



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

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Dan Hull, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

Executive Director's Report

The seafood industry was saddened to learn of the passing of longtime Alaskan fisherman, Nick Delaney on November 8th, following a struggle with cancer.

In 1971, while on a summer break from college, Nick began his commercial fishing career in Kodiak fishing halibut out of an open skiff, pulling skates by hand. By 1979 he had built a 76' aluminum combination vessel and became a highliner in the halibut fishery in both the Gulf and Bering Sea. He was owner and partner in several longline and pot vessels over the years.

Always a visionary, Nick was first instrumental in the forming of the Kodiak Vessel Owners Association, followed by the freezer longline company, Alaskan Leader Fisheries. He helped form the Freezer Longline Coalition and was actively involved in fishery management policies, with an emphasis on conservation of the resource. He was heavily involved in the construction of the Northern Leader, the most technologically advanced, innovative and eco-friendly freezer longline vessel built in the United States, which launched in 2013 and was featured on the Discovery Channel Canada series, "Mighty Ships".

Dr. Betsy Baker to lead NPRB

I want to extend a warm welcome to Dr. Betsy Baker, the new Executive Director of the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB). **Attached** is a letter of introduction, and you can see that Dr. Baker is bringing a wealth of experience to lead the research program of the NPRB. We look forward to working with her and all of the NPRB staff and board members as we tackle the next 40 years of fisheries science and management in the North Pacific.

SSC nomination

The State of Washington has nominated Dr. Dayv Lowry to its vacant seat on the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). Dr. Lowry has a strong background in forage fish and groundfish population assessment, and marine fish survey methods. His full resume is **attached**. Chairman Hull has approved his appointment on an interim basis, subject to full Council approval at this meeting. Later this week in Executive Session the Council will be making SSC, AP, and PNCIAC appointments.

Bering Sea FEP Team

In December 2015, the Council tasked preparation of a Bering Sea Fishery Ecosystem Plan, and authorized the creation of a Bering Sea Ecosystem Team. The Team's primary responsibilities, as described in the **attached** invitation letter, are to develop the core FEP document, to discuss potential and ongoing FEP action modules, make recommendations to the Ecosystem Committee and the Council about future steps, and to help communicate results to the Council. As confirmed with the Ecosystem Committee and the Council in February 2016, the intent has been to include a diversity of expertise and representatives from various agencies on the team, which will function as a Council plan team. While the team is a scientific and technical team, the focus is also to ensure that

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FEP action modules interface with the Council's management needs, and can be integrated into the Council's decision making and management process. Invited candidates for the BS FEP team have submitted their CVs for Council review and approval, is also **attached**. The invitation letter also sets out the preliminary timeline for development of the FEP over the next 18 months.

Ocean Noise Policy and Procedural Directives

On November 15, NOAA Fisheries approved and issued a Policy Directive, and associated Procedural Directive, to guide its programs relative to the Ocean Noise Strategy (**attached**). Essentially this initiative is to better understand and address ocean noise impacts to the many noise sensitive and acoustically active managed fishery species under our jurisdiction, or to marine mammal and other species affected by ocean noise. I do not expect any immediate or specific implications to our process but wanted you to be aware of this Policy Directive.

NEPA 'Companion Manual'

In mid-November NMFS issued an FR notice of availability (**attached**) of its draft 'Companion Manual' to NOAA Administrative Order 216-6A, which essentially outlines policies and procedures for implementing the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for fisheries management actions. The 'Companion Manual' (**attached**) also provides extensive direction on the use of Categorical Exclusions, which could streamline some of our simpler, less controversial management actions. This document, along with NOAA Administrative Order 216-6A, represents the culmination of many years of effort attempting to refine the application of NEPA to our fishery management process, stemming from the 2006 reauthorization of the MSA (i.e. section 304(i), Environmental Review Process, which directed *the Secretary, in consultation with the Councils and the Council on Environmental Quality, to revise and update agency procedures for compliance with NEPA...*”).

While I continue to believe that the revisions accomplish little more than a restatement of the status quo application of NEPA, it appears to be the final resolution of this issue, and means that we will continue to address the requirements of NEPA largely as we have always done. Appendix C to the 'Companion Manual' is Administrative Order 216-6A, which is essentially the document which provides the procedures for NEPA compliance for our fishery management actions. I am still in the process of reviewing the 'Companion Manual' to ensure that nothing in there is inconsistent with the provisions of AO 216-6A, and have not yet compiled any formal comments. It is unlikely that Council comments will be necessary, but we have until December 19 if we wish to comment. I should have a recommendation in that regard by the end of this Council meeting.

Final EBFM Roadmap

On November 17 NOAA Fisheries announced the release of its Final Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) Roadmap (**attached**). As you will recall, the agency issued a Policy Directive last May, which outlined a commitment to EBFM, followed by a draft 'Roadmap' intended to provide a national implementation strategy for this policy. We commented extensively on the draft Roadmap, in July and again following the October meeting (October comment letter **attached** for your reference). Our comments noted the ambitious and laudable intent of the Roadmap, but expressed significant concerns regarding the imposition of rigid obligations and expectations that would stretch the limits of financial and personnel resources at both the Council and agency (or divert substantial resources from critical, ongoing management requirements). In my opinion the final Roadmap does not alleviate those concerns. The Roadmap creates numerous new FTEs within the agency, at both regional and HQ levels, and specifies numerous resource-intensive activities to be conducted without identifying the resources to accomplish those activities. In combination with numerous other Policy Directives and strategic plans issued over the past year (including allocation reviews, catch share program reviews, etc), there is a potentially huge workload implied for the regional Councils, with no additional funding identified to date to implement these initiatives.

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Recent activities of Council members and staff

Bill Tweit and Diana Evans attended the 2nd National Electronic Monitoring Workshop, in SeaTac, November 30-December 1. The workshop intent was to evaluate successes and challenges to EM deployment across the country, and share lessons across regions. The workshop also focused specifically on issues of data quality, storage, and retention; enforcement and compliance; program design and implementation; and understanding costs and facilitating stakeholder buy-in. A summary of the workshop will be available in the next couple of months at www.eminformation.com <<http://www.eminformation.com>>.

Chairman Hull participated in the October 26-27 meeting of the IPHC's Management Strategy Advisory Board (MSAB), where they continued to work on the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) process. Of note to the Council, the meeting discussions included a review of the IPHC's current harvest policy and actual vs realized harvest rates, a review of the Council's ABM approach to setting PSC limits, and a review of the MSAB's draft goals, objectives, and performance metrics for the directed halibut fisheries, in the MSE process. The link to access the relevant documents is <http://www.iphc.info/Pages/Previous-MSAB-Meetings.aspx>.

Chairman Hull and I also attended the interim meeting of the IPHC on November 29 - December 30 in Seattle, where we provided the IPHC a report on recent Council activities, specifically addressing halibut related research priorities and our abundance-based management (ABM) initiative relative to halibut PSC setting (see **attached** memo). We discussed opportunities for further coordination and communication, particularly with regard to IPHC input on the ABM initiative, and the potential for a joint meeting between the Council and the IPHC, either in April or in conjunction with our June meeting in Juneau, Alaska.

Council member Theresa Petersen attended the November meeting of the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS), where she now serves as the Council representative on that body.

In San Diego in early November, Dr. Gordon Kruse attended the 25th annual meeting of the North Pacific Marine Science Organization (better known as PICES). Dr. Kruse has been attending this forum for many years, including as a representative of the Council for many recent years. He provided an excellent presentation to the PICES conference summarizing major North Pacific Council research and management issues. Thank you Gordon!

Halibut PSC Abundance Based Management (ABM) workshop for February

The ABM workgroup is continuing to develop both the range of alternative control rules and biomass indices as well as performance metrics from which to evaluate them. In conjunction with this, the Council will hold a public stakeholder workshop during an evening session of the February Council meeting to solicit input on the appropriate metrics for evaluation. Performance metrics (both quantitative and qualitative) will be developed in relation to the Council's stated objectives of this action and will be grouped most likely in four broad categories: (1) Conservation, (2) Fishery metrics, (3) Social metrics, and (4) Incentives. An example of a performance metric for which the workshop will solicit stakeholder input would be under fishery metrics such as whether a range of relative target catch levels to be achieved in directed halibut and directed groundfish fisheries is an appropriate consideration as a metric. The ABM workgroup will discuss draft performance metrics and solicit stakeholder input on modifications or additions to them.

Following the workshop, between February and mid-March, the workgroup will continue to develop a range of alternative control rules applied to a range of indices to further the process of development of alternatives for this action. These indices include the EBS trawl survey, the IPHC setline survey, a proposed ABM index which integrates across multiple surveys and includes a range of weights on the relative proportions, and an estimate of the exploitable biomass in Area 4. Control rules will be considered which are applied in aggregate based on total bycatch of halibut as well as bycatch by gear type over these indices and consider a suite of slopes and constraints.

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The workgroup will also provide the draft performance metrics incorporating the stakeholder input from the workshop for distribution in conjunction with the discussion paper on the development of alternatives. The discussion paper is scheduled for the April 2017 Council meeting.

Alaska Ocean Leadership Awards

In association with the annual Alaska Marine Gala (to be held on February 11 in Anchorage), the Alaska SeaLife Center is soliciting nominations for its Alaska Ocean Leadership Awards (see **attached** flyer for details). Categories include: Walter J. and Ermalee Hickel Lifetime Achievement Award; Stewardship and Sustainability Award (given to the North Pacific Council in 2012!); Marine Research Award; Marine Science Outreach Award; Hoffman-Greene Ocean Youth Award; and Ocean Ambassador Award. Nominations are due by December 15.

Alaska Sea Grant Fellowship

Attached is a letter from the Alaska Sea Grant Director inviting the Council to be a host agency for the third year of the State Fellows Program. We participated in the first year of the program, hosting Matt Robinson, who has now moved on to a position with BBEDC. We intend to participate in this third year of the program, as a possible host agency, and may therefore be hosting a Fellow from May 2017 to May 2018 (approximately).

Events this week

On Tuesday, December 6 NOAA Fisheries Habitat Division will host a presentation and public workshop on Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) non-fishing effects, beginning at 5:30 pm in the King Salmon/Illiamna (SSC) meeting room. This issue is also on the Council's agenda later this week.

On Wednesday evening, December 7, Council and NMFS staff will provide a 'Stock Assessment 101' seminar for those interested in gaining a deeper knowledge and appreciation of the stock assessment process, and associated jargon and basic principles. This will begin at 5:30 in the Katmai/Dillingham (AP) meeting room.

Also on Wednesday evening, representatives from NOAA Fisheries HQ (Assistant Administrator Eileen Sobek and Russell Dunn, National Policy Coordinator for Recreational Fisheries) will be hosting a Recreational Roundtable Event from 6 to 8 pm at the historic Anchorage Hotel. They want to hear from the recreational fishing community about national priorities, as well as current and emerging issues in Alaska. All interested persons, including agency folks, are welcome to attend this event. Co-sponsors of the event include the Alaska Charter Association and Southeast Alaska Guides Organization. An outline for the event is **attached**.

On Thursday, December 8, we will have our 40th Anniversary Celebration of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the Regional Fishery Management Council system. This event will be held at the Captain Cook Hotel beginning at 6 pm (doors open at 5:30 pm). The evening program for the event is **attached**. This event is SOLD OUT and we have a waiting list. Please remember to bring your cell phone to participate in the audience game show!

On Friday evening, December 9, staff from the IPHC will hold an evening session to provide a presentation on the 2017 harvest outlook, and be available for Q&A from interested stakeholders. This will begin around 5:30, likely in the Katmai/Dillingham (AP) meeting room.