week at a time. This dynamic closure program is referred to as the "rolling hotspot system." This system relies on every vessel being monitored on every trip and observers counting every salmon (in addition to genetic sampling). The Chum Salmon Savings Area is also in place as a backstop measure, should vessels not participate in the rolling hotspot system, but this has never happened. The Chum Salmon Savings Area is fixed, meaning its location and the timing of the closure do not change inseason. While the "No Action" alternative includes these existing bycatch avoidance measures, the action alternatives described below also retain these existing regulations plus additional measures.

Alternative 2, Overall Chum Salmon PSC Limit (Cap)

If Alternative 2 is selected, an overall chum salmon cap that functions as a hard cap would be in place each B season. If the overall cap is met, pollock fishing must cease even if the fishery has not caught its full quota. Alternative 2 cannot be selected alongside Alternative 3, but it may be selected in combination with Alternative 4 or 5. The cap would be on overall chum salmon, regardless of whether they are Alaska or non-Alaska origin.

If the Council were to recommend Alternative 2, it would need to select a cap limit in numbers of chum salmon and how to divide the cap among the four different pollock fishing sectors. The chum salmon cap could be set at any amount between 100,000 and 550,000 chum salmon, and it could be apportioned to the four pollock sectors using one of four different approaches that are based on either a sector's historical bycatch, its pollock allocation, or a combination of both.

Alternative 3, Overall Chum Salmon Cap Triggered by Low Western Alaska Chum Salmon Abundance

If Alternative 3 is selected, an overall chum salmon cap that functions as a hard cap would be in place during the B season fishery, but only when Western Alaska chum salmon are at low abundance. Alternative 3 is otherwise the same as Alternative 2. Alternative 3 cannot be selected alongside Alternative 2. If the Council were to recommend Alternative 3, it would also need to select a cap limit in numbers of chum salmon and how to apportion the limit among the four different pollock fishing sectors just as with Alternative 2. The Council would also need to select a way to use consistent ADF&G data to determine whether Western Alaska chum salmon is at low abundance, which would trigger the chum salmon cap being in effect. The Council is considering two different indices that would be used to measure abundance, and only one index may be selected.

Option 1 is a three-system index that would measure chum salmon abundance in the Yukon River (summer and fall chum salmon based on run reconstructions provided by ADF&G), the Kuskokwim River (based on the Bethel Sonar with data provided by ADF&G), and the Norton Sound Area (based on a standardized index of five rivers in the region with data provided by ADF&G). Abundance in each area would be independently assessed. If 3/3 areas are above their threshold, a cap would not be in effect. If 2/3 areas are above their threshold, a cap set at an amount between 100,000 and 550,000 chum salmon would be in effect. If 1/3 or 0/3 areas are above their threshold, a cap set at 75% of the amount selected when 2/3 areas are above their threshold would be in effect.

Option 2 for an index would use the Yukon River summer and fall chum salmon runs (based on run reconstructions provided by ADF&G). Each stock would be independently assessed. If 2/2 runs are above their threshold, a cap would not be in effect. If 1/2 or 0/2 stocks are above their threshold, a cap would be in effect.

Alternative 4, Modifications to Regulations Implementing the Salmon Bycatch Incentive Plan Agreements

If Alternative 4 is selected, six provisions would be added to current regulations implementing the pollock industry's Incentive Plan Agreements (IPAs). The IPAs are legal contracts among participants in the pollock fishery that specify different incentives and penalties for vessels to avoid both Chinook salmon and chum salmon while fishing for pollock, as described in the salmon avoidance regulations under Alternative 1. In general, the provisions being considered under Alternative 4 would require the pollock

industry to modify the IPAs so the contracts include more stringent measures to avoid total chum salmon and Western Alaska chum salmon. Alternative 4 may be selected alongside Alternative 2, 3, and 5.

Alternative 5, Inseason Corridor Closures Triggered by a Chum Salmon Cap

If Alternative 5 is selected, an inseason corridor would be in effect to target avoidance efforts to western Alaska chum salmon. Figure 2-3 from the DEIS shows the inseason corridor in red. The location of the inseason corridor is based on historical chum salmon bycatch genetics data that show a greater percentage of Western Alaska chum salmon have been taken as bycatch in this area compared to outside of it, and during the timeframe the corridor could close. From June 10 – August 31, all chum salmon caught as bycatch inside the inseason corridor would count towards a chum salmon cap. If the corridor chum salmon cap is met at any point during that timeframe, either all or part of the corridor would close through August 31. Fishing may continue in all areas unaffected by the closure. Alternative 5 may be selected alongside Alternative 2, 3, and 4.

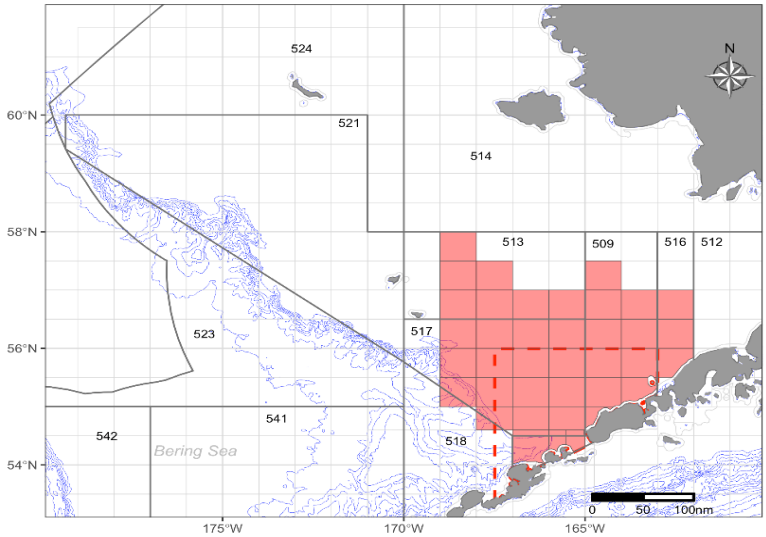

Figure 2-3 Inseason corridor under consideration for Alternative 5 that represents the combined area of genetic clusters 1 and 2 and encompasses 40 ADF&G groundfish stat areas
Notes: The Chum Salmon Savings Area is shown by the red dashed line inside the inseason corridor.

Recommending Alternative 5 would require the Council to also select a cap amount in numbers of chum salmon and how to divide the cap among the four different fishing sectors. The corridor cap could be set at any amount between 50,000 and 350,000 chum salmon, and it could be divided using one of four different approaches based on either a sector's historical bycatch, its pollock allocation, or a combination of both.

The Council would also need to select one of three options which would determine the area inside the corridor that would close. The corridor area is the same among all three options (see Figure 2-3), and so is the closure window, the range of chum salmon caps, and the ways to divide the cap among the fishing sectors. If the corridor chum salmon cap is met, Option 1 would close the entire area through August 31, Suboption 1 would close approximately 75% of the corridor area, and Option 2 would close approximately 50% to 75% of the corridor. The area inside the corridor that would close would be specified in federal regulations under Option 1 and Suboption 1. Option 2 would allow the IPAs to select the area inside the corridor that would close using specific criteria, and the criteria would be specified in regulation. The IPAs selections would be required to be reviewed and approved by NMFS.