



Cook Inlet Salmon Committee

REPORT

April 2, 2019, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Anchorage, AK

The Cook Inlet Salmon Committee met in order to continue developing recommendations to the Council on management measures needed to extend federal management authority to salmon fisheries in EEZ waters of Cook Inlet.

Committee Members in attendance:

John Jensen (Petersburg, Chair)
Dan Anderson (Homer)
Jeff Berger (Ninilchik)

Hannah Heimbuch (Homer)
Eric Huebsch (Kasilof)
Dino Sutherland (Eagle River)

Members absent:

Mark Casseri (Kasilof)

Others in attendance:

Jeff Anderson (USFWS)
*Forrest Bowers (ADF&G)
Catherine Cassidy (fisherman)
*Curry Cunningham (Alaska Pacific University)
*Doug Duncan (NMFS)
*Diana Evans (NPFMC)
Jeff Fox (UCIDA)
*Gretchen Harrington (NMFS)
Georgeanna Heaverley (Cook Inletkeeper)

Wes Humbyrd (UCIDA)
David Martin (UCIDA/CIFF)
Roland Maw (UCIDA)
John McCombs (CIFF/UCIDA)
Matt Oxford (UCIDA)
*Lauren Smoker (NOAA General Counsel)
Teague Vanek (UCIDA/CIFF)
*Jordan Watson (NMFS)
David Witherell (NPFMC)

*member of the Salmon Amendment Work Group

Administrative Issues

The meeting began at 9:00 a.m., and Committee members and others in attendance introduced themselves. Committee member Mark Casseri was unable to attend. The availability of a teleconference listen-in option for the public was advertised on the [webpage for the Committee meeting](#), which also provided links to all of the meeting documents.

The [posted agenda](#) was modified so that the Status Determination Criteria discussion, including the workgroup comments on the stakeholder proposal, was moved from fourth to second in the sequence. Jim Armstrong briefly reviewed the March 6, 2019 Committee report, reminding attendees that the Committee had made initial recommendations on record-keeping and reporting methodologies, but were continuing to develop a stakeholder proposal on status determination criteria and also develop recommendations on the delegation of management measures to the State of Alaska under Alternative 2.

Although Chairman Jensen initially stated that public comment would be taken in two segments before and after lunch, he later relaxed that decision and called on audience members during the course of Committee discussion. No written public comments had been submitted to the [meeting webpage](#).

Jim Armstrong noted to the Committee that the Council Chair would not allow alternates to serve on the Committee when regular Committee members cannot attend in person or by phone. Jim noted that no ad hoc committees allow this, and at-large Council members are also not permitted substitutes.

Discussion of Committee Member Concerns

This agenda item was suggested by Committee members so they could bring to the table some fundamental concerns they had identified since their involvement in the Council process. First among these is the belief by some Committee members that the scope of the FMP extends into State waters including freshwater tributaries. Committee member Dan Anderson stated that he needed clarity on a seeming inconsistency between what is permitted jurisdictionally and what is necessary for achieving appropriate harvest levels of salmon stocks independent of jurisdiction. For example, the actual escapement of salmon to spawning grounds occurs in state waters, but escapement-based management is being proposed for the EEZ. There was subsequent discussion about information in the [discussion paper](#) that some Committee members felt was inconsistent with the MSA, about the reach of federal review of state decisions, about Council influence on setting escapement goals, and how these issues are reconciled with the National Standards. Some Committee members suggested that underfishing, defined by stakeholders as harvest that allows escapement goals to be exceeded, should be avoided in order to be consistent with the National Standards and MSA. Gretchen Harrington spoke to each of the National Standards and how these are achieved in the federal process, and pointed out that underfishing is not contemplated in the National Standards. Jim Armstrong suggested that the Committee identify and set aside, for practical purposes, those philosophical issues that are constraining the development of Committee recommendations to the Council on the amendment. Committee member Hannah Heimbuch suggested that the Committee focus less on frustration with select items in the [discussion paper](#) and more on achieving a workable cooperative management solution that involves state and federal processes.

Status Determination Criteria

As described in the [Committee Report for the March 6, 2019 meeting](#), a set of [workgroup comments](#) would be provided to the Committee in response to a [stakeholder proposal for status determination criteria](#) (SDCs) that Committee member Erik Huebsch had delivered at the March meeting. The enumerated list of eleven workgroup comments was sent to the Committee on March 22, and discussion of workgroup comments at the April meeting proceeded in order of the list. A [revised stakeholder proposal](#) was provided by Mr. Huebsch for the April meeting who led the Committee through his responses to the comments.

Comment #1 addressed the geographic scope of the FMP (which the proposal claims to include state waters) and demarcation of the EEZ within Cook Inlet. There was dispute from Committee members about the baseline used for establishing the EEZ in Cook Inlet and that runs to the east and west of Kalgin Island. Committee and audience members suggested that they had evidence that the line as depicted in various figures in the [discussion paper](#) should be moved to the north, and that this would greatly change assumptions about the percentage of EEZ catch that has occurred historically. Gretchen Harrington stated that the figures in the discussion paper are correct and were created using GIS from authoritative boundary definitions. A [NOAA nautical chart publication](#) was suggested by some Committee members as providing correct references, however, Gretchen pointed out that the baseline in figure 77 of this publication appears to be the same baseline used in creating the figures in the discussion paper. To be clear, the EEZ is defined as 3 nm from the baseline, and this definition was used in GIS to generate the figures in the discussion paper.

Comment #2 was addressed in the [revised stakeholder proposal](#).

Comment #3 addressed the term “CPUE” used in the original stakeholder proposal and the need to describe how it was calculated. After some discussion at the Committee table, Chairman Jensen allowed audience member Jeff Fox of UCIDA, and formerly an ADF&G biologist, to describe how State in-season management is adjusted using indices of run strength interpreted from driftnet vessel catches and assumed proportional catch by gear sector. Gretchen Harrington pointed out that CPUE is not used for status determination criteria when escapement goals are available because, in general CPUE is not the best available information to estimate abundance. The SDC proposed under Alternative 2 are defined for stocks according to their respective “tier” which relates to presence of escapement goals for the stocks (tier 1) and stocks managed as a complex with indicator stocks (tier 2). Through the annual stock assessment process, stocks can move up in tiers if the quality of information on the stocks changes. There is flexibility to use CPUE, if that is the best information available, for stocks in tier 3 (stocks with no reliable estimates of escapement) under the proposed Alternative 2 SDC. Due to limited potential for reconciliation of opposing views on this issue, the Committee moved to the next workgroup comment.

Comment #4 addressed the need for the proposal to describe how certain conclusions were reached, such as stating that there are no overfished stocks in the area. There was no opposition to this comment, but it was explained that there was limited time for preparation of the proposal, and that they could be provided in a future iteration.

Comment #5 addressed a need for showing calculations and mathematical definitions, and Mr. Huebsch repeated the response under #4.

Comments# 6 and #7 addressed confusion about the proposal’s use of the term GHL, and it was explained by Mr. Huebsch that this was meant to be equivalent to “MSY proxy”. In the [revised proposal](#), Mr. Huebsch replaced the term GHL with F_{MSY} , defined in the National Standard 1 Guidelines as the MSY fishing mortality rate.

Comment #8 addressed the use of harvest rates defined as harvest/run size for stocks where run size is unknown. Mr. Huebsch referred back to the in-season catch analysis described by Mr. Fox.

Comment #9 suggested that the proposal described the status quo in many respects. Mr. Huebsch said that he believes the proposal describes how fishery management is supposed to function, but that in Cook Inlet it no longer functions because of the prescriptive management plans that do not allow adaptive management.

Comment #10 suggested that the proposal’s definition of OY accommodate uncertainty and ecological issues rather than prescribe economic outcomes. Mr. Huebsch stated that the salmon life cycle requires a different approach such that the carrying capacity of the stock could be reached if harvest is less than what is needed, i.e., underharvest or surplus escapement.

Comment #11 addressed proposed harvest rates in a table in the proposal, and the need to describe how they were calculated. Mr. Huebsch suggested that the current harvest rates for pink salmon in the Kenai are very low, and any increase would be an improvement. He also stated that he was willing to discuss more appropriate rates where disputes may exist. Discussion also reflected perceptions about preferential treatment of sportfish harvest as underlying some underharvest outcomes. Dr. Jordan Watson suggested that workgroup comments be interpreted less as challenges and more as suggestions on how to prepare an approach that the SSC would need to review.

Following the discussion of the workgroup comments, Chairman Jensen allowed the audience to engage in further discussion including the limiting effect of sportfish harvest historically, the need for management solutions that benefit all user groups, and extreme underharvest of pinks, need for focusing on a cooperative solution, the long and painful history getting to this point and the need for protection

from the negative effects of state management. An appeal was made by an audience member for a positive and cooperative approach that is respectful of all parties involved.

An audience member provided a presentation on historic runs using brood tables for Kenai sockeyes that he provided and discussed his views on the range of factors involved in the success of a salmon run, stressing that it is more than numbers of fish. The ages of the fish and when spawning occurred for each age class are also important. The age structure has important impacts on competition for resources before they leave freshwater.

Another audience member addressed the boundary line issue described above.

Delegation of Management Measures under Alternative 2

As described in the [Committee Report for the March 6, 2019 meeting](#), the Committee wanted to revisit the range of management measures that could be divided between Federal and State authority. The table on page 41 of the [discussion paper](#) provides draft divisions of measures, although some are indisputably Federal such as SDCs, OY, ACLs, etc. Committee member Dino Sutherland suggested that “underharvest” be added to the list and said he will develop language to describe it.

It was suggested that, from now on, Committee recommendations on issues addressed in the [discussion paper](#), that are different from the draft measures in the paper, be presented as redline versions so that differences can be easily tracked.

There was discussion about escapement goals and allocation and how those would be addressed and whether escapement goals would need to be federally compliant. The Committee was reminded that an appeal process is described in the [discussion paper](#) that addresses objections to State management actions. Discussion of SAFE preparation, and other Plan Team and SSC processes were described.

The option for establishing a Salmon Plan Team as described on page 69 of the [discussion paper](#) appeared to have general appeal to the Committee, although a formal recommendation was not put forward. Members of the Committee will consider the text in the [discussion paper](#) in preparation for a future recommendation on Plan Team. The Committee discussed Plan Team membership and Plan Team – SSC processes.

Timing and Issues for Further Development

The Committee recommends a two-day meeting in May in order to continue to develop recommendations on the amendment. Agenda topics for that meeting tentatively include recommendations on 1) Salmon Plan Team, 2) SDCs, 3) Bycatch options, and 4) improving the Committee process. A two-day meeting was suggested in order to allow for Topic #4 which reflects the need for stakeholders to continue to learn about the federal process in order to improve the Committee’s ability to provide viable recommendations to the Council.

Chairman Jensen adjourned the Committee meeting at 4:20 p.m.