

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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MINUTES Scientific and Statistical Committee January 15-16, 1990 Anchorage, AK

The Scientific and Statistical Committee of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council met January 15-16 at the Hilton Hotel in Anchorage, Alaska. Members present were:

Richard Marasco, Chairman	Terry Quinn
Doug Eggers, Vice Chairman	Bill Aron
Jack Tagart	Don Rosenberg
Larry Hreha	Don Bevan
Gordon Kruse	Bill Clark

C-1 NORTHERN SEA LIONS

The SSC heard a report on the northern Sea lion situation. Funds have been provided to allow the NMML of the AFSC to conduct a resurvey of critical sea lion rookeries to confirm the reported population declines. Further, efforts will be undertaken to investigate the causes of mortality of the sea lions primarily through field investigations employing satellite tags. Continued efforts on disease, environmental change and interaction studies should provide insight on sea lion population changes.

The SSC was also provided a list of sea lion rookeries ranked by order of their need for protection and their importance to fisheries.

C-2 OBSERVER PROGRAM

The SSC heard a review of proposed rules for implementation of the domestic observer program. The SSC reiterated its concern expressed at the December meeting that biased data may be obtained from vessels mandated to have 30% observer coverage. Proposed rules provide an opportunity within each quarter for vessels to control the trips during which observers are present. The preferred systematic sampling strategies would require observer coverage on every n th day or trip. The concern of the SSC has been transmitted to the AFSC with request that they take appropriate steps to minimize sampling bias.

The SSC notes that the final rule stipulates that observer data are "administratively confidential". Data from individual vessels cannot be released to professionals including members of the SSC, and fishery scientists and managers in ADF&G, WDF, ODFW, universities, and IPHC, without the consent of the vessel operator or manager.

Although aggregated and summarized data can be provided, much information is lost in this process. Statistical accuracy of observer data cannot be verified without access to data from individual fishing vessels. Additional staff time required to filter the data could possibly result in delays in meeting requests and analyses required for management actions.

The SSC believes these restrictions undermine the effectiveness of the domestic observer program for providing the Council with the information required to manage the groundfish fishery. The SSC urges the Council to work to modify these restrictions so that fishery scientists and managers may gain timely and complete access to the data.

C-5 SABLEFISH MANAGEMENT

The SSC received a report from Council Staff summarizing the contents of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis for the Longline and Pot Gear Sablefish Management Amendment to the Groundfish Fishery Management Plans for the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands. The document states that, "The overriding characteristic of the sablefish fixed gear fishery is that it has developed into a 'derby' fishery as a direct outgrowth of open access. This type of fishery is characterized by progressively greater numbers of fishermen and/or increased fishing power of vessels pursuing a finite resource during progressively shorter seasons." The SSC notes that overcapitalization exacerbates allocation and gear conflicts, increases deadloss, bycatch loss and discard mortality, and decreases product quality and vessel safety. While the SEIS/RIR identify the Council's concern about problems that result from open access, the alternatives specified in the document only address excess harvesting capacity. Of the four alternatives discussed only two, license limitations, with controls placed on the holder's ability to increase fishing power, and IFQs, will control the amount of effort exerted in the fishery. The advantages and disadvantages of each of these alternatives are discussed in the SEIS/RIR and, therefore, will not be repeated. Annual Fishing Allotments (alternative 2) as currently structured will not control effort.

Numerous suboptions are identified for the IFQ and license limitation alternatives. The SSC is unable to provide a detailed discussion of the pro's and con's of any effort limitation system until the Council further narrows its options and a focused impact analysis is completed.

C-8 INSHORE-OFFSHORE ALLOCATION

The SSC reviewed the problem statement and proposed management alternatives contained in Agenda Item C-8(a). The problem statement contains a list of concerns that is too broad. Pre-emption of one segment of the industry by another appears to be the main issue. If the Council agrees that this is the case, the problem statement should be modified. Further, alternatives should be tailored to

address the issue of pre-emption. The SSC reviewed the list of alternatives and suggests that:

1. Alternative 2 is too general. It's not clear how trip limits, periodic allocations, gear sizes or super-exclusive registration areas will ensure that fish are delivered to onshore processors.
2. Alternative 3 must specify how the TAC will be allocated between onshore and offshore segments of the industry (i.e. what percentages).
3. Alternative 4 must specify the percentages that will be allocated to inshore and offshore components in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.
4. Alternative 5 creates the possibility that fish will be made available for onshore processing. However, there is no assurance of specific quantities.
5. Alternative 6 will not ensure that fish are processed onshore.
6. Alternative 7 caps the harvesting and processing capacity, which should lessen pressures that would intensify inshore/offshore conflicts. Pre-emption could still occur.

C-9 FISHERY RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The SSC reviewed research priority recommendations of the groundfish plan teams. The SSC has developed a list of research areas covering fisheries managed by the Council. The SSC believes that the funding needed to handle, store and analyze the data being collected under the domestic observer program should have the highest priority. The SSC's list of research needs is:

A. Alaska Fishery Monitoring Data Entry, Storage and Analysis System

The creation of a computer based data management system, that includes both biological and economic information to allow entering and analysis of data collected by domestic observers and data reports submitted by industry for use in fisheries management. Analysis of these data will lead to improved management of bycatch, biomass determination, and economic and social impact assessment. Cost are estimated to be \$4.0 million for the first year and \$2.5 million for future years.

The other major areas of about equal importance are:

B. Expanded Ecosystem Studies

Studies of marine mammal/fishery interaction, relationship of oceanographic conditions and recruitment, and predator/prey studies. Annual cost \$1.0 million.

C. Critical Biological Problems

1. Pollock stock structure, assessment and management

Expanding domestic fisheries in both the eastern Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska coupled with foreign fisheries in the "Donut Hole" require improved understanding of stock structure and stock assessment techniques. Annual cost \$1.4 million.

2. Rockfish and sablefish assessment and management

Development and validation of techniques for ageing and determining biomass using age structure analyses. Annual cost \$700K.

3. Crab assessment and management

Studies to increase the precision of population abundance estimates and harvest management of major stocks of king and Tanner crabs in the Bering Sea. Imprecision in current biomass estimates result in wide guideline harvest ranges, increased reliance on inseason fishery performance, and uncertainty about optimal harvest strategies. The studies include additional survey sites in areas of high variance in abundance, independent mark-recapture estimates of population size, and the development of methods to incorporate multiple years of assessment data and other ancillary data, such as population size structure and fishery performance, into one comprehensive annual abundance estimation approach. Annual costs are \$500K.

D-1 GENERAL GROUND FISH

D-1(a) Groundfish proposals

The SSC reviewed the Groundfish proposals and recommendations developed by the Team and PAAG. Except as noted below the SSC concurs with the recommendations of the PAAG. The SSC in developing its recommendation reviewed the specific problems presented and the availability of staff and information available to develop an amendment. Our comments are:

Changes in Priority

Proposal 4 - Implement a data gathering cost recovery program. The SSC ranks this proposal as low for the current year. Action should be postponed until the MFCMA is modified.

Proposal 21 - Require 5 inch or greater mesh/pollock trawls, and 23 - Define/restrict codend mesh size in trawl fisheries. The SSC ranks these proposals as low priority. The SSC recommends that the current status of knowledge on mesh size regulations be compiled and critiqued prior to taking any action.

Proposal 35 - Establish chinook salmon PSC cap. The SSC ranks this proposal as low. Data

was not presented which allowed the SSC to assess the problem. The Domestic Observer Program data will allow an assessment of the magnitude of the salmon bycatch problem in the domestic groundfish fisheries. The SSC recommends waiting until these data are available to determine the appropriate course of action.

Specific Comments

Proposal 25 - Prohibit bottom trawling in IPHC Area 4c. This proposal identifies various bycatch, marine mammal and birds, and habitat issues or problems. The SSC recommends that the bycatch issues be addressed with other bycatch proposals. If the Council wishes to address other areas (protection of substrate habitat, sensitive fisheries, marine mammals, and seabirds habitat) this should be done as a separate amendment.

Proposal 36 - Establish herring PSC cap. The SSC received a report from ADF&G on the magnitude of herring bycatch and on the status of Bering Sea herring stocks. These stocks are all declining. The Nelson Island and Nunivak Island stocks are below threshold levels. The SSC concurs that this is a high priority item.

Recommendation for the current amendment cycle.

The SSC noted that plan amendments for roe stripping and inshore/offshore are being developed. Additional work may be required on Sablefish, Halibut, and/or groundfish limited entry. Given this work load the SSC recommends the following items be placed on the current amendment cycle:

- a. Proposal 1. Overfishing definition.
- b. Proposals 34. Continuation of BS/AI Amendment 12a. Amendment 12a sunsets 12/90, the SSC recommends that steps be taken to ensure that management measures contained in 12a are in place starting January 1, 1991, in case the development of a comprehensive bycatch management system is delayed. This amendment should sunset date on December 31, 1991.
- c. Proposal 36. Herring bycatch.
- d. Proposals 28-33, 38. Gulf of Alaska bycatch.

The SSC recommends development of a comprehensive bycatch management system that addresses issues raised in proposals 34, 35, 36, 38, 41 and those parts of 25 that are related to bycatch be put on an extended cycle.

The SSC in reviewing proposed amendments also considered the current value of the existing Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea FMP's to provide timely and effective management of North Pacific resources. The SSC finds that the rapid evolution of domestic fisheries has created a need to revise the FMPs, primarily to combine the two plans and incorporate the experience of more than a decade to simplify and enhance fishery management and allow more rapid response to the continuing changes

of the fishery by minimizing the need for amendments. The new plan could consider an approach that would framework issues including bycatch, gear changes, closed areas, seasons and etc. It would be expected to be implemented by Jan 1, 1992.

D-2 SALMON PLAN

The SSC reviewed the proposed definition of overfishing to be added to Amendment 3 of the salmon FMP. The SSC recommends that the definition not be included in Amendment 3 at this time. The definition of overfishing for salmon should be coordinated with both the Pacific Salmon Commission and the Pacific Fishery Management Council. The SSC, therefore, suggests that the team meet with representatives of the Pacific Salmon Commission and the Pacific Fishery Management Council to develop a definition of overfishing.

MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

1. Methodology for setting ABC

Discussion of this agenda item was postponed until a meeting can be set up with selected members of the Groundfish Plan Team's and SSC's of the North Pacific and Pacific Fishery Management Councils.

2. Criteria for experimental/exploratory fisheries

In December 1989, the SSC advised the Council that we would provide guidelines for development of a Council policy on experimental fishing. We have reviewed draft language of the proposed Amendment 4 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish FMP regarding experimental fisheries (See attachment: Chapter 7.0, Draft Amendment 4 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan, December 1989. pg 7-1 to 7-3). The SSC endorses the principals and procedures set forth in the PFMFC draft amendment with minor additions. Under "Criteria and procedures for issuance of an Experimental Fishing Permit (EFP)", item 1.c.(Statement of purposes and goals of the experiment) the SSC recommends explicit language to require:

- 1.c.1. Specification of the hypothesis to be tested
2. Description of the experimental design including:
 - a. Methods used to conduct the experiment
 - b. Methods for the analysis of the data
 - c. Criteria used to evaluate the experiment's success
3. A schedule of events: timing of the experiment, analysis, and delivery of reports.

The SSC further recommends that "Criteria and procedures for issuance of an Experimental Fishing Permit" include:

- 1.j. Specification of the report[s] to be written, and who is responsible for those reports. Such reports should include a summary, conclusions and recommendations to the Council.