

# North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Richard B. Lauber, Chairman  
Clarence G. Pautzke, Executive Director

605 West 4th Avenue  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501



Mailing Address: P.O. Box 103136  
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

Telephone: (907) 271-2809  
FAX: (907) 271-2817

Certified: *Paul Peeler*  
Date: 6/19/91

## MINUTES Scientific and Statistical Committee April 21-23, 1991 Kodiak, AK

The Scientific and Statistical Committee of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council met April 21-23 at the University of Alaska, Fishery Technology Center. Members present were:

Richard Marasco, Chairman  
Doug Eggers, Vice Chairman  
Jack Tagart  
Larry Hreha

Gordon Kruse  
Dan Huppert  
John Burns  
Bill Aron

Don Rosenberg  
Terry Quinn  
Bill Clark  
Marc Miller

### Election of Officers

Drs. Bill Clark and Terry Quinn were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the remainder of 1991. They will begin their terms of office on May 1, 1991.

### C-1 Inshore/Offshore

The SSC reviewed the Inshore/Offshore SEIS/RIR along with the associated Community Profiles. It also received a presentation of the various analyses from Council staff and the author of the SIA. The SSC notes the stringent time and budget constraints imposed on both the development of the analyses and associated reviews. These constraints may put the findings at risk and may result in incorrect conclusions concerning the effects of the proposed alternatives.

The SSC agrees with the Conclusions section of the SEIS/RIR, p.5-6, "...all five of these management alternatives point to the inability of the proposals to remedy the underlying catching and processing capacity that drives the preemption-related problems."

The SSC recommends the following revisions.

- (1) The Executive Summary should be expanded and rewritten. We recommend that it match the organization of Section 5.0. Care must be taken to assure that the summary accurately reflects information presented in the document. A summary chart displaying general results and consequences of options should be included.

- (2) The SSC recommends the inclusion of a table presenting annual Inshore and Offshore domestic processing of BSAI cod and pollock and GOA cod and pollock. The table should display inshore/offshore harvest shares for these categories. The historical tonnages and shares through 1990 should be followed by what the 1991 tonnages and shares would be with each alternative and what the tonnages would be for a reasonable historic range of TACs.
- (3) The text (Sec. 4.2.6 fourth paragraph) should indicate the social impact assessment is preliminary and suggestive rather than conclusive. The profiles are useful descriptions, and should stimulate research; but they are insufficient to provide conclusions about impacts. The SIA section should reference figures and calculations in the economic impact section wherever appropriate.
- (4) Because results of the I-O analysis depend on numerous parameter estimates, the results of the sensitivity assessment should be reflected in the Conclusions. Results of the sensitivity analysis should be presented along with the discussions of model results. A graphical presentation would be helpful.
- (5) The concluding section of the economic impact analysis notes that stability of inshore and offshore sectors is not assured by a once-for-all allocation of cod and pollock. The underlying problem is open access competition for limited harvest quantities in both sectors. As long as overcapacity exists both sectors are left vulnerable to economic strife when prices and stock decline. In contrast, the social impact analysis assumes that the inshore/offshore allocation creates stability in the inshore sector. The SSC recommends that the two sections of the report be made consistent with the conclusions of the economic impact chapter.
- (6) The draft should explain the differences between benefit/cost and input/output analyses.

In addition to these comments, the SSC will informally forward to the preparers minor corrections and drafting suggestions.

The SSC believes the following issues need to be addressed.

- (1) The MFCMA and associated regulations require that any proposed action be evaluated in terms of the "net benefit to the nation, as a whole." A benefit-cost analysis would normally be done to meet this requirement. At a minimum a qualitative discussion of possible effects on consumers should be made. An assessment also should be made of producer benefits. Such an analysis would include addressing the transfer of capacity between sectors.
- (2) The SSC recommends that additional material be added in Sections 5.6 and 2.3. regarding possible impacts on northern sea lions and marine mammals. The points to be addressed should include comments on impacts of noise, recent changes in incidental catches of marine mammals, potential effects of increased vessel traffic on marine mammals at such locations as Akutan and St. Paul, recent status estimates of harbor seals, and other data that are available. The points of concern by the SSC have been conveyed to Council staff.

- (3) The analysis does not take into account the impact of various bycatch management schemes. Without an assessment of the bycatch issue, the public will be unable to make an informed judgement about the probable costs and benefits of any of the alternative allocations.

The SSC was unable to make a recommendation on releasing the document for public review. Finally, the SSC wants to stress to the Council the importance of timely submission of lengthy and technical documents. In this instance, the SSC was unable to give this important analysis a thorough evaluation. Accordingly, we request that the next such document (such as the SEIS/RIR for halibut IFQs) be distributed to SSC members at least two weeks in advance of Council meeting.

### **C-2 North Pacific Fisheries Research Plan**

The SSC reviewed the draft document entitled "Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for the North Pacific Fisheries Research Plan". The document was discussed with the council staff and the NMFS personnel.

The SSC recommends the adoption of Alternative 2 with the following comments:

- (1) A key element of Alternative 2 is the development of an observer plan. It was our understanding that the initial observer plan under Alternative 2 would be the current plan with minor modifications. The SSC noted that more than minor modification may be required in light of the start-up problems and the limitation on total funding. It was suggested that NMFS develop a plan for 1992. The new plan would include a description of the objectives, the type and methods of data collection and data entry.
- (2) The SSC discussed the possibility of biasing the data by linking the fee to the amount of fish received. We concluded that there are sufficient checks in the reporting system to prevent under reporting.
- (3) With regard to options under Alternative 2 (covering the transition period) the SSC opposes any option that would disrupt the collection of data under the program.

The SSC also noted that the North Pacific Research Plan provides for the collection and entry of data from the fishing fleet. The Council must recognize that for the system to be fully effective provisions must be in place for data entry, editing, and analysis. The Council and the NMFS must take whatever steps may be necessary to assure appropriate support is available for the complete data collection and analysis.

### **C-3 Sablefish Management**

The SSC has reviewed prior documents on this subject. The supplemental EIS/RIR arrived only two days before the meeting, and not all members were able to read it thoroughly. Those that did, however, believed the analysis was well done.

The SSC wishes to emphasize a potential conflict between each of the IFQ alternatives and the present halibut PSC in the Gulf of Alaska. As mentioned in the analysis, continuation of an

open-access PSC would continue the race for fish and therefore reduce the benefits of an IFQ system.

#### **C-7 Marine Mammals**

##### **(a) NMFS-proposed amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act**

The SSC received a report from Charles Karnella, NMFS - Washington, D.C., that described a regime that NMFS is developing to govern the incidental taking of marine mammals in commercial fisheries after October 1, 1993.

##### **(b) Draft Recovery Plan**

The SSC was unable to comment on the Draft Recovery Plan for Steller Sea Lions. No copies were made available to the SSC. The SSC notes that the deadline for review expires within one week. We also note that this plan could have significant impacts on North Pacific fisheries. The SSC recommends that the Council seek an extension of the comment period to permit review by the Council family.

#### **D-1 Groundfish Amendments**

The SSC reviewed the EA/RIR/IRFA for Amendment 17/22 and for a regulatory amendment to define groundfish pots. The following comments are offered. Once these comments have been addressed the SSC recommends that the document be sent out for public review.

#### **Section 2.0 Experimental Fishing Permits**

The SSC recommends several changes to the amendment proposal for experimental fishing permits. First the SSC recommends that the Council emphasize the "experimental" nature of the fishing permit. That is, those requesting an experimental fishing permit should have a structured experiment in mind which includes a testable hypothesis, a sampling plan and a description of how the experiment will be evaluated. Additionally, under the heading of "Application Requirements" item 4: the SSC recommends inserting the phrase "and pay for" between the words "... carry observers, ...". Furthermore, we suggest an additional item which requires public disclosure of all data collected during the experiment.

The SSC endorses the development of a method to permit the issuance of experimental permits. We suggest Alternative 2 be divided into three options: (1) full Council review of all requests for experimental fishing permits, (2) full review only by the NMFS Regional Director, or (3) a combination of full review by the Council and/or expedited review by the Regional Director (the current amendment proposal).

Finally, the SSC recommends two additional grounds for denial of an experimental fishing permit. First, the permit should be denied if the proposed experimental design is judged to be flawed. Second, the permit should be denied if the requestor under a previously issued experimental fishing permit failed to provide access to all relevant data or failed to provide a final report as required by the permit.

### **Section 3.0 Establish Walrus Islands Groundfish Fishery Closure.**

The SSC recommends that this section of the amendment package go forward for public review with minor modifications.

The last sentence on page 12 should be restated to reflect the fact that the number of walrus seen on haulout beaches, since 1988, has remained stable. This stability is indicative of the importance of the haulouts in northern Bristol Bay. The use of haulouts in other parts of the walrus' range has declined, commensurate with a downward readjustment of the walrus population.

In the discussions the references to numbers of walrus seen on the haulouts should be combined across individual haulout areas to reflect that walrus move from one to the other.

The SSC also noted that the following should be included in discussion of options: TAC's can be taken elsewhere and the Alaska Region has not received any complaints about the closure from the industry, during the period of the closures.

On page 27, the following statement appears, "...the maximum benefit to be expected from reopening the area..." is about 24,000 mt, etc. The maximum is determined by multiplying the size of the biomass in the area by the appropriate exploitation rate and the net value per ton. This approach assumes that the biomass is associated with the area.

On the top of page 28, CPUE comparisons are made. Care should be taken to ensure that the comparisons are for the appropriate time periods.

The SSC requests that personal communications references should be stated in the text and not in the literature cited section.

### **Section 4.0 Rescind Gulf of Alaska Statistical Area 68.**

The SSC recommends that the section be modified to reflect the impact of the alternatives on management of shelf demersal rockfish before it is forwarded for public review.

### **Section 5.0 Establish a Bogoslof District**

This section was added because of the emergency rule for Bogoslof Area 515 in effect in early 1991.

The SSC believes that two major modifications must be made to this amendment before public review.

First, the potential impacts of the alternatives on marine mammal populations must be discussed. Proximity of the large Bogoslof Island sea lion rookery and the recently established fur seal colony should be mentioned and considered to the extent that available information allows. The juxtaposition of these marine mammal populations, large assemblages of seabirds, and the annual aggregation of spawning pollock in the area must be better described.

Second, the implications of the alternatives on ABCs and TACs are not adequately discussed. On page 61, the document refers to estimates of ABC by federal fishery scientists, without mentioning the difficulties the SSC and the Council have had in determining ABC for the Bogoslof area. In December 1990, the SSC was unable to make an ABC determination for this area, because of its connection with the Aleutian Basin component, including the Donut Hole.

Under Alternative 1 (Status Quo), no TAC in the Bogoslof area would occur, because an emergency rule cannot be used twice to establish a TAC for the Bogoslof area. This would leave the Bogoslof area component unprotected, unlike in the past. Under Option 1 of Alternative 2, the Bogoslof District would be separate from the Bering Sea subarea and the Aleutian Islands, requiring the determination of ABC and TAC. Given that the Donut Hole component may be overfished, an ABC as low as zero could conceivably be set in the Bogoslof District. Under Option 2 of Alternative 2, the current practice of setting a TAC for the Bogoslof area would continue. However, the TAC would be incorrectly counted against the TAC for the shelf component. These implications need to be described in the document.

On page 62, the document refers to a "roe season estimate of ABC" that should be correctly worded "a TAC", because the setting of a district within a management area does not involve the setting of an ABC. For example, the District specification within a management area is currently being used for Shelikof Strait, but no ABC for Shelikof is determined.

In some years, significant catches in the Bogoslof area occur in the last two quarters of the year (82% in 1989). At present, it is unclear whether these catches should be counted against Basin pollock, shelf pollock, or some other component. The options for Alternative 2 split the current Bogoslof area 515 into two areas 518 and 519 with a dividing line at 167°W., as shown in Figures 3 and 4. The motivation for this division needs to be better explained in relation to the occurrence of pollock stocks at different times of the year and the oceanography of the area. This information is needed so that the Council can determine whether a season or annual TAC is needed.

If this amendment is to be considered in June, the approach of setting ABCs for Bering Sea pollock needs to be reviewed and clarified between now and June. The SSC is willing to convene an *ad hoc* subcommittee of the SSC to participate with plan team members and AFSC scientists to address this subject. The major issues are how to treat the Bogoslof area in the determination of the Aleutian basin component and what the interrelationships between the Basin component and the shelf components are. Recent international developments have led to progress and new approaches to estimating biomass and ABC for the entire Bering Sea, although this work is incomplete. The selection of the best alternative in the Amendment package is dependent on the method of determining ABC; therefore the architecture of this process needs to be constructed before the June meeting.

### **Miscellaneous Items:**

#### **Team Membership**

##### **(a) Salmon Plan Team**

The SSC recommends that Mr. Jim Berkson be appointed to replace Dr. Schaller on the Salmon

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**(b) BSAI/GOA Groundfish Plan Teams**

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