

Draft:  
Summary of Stakeholder Panel on Steller Sea Lions and Pacific Cod Fishing EARIR and  
State Policy on ESA Actions

September 6, 2000.  
Sheraton Hotel, Anchorage, Alaska

On September 6, 2000 the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) held a meeting of Alaskan Stakeholders in the Pacific Cod industry to solicit comments on the NMFS Draft EARIR regarding actions on stellar sea lions. This group of stakeholders consisted of members of the Pacific-Cod harvesting, processing, potentially impacted communities, and environmental interests. There were 12 named individuals in the panel, and a large audience. Kevin Duffy, Deputy Commissioner to ADF&G described the general purpose of the panel and the work products that had been requested from the Governor's Office. The Governor encouraged ADF&G to develop recommendations from the industry, communities, and local interest groups to provide input on how the State should respond to the immediate draft Pacific Cod/Stellar Sea Lion EARIR, Judge's injunction to halt trawling, and the forthcoming Section 7 biological opinion. The panel, set at the Council meeting, was considered to be the best approach to bring together the potentially effected interests in the short period of time available. Mr. Duffy also conveyed, subject to response from the panel members, that it would be helpful for the panel to continue to function beyond this immediate council meeting to advise the state on Pacific Cod management alternatives and state positions that could result from ESA.

The stakeholder panel represented a large range of interests and a number of views were expressed regarding the NMFS EARIR. They ranged from (1) lack of acceptance that the State of Alaska should cooperate in the implementation of any fishing adjustments in the Pacific Cod directed fisheries, (2) encouragement to the state to generate serious objections over the lack of a scientific basis for the present alternatives in the EARIR and entire notion that there is a compelling need to generate management amendments to Pacific Cod fisheries, and (3) to a general acceptance that compromises should be sought in the alternatives presented in the EARIR to avoid a jeopardy finding in the upcoming Biological Opinion.

While it is not possible to document all comments made by the panel, an effort is made here to highlight some of the key observations.

1. Stellar sea lions are not in Jeopardy, and the Pacific Cod fishery cannot be linked to contributing to food and feeding competition. The State should not accept any of the alternatives and it should encourage NMFS to start their analysis over with supportable assumptions.
2. There is a lack of any experimental design incorporated into the assumptions and conclusions that have been drawn in the present EARIR. There is a strong need to include further experimentation and monitoring with fishing regimes. We also need

to come up with reasonable alternatives, as there is a great risk in leaving the current EARIR unchanged.

3. Since the current EARIR is far too restrictive in relation to the scientific evidence, we should not assume that any of the alternatives in the analysis have any credibility. The state should work to keep fishery management out of the judicial system.
4. We need to accept the implications of the existing court actions, and not bury our heads in the sand. If the state totally disregards the need to generate some alternatives under the EARIR, the risk is that we may quickly end up with no fishery in 2001. It would be most appropriate to seek out reasonable alternatives. Included are a summary of possible alternatives and attachments to these minutes.
5. It is important to maintain a healthy industry after the Council has passed management actions and NMFS has published regulations that respond to stellar sea lion ESA actions.
6. As Pollock fisheries have just finished up for 2000, it is clear that the costs of the management actions for stellar sea lions have been very large. Some smaller operations chose to not participate in the fishery. We are poised to go through the same or more severe consequences in the Pacific Cod fisheries.
7. The Purpose and Need Statement developed in the EARIR by NMFS sounds like that agency wants to put fishermen out of business, and for those still choosing to fish in small vessels outside of critical habitat there are grave safety concerns.
8. With large scale impacts anticipated in Pacific Cod and already realized some Pollock trawl fisheries, the fallout to certain communities is generating great concern. In some communities, impacts on small Aleut populations in the region could be tantamount to an act of genocide.

It appeared that participants in the panel felt that the forum was a useful initial meeting, and requested that the State continue to keep them informed as State policies on stellar sea lions develop. Mr. Duffy offered to supply a summary of the discussions to the panel, and requested any specific ideas of alternatives that should be considered by the Council.

Stakeholder Panel:

Michele Ridgeway	AMCC for BSAI issues	Juneau
Tim Blott	Kodiak Processor Assoc.	Kodiak
Jay Stinson	P-Cod Trawler	Kodiak
Stosh Anderson	AMCC for GOA issues	Kodiak
Terry Schaff	Unisea (Processor)	Dutch Harbor
Corey Swansand	Factory Trawler/CDQ APICA	Kodiak
Chuck Thompson	Longliner	Kodiak
Dick Jacobson	Mayor of Sand Point	Sand Point
Frank Kelty	Mayor of Dutch Harbor	Dutch Harbor
Joe Plesha	Trident Seafoods	Seattle
Jerry Bongdon	Pot Cod fishermen	Kodiak
Fred/Lyle Yeck	independent c/v	Not present

This is a list of some possible EARIR alternatives provided to ADF&G by Stakeholders during and after the Stakeholder meeting. It is recognized that these concepts have not been filtered back through the Stakeholder panel yet, and may be ranked or altered in the future.

1. Expand winter survey work to determine the actual distribution of biomass during the winter.
2. Adjust percentage of the winter cod harvest within critical habitat based upon survey results.
3. Controlled reductions per year in the percent of the winter cod fishery that could be harvested within selected critical habitat. Within 5 years we will have survey results to give us an accurate determination of cod biomass distribution outside and inside of critical habitat.
4. Develop efficacy studies to determine whether stellar sea lion fishery management restrictions have positive, neutral, or adverse impact on the recovery of stellar sea lions.

Use local historical knowledge of stellar sea lion populations and fishing to gain insight into sea lion behavior and populations.