



D2 Groundfish Programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (PSEIS)

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Action Memo

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Action Required:

1. Review discussion paper
2. Review Ecosystem Committee Report
3. Provide direction on purpose and next steps

Background

In October 2022, the Council tasked staff to prepare a discussion paper for a roadmap and timeline for reevaluating the Programmatic Groundfish Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (Groundfish PSEIS, or PSEIS), in order to better address the impacts of climate change on our marine ecosystems and on the people who are dependent on those ecosystems (full motion in Appendix 1 of the document). This discussion paper provides context about the original PSEIS, and factors relevant to how the Council might approach developing a new PSEIS. The document includes a primer on the 2004 PSEIS, findings from previous reviews of the Council’s groundfish management program, sources of information and initiatives that may inform the PSEIS reevaluation process, opportunities for stakeholder engagement, as well as guidance for decisionmakers and considerations for next steps.

The Groundfish PSEIS, finalized in 2004, provided analytical support for amendments to revise the management policy for the Council’s Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) for Groundfish in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) and Gulf of Alaska (GOA). The PSEIS analyzed comprehensive alternatives for management of the groundfish fisheries in the BSAI and GOA and provided a broad environmental evaluation to examine the program through future guidance and direction. The intent was for the PSEIS to serve as an environmental baseline to evaluate then-current and alternative management regimes, taking into account the aggregate changes to the fisheries that had occurred since the original FMPs were prepared. It was also designed to anticipate the scope of the Council’s subsequent management actions for the groundfish fisheries, and the need to adapt management to a continually changing environment. The “action” of the PSEIS was the continued, long-term management of the groundfish fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off Alaska.

During the Council’s last evaluation of the Groundfish PSEIS in 2015, the Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) concluded the information and circumstances obtained through the process of the Supplemental Information Report (SIR) were not sufficient to trigger supplementing the 2004 PSEIS; that is, the PSEIS continued to provide NEPA compliance for the groundfish fisheries. The Council also considered whether changes were needed to the management policy adopted through the PSEIS and determined that the policy was not in need of amendment at that time. Since then, stakeholders and the Council’s Ecosystem Committee have referred to the increasing rate of ecological change in the North Pacific as one reason to initiate reevaluation of the PSEIS.