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Policy & Planning Committee
September 1-2, 1987
Sheraton Hotel
Anchorage, Alaska

Jim Campbell called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m. on Tuesday, September 1, 1987. The meeting was recessed several times for the Council teleconference on groundfish allocations. Bob McVey introduced Dale Evans who is replacing Bill Robinson at the NMFS-Alaska Regional Office. Jim Branson introduced Dick Tremaine, the Council's new economist.

The Policy & Planning Committee's agenda included the following subjects: Joint Venture Policy, Halibut Allocation Policy, Future of Groundfish Management, Domestic Observers, and Crab Management.

Joint Venture Policy

In June the Policy & Planning Committee recommended no change to the joint venture policy, other than possibly adding language expressing the Council's concern over unreported pollock catches in the international waters of the Bering Sea ("Donut Hole"). At that time, the Northwest & Alaska Fisheries Center was asked to prepare a report giving their best estimates of catches in these waters.

Richard Marasco of the NWAFC told the Council that hard data on this fishery is not available with the exception of some information recently received from Mr. Shima of the Japan Fisheries Agency. Those data indicate Japan harvested approximately 137,000 mt in 1985, 698,000 mt in 1986 in the area. Using this information, it could be estimated that the total 1986 harvest by all nations might approach one million metric tons. Mr. Shima estimates that Japan's 1987 harvest will be approximately the same as in 1986. The Center has been unsuccessful in obtaining catch information from the other nations fishing the donut - Korea, Taiwan, and the PRC.

Dr. Marasco said that is their opinion that the stocks in the donut area definitely overlap with stocks in the U.S. EEZ in the Bering Sea although there is no scientific data to support this opinion at this time. He noted that Japan has expressed a strong interest in a joint research effort in the area. The Center's triennial survey of the slope stocks is due in 1988. Japan has traditionally participated in this research but will not do so in 1988, so the Center may have to charter the survey which may not be as extensive as in the past. In 1989 an extensive hydroacoustic survey is planned in the Basin and Japan has committed to participate in that research.

Dr. Aron told the Council that the Center plans to solicit additional funds to accomplish the necessary research and work to obtain accurate data on the Bering Sea-wide stocks.

The Committee expressed concern that it may be 1989 before the Council can get the data it needs to make management decisions on Bering Sea stocks, with a possible harvest of one million metric tons per year in the meantime. John Peterson suggested pursuing an agreement with the Soviets for data, and possible restrictions on harvests in that area. Larry Cotter pointed out that if one-half of that million metric tons is of U.S.-origin, then the Council will have to take that into account when setting TACs in December. He pointed out that Japan will have to decrease their catch and that their request to "develop historical harvest rights" should not be considered.

John Harville pointed out that these are international waters and the Council has no authority. He suggested three ways the Council might address the problem: (1) support research plans at NWAFC; (2) improve persuasive powers on joint ventures by incorporating a statement of concern in the policy; and (3) put maximum effort behind getting the PICES group started to provide a better data base and to persuade other nations to help provide the information needed.

Don Bevan pointed out that it's important to have information on the entire Bering Sea stock complex, both in the U.S. EEZ and the international waters.

John Peterson suggested the Council urge the State Department to negotiate a temporary management regime with the Soviets as an interim measure until data can be obtained. However, Mr. McVey pointed out that such an arrangement would require a treaty which would take a long time to negotiate, and certain trade-offs would be required.

Council members discussed the effectiveness of putting restrictions on permits or rating countries by their willingness to provide information on their catches in the donut hole area of the Bering Sea. It was pretty much agreed that rating countries through a point system is a difficult and time-consuming practice.

The Policy & Planning Committee recommends the following paragraph to add to the joint venture policy under the section, "Basis for Recommendations":

The Council remains very concerned about the catches of pollock and other species of fish in the international waters of the Bering Sea and the impact those catches will have on the overall stock abundance, particularly as it relates to the setting of harvest quotas in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone. Any nation receiving directed allocations or operating in joint ventures off Alaska will be expected to provide timely, accurate, and verifiable data on their past, present, and projected catches of pollock and other species from the international waters in question, and to cooperate whenever possible in international research programs on those stocks.

They also recommended that research was needed on all Bering Sea pollock stocks and that the Council should take an active part in encouraging a multi-nation approach to accomplishing that research, perhaps through an organization such as PICES. They also recommended that the Council urge the Department of State to work on a bilateral agreement with the Soviets for immediate control of effort in the international area. The Executive Director was asked to contact Ed Wolfe of the State Department so he can be prepared to discuss this subject at the September Council meeting.

The Committee also had a request from Frank Bohannon for Council help in getting Japan to allow some of their motherships to participate in a research/joint venture fishery for pollock in the "donut hole" of the international waters of the Bering Sea. He said the Japanese government would

only allow their ships in the area if invited by by the U.S. Government. The Committee asked that this issue be put on the Council's September agenda for discussion and advised Mr. Bohannon that the Council could approve such an invitation only if the research was approved by the Northwest & Alaska Fisheries Center and suggested he contact Dr. Aron with the details.

Halibut Allocation Policy

In June the Committee directed staff to prepare draft goals for the halibut fishery. The draft goals were submitted to the Committee for discussion and approval (see Appendix I to these minutes).

The Committee once again discussed whether or not the Council is obligated to undertake halibut management as directed by NMFS. John Peterson said that under Executive Order 12291 regulatory agencies are prohibited from imposing excessive burdens on fishermen and, in his opinion, the Council would be doing so. Mr. Peterson suggested that the Council delay considering halibut management proposals for at least six months or a year to allow time for an environmental impact statement and development of alternatives which might be available to the Council.

John Harville pointed out that although the Council recognizes these problems, they must go ahead with the setting of goals and objectives for the fishery in order to be prepared to take action when required.

John Peterson pointed out that the MFCMA says the Councils may, not shall, undertake halibut management decisions. Bob McVey said that it is NMFS' position that the Council will make allocative decisions in the halibut fishery.

After discussion and editorial changes on the draft goals the Committee approved them (see Appendix I) for presentation to the Council at their September meeting .

The Committee also approved a Halibut Management Team be appointed with the following representatives:

IPHC staff
NMFS Regional Office staff
NWAFC staff: economist/biologist
ADF&G staff
NPFMC staff

Council staff will contact each agency asking them to assign a staff member to the Team.

The Committee also approved the following composition for the Halibut Regulatory Amendment Advisory Group:

2 Council members (including NMFS-RD as IPHC Commissioner)
2 SSC members
2 AP members
Halibut Management Team Chairman

Mr. Campbell will ask the SSC and AP to recommend their representatives. He and Bob McVey will represent the Council.

Future of Groundfish Management

In June the Committee said they would develop a statement of commitment for the Council to examine alternatives to traditional management techniques. John Harville prepared a discussion paper on groundfish management strategies and Terry Smith and Ron Miller of Council staff prepared an options paper on limited access in Alaskan fisheries and a draft statement of commitment for the Committee to consider.

The Committee discussed the draft statement of commitment and suggested several changes. Of particular concern was the setting of actual dates for a moratorium and how to handle vessels already under construction and planning to enter the fisheries. Nancy Munro and a small subcommittee were asked to revise the draft using the Committee's suggestions and discussion. The draft

Statement of Commitment was approved (see Appendix II) by the Committee for presentation to the Council for approval at their September meeting.

Domestic Observers

Clarence Pautzke and Abby Gorham briefed the Committee on the progress of the Council's pilot domestic observer program which will begin about September 21.

Bob McVey asked the Committee to approve two observers under the Council's observer program for catcher/processors that will engage in the Pacific ocean perch fishery off Southeastern Alaska. They would like to have at least 40% coverage and estimated the fishery would last no longer than one month. Don Collinsworth said that ADF&G may be able to provide some help through their observer program. The Committee approved the use of observers as requested by Bob McVey.

Crab Management

The Committee was asked to consider establishing an interim advisory group (as suggested by Senators Packwood and Hatfield of Oregon) to work with the State of Alaska on crab management issues until the new Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Crab FMP is in place.

The Committee voted to recommend to the Council formation of an interim advisory group on crab management and asked the Executive Director to invite the Chairman of the Alaska Board of Fisheries to the September Council meeting to participate in the discussion on the draft plan and on the advisory committee.

The Policy & Planning Committee meeting was adjourned at 6:40 p.m. on Wednesday, September 2.