

Enforcement Committee Agenda
June 5, 2012
1pm – 5pm
Kodiak Harbor Convention Center, Katurwik Room

The following four agenda items are scheduled for review at this meeting:

- C-2 Initial review of HAPC skate sites
- D-1(a) Discussion paper on limiting other gear on jig vessels
- Round Island Prohibitions
- Demonstration of “MapViewr” Program software.

I. C-2 Initial review of HAPC skate sites

At the April 2012 meeting, the Council made a second initial review of designating areas of skate egg concentration as Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC). The Council removed two options from Alternative 3, which would have prohibited the use of all gear types (including longline and pot gear) within skate egg HAPC. A new option was added to Alternative 2 to require NMFS to monitor areas of skate egg concentration. The Council asked staff to expand the analysis to include the most updated VMS technology to monitor activity in and around skate egg concentration sites.

II. D-1(a) Discussion paper on limiting other gear on jig vessels

December 2011, the Council tasked staff with developing a discussion paper on limiting other gear on board jig vessels fishing for Pacific cod in the GOA. This tasking stems from a proposal the Council considered in April 2011 on the “reverse parallel fishery” concept whereby vessels could jig for cod in Federal waters under the State GHM allocations. The Council postponed taking any further action until the Board had opportunity to comment and take action during its meeting in October 2011. Thus, the option to limit other gear on board jig vessels was tabled along with the postponed action on implementing a reverse parallel jig fishery until brought back in December 2011.

At the April 2012 meeting, the Council reviewed a discussion paper on limiting other gear on jig vessels in the GOA Pacific cod fishery. At that meeting, the Council requested an expanded discussion paper. The paper will discuss possible gear type limitations, such as deploying groundfish gear, other groundfish gear types, and the number of jig gear hooks allowed on board. The ability for a vessel to fish two gear types concurrently will also be included in the discussion paper.

The paper includes a discussion that compares State and Federal regulations under consideration because the Federal approach could differ from the State’s, which complicates reporting and catch accounting for individual gear types. Also included in this discussion is the degree of flexibility afforded possible Federal regulations verses ensuring accurate catch reporting.

The paper also includes descriptions of possible mixed-gear fishing trip scenarios and opportunities for jig vessels to operate other gear left on fishing grounds during a previous jig trip or left by another vessel to circumvent a jig-only fishing trip. The discussion will touch upon possible operation standards to prevent jig vessels from operating other fishing gear during a jig-only fishing trip.

III. Round island prohibitions

Per 50 CFR 679.22 (a)(4), between April 1 and Sept 30, vessels with an FFP are prohibited from transiting between 3 and 12 nm from baseline at Round Island and The Twins (Northern Bristol Bay area). This is a longstanding prohibition, intended to provide reduced disruption to the walrus haulouts at these locations.

In 2010, as part of the potential action to create a new closed around a new walrus haulout at Hagemeister Island, there was Council discussion of this issue, and a proposed option for a “transit lane” through the Round Island area. This proposal did not move forward. Over the years, NOAA OLE has taken a proactive education approach with vessel operators and processors in the Northern Bristol Bay area. The primary fleet that this prohibition effects are the vessels serving as tenders between the Togiak area herring and maybe salmon fisheries and processors in Dillingham and other areas within Bristol Bay.

In the past, this has not been an enforcement priority, due in part to there being a process for vessel owner/operators to surrender their FFP to exempt themselves from the application of this prohibition, then reapplying in the fall or when done tendering. However, with the recent passage of the suite of regulations implementing GOA sector splits, the ability for a vast majority of vessels to surrender their FFP to comply with this prohibition has been precluded. A significant number of the vessels which operate as tenders in this area hold a FFP to participate in other fisheries, and if the FFP were surrendered, could not be re-obtained during the 3 year cycle.

Going “around” these two islands requires a significantly detour through much more offshore waters. Likewise, another possibility technically involves remaining inside 3 nm state waters on the very northern shore of Bristol bay, between Togiak Bay and the Nushagak Pen, but this area is likely shallow and presents several increased safety considerations.

Several vessel operators have approached OLE for their response to this new situation. Although the Round Island regulations are clear, it is recognized that the recent changes have exacerbated an already difficult enforcement and compliance situation, compounded with potential safety considerations. Compounding the issue is the regulation’s intent to afford some heightened protections for walrus, a species under primary management of USFWS.

IV. CD-ROM for regulatory closure locations and boundaries

At the April 2012 meeting, the Council tasked the Enforcement Committee to explore the availability of agency-issued software that could be integrated with the existing navigation software to show closed areas. To address this request, a 15 minute demonstration of the “MapViewer” Program software will be presented at the Enforcement Committee meeting.