

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC, and APM Members
FROM: Chris Oliver 
Executive Director
DATE: May 31, 2011
SUBJECT: GOA Chinook salmon bycatch

ESTIMATED TIME 12 HOURS

ACTION REQUIRED:

Final action: Chinook salmon prohibited species control measures in the GOA pollock fishery

BACKGROUND:

This amendment package evaluates amending the GOA Groundfish FMP to create a prohibited species catch (PSC) limit for western and central GOA pollock fisheries, which, once reached, would close the affected fisheries. At the March/April meeting, the Council identified a preliminary preferred alternative for this action.

The preliminary preferred alternative (attached as Item C-4(a)) identifies a PSC limit of 22,500 Chinook salmon for the western and central GOA pollock fisheries combined. This limit would be apportioned between the two areas based on a combination of the proportional historic pollock TAC and historic average Chinook salmon prohibited species catch, using the time series 2001-2006 and 2008-2009. The years 2007 and 2010 were dropped from the time series, because these were abnormally high bycatch years in the central and western GOA, respectively, and inclusion of these years biases the apportionment calculation. This calculation results in the following annual PSC limit allowances for the two areas:

Central GOA: 15,816
Western GOA: 6,684

Additionally, the preliminary preferred alternative would implement an interim observer requirement of 30% coverage for trawl vessels under 60 ft, while directed fishing for pollock in the central or western GOA. The interim requirement would expire once the observer restructuring program is implemented (currently targeted for January 2013), because that program also provides for observer coverage on vessels under 60 ft. All vessels would be required to retain all salmon while directed fishing for pollock, and NMFS will work with the industry to improve observed and extrapolated Chinook salmon estimates and their timeliness. The preliminary preferred alternative also specifies reduced PSC limits for the two areas in the implementation year, if the PSC limit should be implemented mid-season.

The public review draft of the analysis for the pollock fishery management measures was mailed to the Council in early May, and the executive summary is attached as Item C-4(b). The full range of alternatives and components addressed in this analysis is included as Item C-4(c).

At initial review, the Council requested information from NMFS about Chinook salmon sampling and sample analysis for stock of origin. Dr DeMaster has written a letter, on behalf of NMFS, responding to the Council's questions. The letter provides information about recent improvements to the Chinook salmon sampling protocol (beginning in 2011), and the timing of genetic analysis of these samples, which will supplement the available information on the presence of particular Chinook salmon stocks encountered in the GOA trawl fisheries. NMFS also notes that requiring full retention of salmon, which is included in the preliminary preferred alternative in this analysis, is one of the key prerequisites to be able to estimate the stock composition of GOA Chinook salmon bycatch in the future. The letter is attached as Item C-4(d).

As referenced in the letter, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center has analyzed genetic samples from Chinook salmon taken in the GOA groundfish fisheries in 2010. Because the samples are neither representative nor numerous, they cannot be used to infer the stock composition of the entirety of Chinook salmon bycatch in the 2010 GOA trawl fishery. Most of the samples were derived from stocks of the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia. A small proportion of samples indicated that stocks from the various Alaska regions are also present in the GOA bycatch. The update is attached as Item C-4(e). Dr Jeff Guyon/ will be attending the meeting, and will be available if there are questions.

Note, in December 2010, the Council initiated two amendments to address GOA Chinook salmon bycatch. The first, the expedited amendment package, is the subject of final action today. A regular-track amendment package was also initiated to address Chinook salmon bycatch management more comprehensively, in all the GOA trawl fisheries. Originally, mandatory salmon bycatch cooperatives were part of the expedited amendment package, but at the March/April meeting, the Council was informed that administrative requirements are likely to limit the effectiveness of the cooperatives as proposed. In removing the cooperatives from the expedited amendment package, the Council resolved that alternative tools would be evaluated in the longer term package. Given this, the Council may, at some point, wish to revisit the alternatives and discussion items for the second amendment package. However, in October 2011, the Council is scheduled to receive a discussion paper on individual bycatch quotas that may also be relevant. The full Council motion from December 2010 is attached as Item C-4(f). Item C-4(g) provides Chinook salmon bycatch numbers from 2003-2011 for all GOA groundfish fisheries.