

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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NEWSLETTER

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Preliminary Groundfish Assessments Highlight September Council Meeting

The North Pacific Council met September 24-26 in Anchorage to review the status of groundfish stocks off Alaska and set initial harvest levels for 1986. The Council reviewed the performance of the U.S. groundfish fisheries in 1985 and set preliminary apportionments to DAP, JVP and TALFF for 1986. These estimates will be sent out to public review in early October and final decisions will be made at the December meeting. The Council also reviewed a request for joint ventures from the Peoples Republic of China and heard reports on the problem of king crab interceptions by yellowfin sole joint venture fisheries in the Eastern Bering Sea. These and other items are detailed below in this newsletter.

Groundfish Harvest Levels for 1986 and Sablefish Limited Entry to Highlight December Council Meeting

The Council will meet December 10 in Anchorage at the Anchorage Westward Hilton Hotel to make final decisions on groundfish harvest levels for 1986 and their apportionments to U.S. and foreign fisheries. The Council will also consider whether to accept an offer from the Secretary of Commerce to publish a September 26, 1985 cut-off date for any further credit for entry into the hook and longline sablefish fishery in the Gulf of Alaska, should there be a limited access system developed for that fishery. There will be a major review of foreign allocations, vessel permits and joint venture operations for 1986. Industry solutions to the bycatch of king crab in joint venture trawl operations will also be considered. The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee and Permit Review Committee will begin their meetings on Sunday, December 8 at the Westward Hilton. A draft agenda will be available about mid-November. The Council expects to have a very heavy workload and has made arrangements to meet through Saturday, December 14 if necessary.

Council Wants Public Comment on Industry Groundfish Needs

The Council heard team reports on the status of groundfish stocks off Alaska. Most of the information is very preliminary and will be updated at the December meeting. In the Bering Sea and Aleutians, pollock stocks are passing through a low point in their abundance cycle but can still safely sustain a relatively high catch. Pacific cod, very abundant in 1984, is projected to continue to decline through 1987 as the 1977 year class fades from the scene. The 1985 NMFS survey found a decline in yellowfin sole and other flatfish stocks. Based on earlier surveys, Atka mackerel abundance may be declining rapidly. Sablefish stocks continue their recovery but are still below historical high levels.

Pollock abundance has declined rapidly in the Gulf of Alaska through 1985 and will bottom out in 1986. Pacific cod and flounder stocks are in good condition and stable, but Atka mackerel and Pacific ocean perch are very depressed.

Tables 1 and 2 compare estimated biological harvest levels for 1986 with this year's catch limits. Estimated needs of U.S. processors (DAP) and joint ventures (JVP) are based on actual performance this year. The ABCs or acceptable biological catches listed for the Gulf of Alaska represent the yields the stocks could safely withstand. For some species such as for Pacific cod and flounders, they will have to be adjusted downward to hold bycatches of crab and halibut within reasonable limits.

These preliminary estimates of harvest levels and apportionments for 1986 will be sent to the groundfish mailing lists for a 30-day public comment period ending November 6. The public review package will have much more detailed information, including bycatch rates of prohibited species and fully-U.S. utilized groundfish species. If you want this package and are not now on the Gulf of Alaska groundfish mailing list, please let know. A copy will be mailed immediately. The Council will make its final decisions in December.

Council Workgroup on Gulf Goals Solicits Public Comment

The Council's workgroup on goals and objectives for the management of groundfish in the Gulf of Alaska will meet with the Council's Plan Team in late October to continue work on the revision of the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. In preparation for this meeting the workgroup is interested in receiving information and comments of all components of industry as to their future plans and concerns they may have which might aid the workgroup in developing long-range goals for the Gulf groundfish fisheries. Interested persons may submit written comments to any of the following workgroup members, or may call Sara Hemphill (907) 276-8314. Any comments received by phone will be conveyed to other workgroup members by Ms. Hemphill.

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TABLE 1. PRELIMINARY HARVEST LEVELS AND APPORTIONMENTS FOR GULF OF ALASKA
GROUND FISH IN 1986 (ALL IN METRIC TONS)

		1985 OY	1986 ABC	Projected Catches ^{1/}		
				U.S. Processed (DAP)	Joint Ventures (JVP)	Foreign (TALFF)
Pollock	West/Cent	305,000	100,000	10,000	90,000	0
	Eastern	16,600	16,600	1	0	0
Pacific cod	W	16,560	37,500	3,000	300	
	C	33,540	76,000	1,300	4,000	<u>2/</u>
	E	9,900	22,500	60	0	
Flounders	W	10,400	23,000	30	600	
	C	14,700	101,000	20	1,200	<u>2/</u>
	E	8,400	17,000	40	0	
Pacific ocean perch	W	1,302	3,500	1,300	10	0
	C	3,906	4,000	100	20	0
	E	875	5,500	40	0	0
Sablefish	W	1,670	1,760-3,520	2,100	0	0
	C	3,060	6,080-12,160	3,800	0	0
	W. Yak	1,680	2,210-4,420	2,600	0	0
	E. Yak	1,135		3,000	0	0
	S.E. Out	1,435	2,450-4,900		0	0
Atka mackerel	W	4,678	4,678	0	300	0
	C	500	0	0	5	0
	E	100	0	0	0	0
Rockfish	SE Cent/Out	600	600	600	0	0
	Gulfwide	4,400	1,700	340	15	0
Thornyhead	GW	3,750	3,750	50	5	0
Squid	GW	5,000	5,000	10	10	0
Other species	GW	22,460	<u>3/</u>	20	2,300	0
TOTAL		471,651		28,411	98,765	0

^{1/} These are the actual catches in 1985 projected through December 31, except for pollock JVP which will be about 235,000 mt.

^{2/} It is very probable that TALFFs in the Gulf of Alaska will be zero for 1986. Only the ABC's for Pacific cod and flounders may be sufficient for foreign fisheries but most likely they will be reduced substantially to mitigate bycatch problems with halibut and crab.

^{3/} Unknown. OY is determined by formula.

TABLE 2. PRELIMINARY HARVEST LEVELS AND APPORTIONMENTS FOR BERING SEA AND ALEUTIANS GROUND FISH IN 1986 (ALL IN METRIC TONS)

	AREA ^{1/}	1985 TAC	1986 TAC ^{3/}	Projected Catches ^{2/}		
				U.S. Processed (DAP)	Joint Ventures (JVP)	Foreign (TALFF)
Pollock	BS	1,200,000	1,100,000	20,000	361,000	554,000
	AI	100,000	100,000	4,000	7,500	73,500
Pacific ocean perch	BS	1,000	1,000	850	0	0
	AI	3,800	3,800	100	450	2,680
Rockfish	BS	1,120	1,120	150	5	797
	AI	5,500	5,500	5	15	4,655
Sablefish	BS	2,625	2,625	2,231	0	0
	AI	1,875	1,875	1,594	0	0
Pacific cod	BS	220,000	141,000	82,400	35,300	22,550
	AI		24,000			
Yellowfin sole	BS	226,900	338,780	100	111,200	177,513
	AI		1,000			
Turbots	BS	42,000	28,320	5	300	31,230
	AI		8,780			
Other flatfish	BS	109,900	146,000	360	45,500	81,810
	AI		4,200			
Atka mackerel	BS	37,700	800	0	26,180	0
	AI		30,000			
Squid	BS	10,000	7,500	0	10	8,490
	AI		2,500			
Other species	BS	37,580	39,400	1,000	4,900	37,620
	AI		11,800			
TOTAL		2,000,000	2,000,000	112,795	592,360	994,845

1/ The Council may assign separate Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area TACs for all species for 1986. This was done only for pollock, POP, rockfish and sablefish in 1985.

2/ These are the 1985 catches projected through December 31 and serve as preliminary estimates of industry needs for 1986. They have been reduced where appropriate to ensure that the total does not exceed TAC - reserves.

Secretary of Commerce Approves Amendment 14
And Offers Sablefish Limited Entry Cut-off Date

On September 26, 1985 the Secretary of Commerce approved Amendment 14 to the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Fishery Management Plan. The amendment contained seven parts which accomplish the following:

1. (a) commercial fishing gear in the directed sablefish fishery is limited to hook and line, pots, and trawls;
- (b) the sablefish optimum yields are allocated among the legal gears as follows: in the Eastern Regulatory Area, 95% sablefish OY to hook and line, 5% to trawl; in the Central and Western Areas, 55% sablefish OY to hook and line, 25% to pots, and 20% to trawl;
- (c) a phase-out of pot gear from the directed sablefish fishery will be accomplished follows:

Eastern Area - immediately; pot gear is prohibited.

Central Area - pot gear is prohibited beginning January 1, 1987.

Western Area - pot gear is prohibited beginning January 1, 1989.

As pot gear is phased out, the sablefish allocation to pot gear will be added to hook and line gear.

2. The opening date for the sablefish season is changed to April 1 for hook and line and pot gear;
3. Optimum yields for pollock, Pacific ocean perch, other rockfish, Atka mackerel, and other species are reduced;
4. A new regulatory district in the Eastern Regulatory Area is established to better manage rockfish;
5. Procedures are established for setting prohibited species catch limits for Pacific halibut.
6. A check in/check out system and weekly catch reporting system are established for catcher/processor vessels; and
7. The National Marine Fisheries Service Habitat Conservation Policy is incorporated into the FMP.

The primary objective of Part I of Amendment 14 was to eliminate the gear conflict and grounds preemption problems experienced in the sablefish fishery since 1980. The continuing problem of growing effort in this fishery which has led to shorter seasons and exceeded quotas is not addressed by Amendment 14. The Secretary has determined that the existing hook and line fleet is sufficient to fully harvest the sablefish OY and recommends that the Council begin work immediately to address the problem by developing effort control measures. To assist the Council in this effort, the Secretary has offered to publish a Federal Register notice announcing that anyone entering the sablefish fishery after September 26, 1985 will not be assured of future participation should the Council develop, and the Secretary implement, an

effort control program. The Council will discuss the Secretary's offer at its December meeting.

Bering Sea Sablefish Closure

On September 4 NMFS closed all waters deeper than 200 fathoms in the Bering Sea management area to foreign and domestic groundfish fishing. These waters were closed because the sablefish total allowable catch of 2,625 mt was reached. Gulf of Alaska sablefish fisheries closed in July. The Aleutians still have harvestable quantities remaining.

Proposals Due in December for Bering Sea Groundfish

Proposals for the 1986 Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands amendment cycle are due by December 13, the end of the Council's next meeting. No proposals for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish plan will be accepted this year because of the ongoing plan rewrite.

Crab Stocks Surveyed

NMFS surveyed the crab stocks in the Eastern Bering Sea using two charter vessels between June 6 and September 3. There were 358 trawl tows made covering approximately 132,000 square miles. Legal male crabs were sparsely distributed but their abundance appears to have stabilized at low levels. Juvenile crabs decreased significantly, which could cause future adult recruitment to continue the current decline for the next three or four years. Mature females in Bristol Bay decreased significantly, by 61% (from 17.6 to 6.8 million crabs) from 1984. Immature females decreased also significantly. Virtually all mature females were carrying full egg clutches, and the decline in overall abundance does not appear to have affected the capacity for full reproduction within the population, although most of the mature females were small.

The fishery opened on September 25, 1985 with a guideline harvest of 3.0-5.0 million pounds relative to an estimated stock of 12.5 million pounds in Bristol Bay. About 127 boats fished the opening which lasted until noon on Wednesday, October 2. Catch per pot appears to be better than predicted though final catch figures won't be available until next week.

Industry to Hammer Out Solution to King Crab Bycatch

Joint venture trawlers, primarily those fishing for yellowfin sole in Bristol Bay, caught over 900,000 king crab this year, which may be as much as 2 1/2% of the total crab population in the area. Although king crab is a prohibited species for trawlers and must be returned immediately to the sea, there may be considerable mortality. Representatives from the king crab and trawl industries have met to discuss ways to reduce this bycatch but so far have not been able to reach a consensus. Several solutions are possible, among them closing sensitive areas at critical times of the year, using bycatch rates or ceilings, modifying trawl gear or techniques, or combinations of these and others. The Council asked the industry to continue to work on a solution prior to the December Council meeting. If no compromise can be reached, the Council intends to resolve the problem at their January meeting.

The Council was told the Northwest and Alaska Fishery Center has requested the NOAA Office of Undersea Research to lend them a towed underwater vehicle equipped with cameras. The submersible would be used to take pictures of trawls and record fish behavior, catch efficiency, etc. NMFS said they could expand the project to study the impact of bottom trawls on king crab and other bottom dwelling organisms. A letter of support from the Council has been sent to the funding agency.

Chinese Joint Venture Approved

The Council approved a 4,500 mt joint venture for pollock between Pacific Rim Ventures, an Anchorage-based firm, and the Peoples Republic of China. Operations will be conducted in the Gulf of Alaska in late 1985 using U.S. catchers out of Kodiak. The Chinese had originally requested a 9,000 mt joint venture and 1,000 mt directed fishery but the Council turned this down because the pollock stocks are declining rapidly and little was left for reapportioning to joint ventures this late in the year.

Before the Chinese can fish the Governing International Fishery Agreement between the U.S. and the PRC must be approved by Congress. This can't occur until mid-November and further processing of the vessel permits will probably delay any fishing operations until December. Two Polish joint ventures may also fish pollock in the Gulf this fall and, because all joint ventures fish from a common pool, it's possible no pollock will be left for the Chinese when they finally are ready to go. The 15,000 mt of pollock that the Council allocated to joint ventures for the rest of 1985 came partially from unallocated TALFF and from 34,000 mt of DAP pollock that will not be used by U.S. industry. The Council asked the NMFS Regional Director to not allocate any additional pollock for the remainder of 1985 even if the 34,000 mt still set aside for U.S. processors (DAP) is not all harvested.

New Joint Venture Policy for 1986

The Council considered conditions and restrictions on joint venture permits, whether to allocate JVP target and bycatch species by company, and a new policy for reviewing permits this coming December. NOAA's latest legal advice opines that a wide range of conditions can be incorporated in foreign fishing vessel permits. As provided by the Magnuson Act the Council will continue to recommend to the Secretary of Commerce the conditions and restrictions they deem appropriate on joint venture permits. The Council decided not to incorporate its permit review policy and procedures in the FMPs, but did recommend that NMFS develop its own review policy that, hopefully, will mesh with the Council's. NMFS was requested to respond in writing should a recommendation be turned down. Those responses will help in further defining Council policy and will be necessary if policy is to evolve to fit changing circumstances.

For 1986 joint venture target species will be fished from a pool whether or not demand exceeds supply. However, each company will be allocated an amount of bycatch (prohibited species such as crabs, salmon and halibut, and fully U.S.-utilized groundfish species) based on requested amounts of target species. When a company's bycatch limit is reached, they must stop fishing, regardless of whether their target tonnage has been achieved. If joint venture demand is less than supply, the company bycatch limit will be based on

an appropriate rate times their requested target tonnage. If demand exceeds supply, there will be a pro rata reduction in target species catches first and then the company limits on bycatch will be calculated. It is anticipated that for 1987 the Council may reconsider the desirability of company allocations of both bycatch and target species.

Finally, the Council adopted a revised joint venture review policy that incorporates the above provisions. Compared to last year, the policy emphasizes differences between nations rather than companies and requests public comments on how the criteria are satisfied on a nation-by-nation level. The Council's Permit Review Committee will use the policy to guide its review on December 8 of fishing applications for 1986. To be considered at the December meeting all applications must be received by the Council by November 22 and be published in the Federal Register by November 29.

ADF&G Reports on Domestic Fisheries

Approximately 23,000 chinook were harvested during the 1985 winter troll season from October 1, 1984 through April 14, 1985. The winter catch was down about 30% from 1984 because bad weather hindered fishing operations. This summer the troll fishery harvested about 190,000 chinook during three fishing periods beginning June 3 and ending August 26. The estimated total chinook harvest by all commercial and recreational fisheries in 1985 is approximately 268,000 fish which includes 213,000 by trollers, 33,000 by nets and 22,000 by recreational fishermen.

The U.S. factory trawler fleet and U.S. catchers delivering to U.S. processors are projected to catch 136,000 mt of groundfish this year off Alaska, more than double the 50,000 mt catches the last two years. The main growth has been in Pacific cod where catches are projected to hit 85,000 mt by year's end. Pollock harvests may reach 35,000 mt. Sablefish closed in the Gulf of Alaska on July 15 with a catch of about 11,000 mt. About 4,200 mt of sablefish will be taken from the Bering Sea/Aleutians this year.

Joint Venture Update

The total joint venture catch off Alaska through September 7, 1985 was 789,852 mt. In the Gulf of Alaska joint venture trawlers caught 221,000 mt pollock, 1,700 mt Pacific cod and 800 mt flatfish. Joint venture catch in the Bering Sea/Aleutians included 337,000 mt pollock, 107,000 mt yellowfin sole, 39,000 mt flatfish, 37,000 mt Atka mackerel, and 37,000 mt of Pacific cod. By mid-September there were still over 15 different joint venture operations in progress off Alaska using 80 U.S. trawlers compared to 57 last year at this time. From March through July there were 73-92 catchers compared to 42-66 in 1984.

Foreign Fisheries Update

Japan has been the only foreign country to fish in the Gulf of Alaska so far this year. Their catch through September 7 was about 10,000 mt, mostly Pacific cod taken by longliners. Directed fisheries by Korea and Japan on pollock are expected to start this month. Foreign fleets from Japan, Korea, Poland and the USSR harvested 528,922 mt by September 10 from the Bering Sea and Aleutians. Their catches were 78% pollock, 16% flounders, and 5% Pacific

cod. Approximately 73% of the catch was by Japan, 24% by South Korea, 2% by the USSR and less than 2% by Poland.

There were 232 foreign vessels off Alaska in August. This included 170 from Japan, 23 from the Soviet Union, 31 from Korea, 5 from Taiwan, 1 from Greece and 2 from Poland. By September 20 the number of vessels had decreased to 172 including 136 from Japan.

U.S. Coast Guard Reports on Enforcement Activities

Through September 18 Coast Guard enforcement effort totaled 645 cutter days and 1,217 aircraft hours covering over 325,214 miles. They have conducted 439 fishing vessel boardings of which 10 percent have resulted in violations or warnings. The Canadian fishing vessel ROGERS PASS was seized in Ketchikan after fishing about five miles north of the A-B Line. The vessel had 400 pounds of salmon in its holds and was released after paying a \$3,000 assessment. In Dutch Harbor the Portuguese side trawler ESTAVO GOMES is still awaiting resolution of crew payment and other financial problems. Apparently Solseca no longer operates the vessel and the Portuguese Consul General from San Francisco has flown to Dutch Harbor to assist in resolving the problems.

Outside the 200-mile zone a Coast Guard C130 surveillance flight sighted three Taiwanese squid gillnet vessels near 47'30"N, 160'15"E and salmon was being processed on the deck of one. Photographs were forwarded to the American Institute of Taiwan via the State Department. The Institute has agreed to restrict their squid gillnetters to south of 35°N latitude until a final agreement can be reached. Six times during June and July gillnet vessels believed to be from Japan were sighted east of 175°E longitude in violation of International North Pacific Fisheries Commission agreements.

The USCG STORIS conducted a research and enforcement squid patrol in the North Pacific ocean from August 15 to September 19 which provided valuable data concerning the fishing patterns of the Japanese high seas squid fleets as well as marine mammal and bird entanglement in gillnets. Fifteen Japanese gillnet vessels were boarded, but none had incidental catches of salmon. Thirteen surveillance flights in support of STORIS' squid patrol detected up to 24 Japanese squid gillnet vessels operating north of the northernmost boundary as determined by Japanese regulations. Photographs and other pertinent information have been forwarded to the State Department.