

Excerpts from:

**DRAFT REPORT
of the
SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE
to the
NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
December 8-10, 2008**

The SSC met during December 8-19, 2008 at the Hilton Hotel, Anchorage, Alaska. Members present were:

Pat Livingston, Chair <i>NOAA Fisheries—AFSC</i>	Keith Criddle, Vice Chair <i>University of Alaska Fairbanks</i>	Troy Buell <i>Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife</i>
Bill Clark <i>International Pacific Halibut Commission</i>	Robert Clark <i>Alaska Department of Fish and Game</i>	Sue Hills <i>University of Alaska Fairbanks</i>
Anne Hollowed <i>NOAA Fisheries—AFSC</i>	George Hunt <i>University of Washington</i>	Kathy Kuletz <i>US Fish and Wildlife Service</i>
Seth Macinko <i>University of Rhode Island</i>	Franz Mueter <i>University of Alaska Fairbanks</i>	Lew Queirolo <i>NMFS—Alaska Region</i>
Terry Quinn II <i>University of Alaska Fairbanks</i>	Farron Wallace <i>Washington Dept of Fish and Wildlife</i>	Doug Woodby <i>Alaska Department of Fish and Game</i>

Members absent were:

Gordon Kruse
University of Alaska Fairbanks

D-3 Arctic FMP

Bill Wilson (NPFMC), and Melanie Brown (NMFS-AKR) presented the revised draft Fishery Management Plan for the Fish Resources in the Arctic and the accompanying EA/RIR/IRFA. Lauren Smoker (NOAA GC) Grant Thompson (NMFS-AFSC) were also present to answer questions. Public testimony was provided by Chris Krenz (Oceana), Bubba Cook (WWF), and Ukallaysaaq Tom Okleasik (NW Arctic Borough).

The SSC compliments the preparers for responding to many of the SSC comments from the October 2008 meeting so quickly and for the many detailed additions at an extremely busy time of year. The SSC's question on the legal validity of the Option 2 approach has been addressed by NMFS and NOAA GC in

their suggested language for a new Option 3, contained in their letter of November 26, 2008. On December 4, 2008 the SSC was sent (via email) the revised FMP with the Option 3 language included. Several sections of that revision were still incomplete at that time. The SSC received the partially updated EA/RIR/IRFA at this meeting. The SSC did not have time to completely review the material and plans to comment more fully on the finished documents at the February meeting. **The SSC recommends that the document be released for public review, after completing the changes recommended by the SSC previously and at this meeting.**

The SSC notes that the proposed handling of the Kotzebue Sound red king crab fishery in Alternatives 3 and 4 is inconsistent with the FMP's objectives for protection of the sensitive marine environment and prevention of unregulated fishing, and the careful listing of requirements for opening a new commercial fishery. In addition the selection of the 1000 lbs. cap is arbitrary and without a scientific basis. Although strictly speaking it is not a new fishery, very few data exist on the fishery or stock size and these are of poor quality and insufficient to establish the level of past fishery catches. On the other hand, other crab fisheries outside the Arctic have been similarly deferred to State management (e.g., hair crabs) and do not require all of the data listed in the Arctic FMP for new fisheries. The SSC notes that a subsistence harvest of that magnitude would be allowed and would still allow for cash exchange at some level.

Although it appears that Option 3 is preferred by the authors, if Options 1 and 2 are to remain in the document as viable choices, all the appropriate analysis and calculations need to be included for each for a fully informed decision. The SSC understands that the material will be updated with the newly estimated biomass data (Ormseth et al.) from 2008 surveys conducted in the Arctic by Libby Logerwell (NOAA). The SSC recommends that the new biomass data for the Beaufort Sea be used in place of the older (1990) data, and that the Options 1 and 3 MSY numbers be revised accordingly. The Ormseth et al. report supports the designation of arctic cod, snow crab, and saffron cod as potentially exploitable biomass.

We recommend that the comparative approach used for Option 2 systemwide MSY calculations (e.g., Table 4-8, page 120) be deleted. It is not clear that the MSY calculation needs to be included since no fisheries are authorized; the SSC recommends that the authors consider deleting the whole section starting on page 117. The biomass information we have for calculating MSY in Options 1 and 3 provides a minimum estimate and is the best information available at present. The FMP should be amended as new information becomes available.

Other SSC comments on the FMP (December 2008 version)

The Changing Arctic section (about page 66) contains information on areas beyond the arctic and adjacent areas. Staff explained that the material was included to "give an ecosystem flavor" and to bolster evidence for climate change. In the interest of keeping the document concise, the SSC suggests deleting material south of the Bering Sea.

The EFH maps are digitized from old maps, some of which are incorrect (e.g., snow crab distribution). Some explanation should be given for the discrepancy of the maps with the data presented in the text.

There seems to be some confusion of groundfish Tiers and crab Tiers in the document. In particular for option 3 the relationship between algorithms used to identify FMP species and the crab and groundfish Tier system should be explained. Crab Tier 5 Uses catch history to determine reference points, however since there are no commercial fisheries Tier 5 should not be considered.

EA/RIR/IRFA (November 2008 version)

P38 – repeated creative misspellings of deferred.

Section 3.1 (P 45) – left out ADFG, MMS, OCSEAP, NSB, USGS Alaska center, USFWS Marine Mammals Management.

Section 3.2 section on oil and gas. No reference to effects of seismic exploration from ships or on ice.

P 136 fishery interactions of seabirds is confusing and de-emphasizes the documented effects of gill nets on some of the seabirds listed. The marine mammal section might be a useful model, by separating state run gill net fisheries from federal groundfish fisheries interactions. Specific comments related to this issue throughout the document will be provided to the authors.