

# Ecosystem Committee Minutes

Tuesday, September 30, 2008 10am-1pm  
Sheraton Hotel, Board Room 308, Anchorage, AK

**Committee:** Stephanie Madsen (chair), Jim Ayers, Dave Benton, John Iani, Doug DeMaster, Diana Evans (staff), Bill Wilson (staff)

**Others attending included:** Lisa Lindeman, Melanie Brown, Chris Krenz, Michele Longo Eder, Julie Raymond-Yakoubian, Jon Warrenchuk, Paul MacGregor

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The Ecosystem Committee discussed the Arctic FMP, the Aleutian Islands Ecosystem Team report on the Fishery Ecosystem Plan, and received updates on other issues. The next Ecosystem Committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for the first Tuesday of the December Council meeting.

## Arctic FMP

The Committee received a presentation from Mr Wilson and Ms Brown, reviewing the EA/RIR/IRFA for the Arctic FMP, and the draft FMP itself.

**The Committee recommends to the Council that the draft Arctic FMP and its EA/RIR/IRFA be released for public review, subject to some clarifications.**

1. Address, insofar as it is possible, the comments of the SSC, in time to release the document for review by the end of October (in time for action at the December Council meeting). The comments are mostly editorial or technical, and Mr Wilson indicated that he should be able to address some of them in this timeframe, although he was not able to speak to the availability of staff from the Alaska Fisheries Science Center.
2. With respect to the SSC's comment about Alternative 3, about regarding more specificity about the historic red king crab fishery's size and scope, the Committee provides the following recommendation:
  - the size of the fishery should be no more than 1000 lbs annually,
  - the geographic scope of the fishery should be limited to the four statistical areas identified in the caption of page 203 of the EA, Figure 9-7: 646701, 646631, 646641, 636631.
3. Under Option 1, the Committee recommends editing the language describing the specifications process. The Committee recommends that annual catch limits be specified for a period of 3 years, and thus the Plan Team process that would support these catch limits would occur on a triennial cycle, unless new information is available, which would trigger a specifications process in that year. (The Committee noted that there is precedent for this procedure under the MMPA's marine mammal stock assessments).
4. Under Option 1, clarify that the procedures under Option 2, describing the criteria for moving a species into the target category, also apply under Option 1. The Committee noted that the procedures are also included in the draft FMP; it is important to clarify that the procedures are the focus of the Council's action at this time, as the fisheries would not open under any of the alternatives.

The Committee discussed the legal question which concerned the SSC, regarding Option 2, with Lisa Lindeman, NOAA GC. She confirmed that there is no legal impediment preventing the Council from sending this document out for public review. The Committee felt strongly that the document was ready for public review, that staff has prepared an excellent document, and that the edits suggested by the SSC

and the Committee can be incorporated without holding up public review. The SSC agreed that both Option 1 and 2 have merit, and the advantage of releasing the document is that the public will have an opportunity to examine and consider these two options, and provide feedback to the Council for their decisionmaking. Releasing the document does not preclude the SSC providing further review or input the next time this issue is in front of the Council.

The Committee also suggested some other minor clarifications to staff. The draft FMP is written assuming that the Council chooses Alternative 3; this should be more clearly noted on the document. The document should put in perspective the calculated snow crab biomass in the Arctic, e.g., compared to the size and biomass of the eastern Bering Sea crabs and biomass. Under Option 2, a further clarification may be required to explain that MSY is calculated for individual species, not just for the ecosystem component as a whole. Under the description in Option 2, adding a heading on page 104 would highlight that the bulleted list represents the Council procedure for initiating a new target fishery, and clarify that the three suggestions of ways of calculating MSY are just examples that could be applied once the Council moves a fish stock into the target fishery category.

### **Aleutian Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plan**

The Committee briefly reviewed the AI Ecosystem Team's minutes from their September 9-10, 2008 meeting. The Committee discussed the Team's membership, and suggested a contact for soliciting a marine mammal expert for the Team. The Committee also discussed the Team's request for an economist, and requested that the Team provide a description of the tasks that the economist would be asked to undertake. The draft FEP was reviewed by an AFSC economist in autumn 2007, and the Committee suggested that examples of his input might help clarify why the Team believes an economic perspective to be a critical gap in the composition of the Team.

Ms Evans noted that further updates on the AI FEP will be provided by Jennifer Boldt in December, during her annual Council presentation on the Ecosystem Considerations chapter of the SAFE. The Committee also discussed the Team's comments on formalizing the process for ecosystem considerations in the specifications process. The Committee suggested a way to move forward on some of these questions could be to convene a workshop that would include participants from all stages of the specifications process, and address the questions of how the FEP and other ecological information, including indicators, comes together in the Council's stock assessment, Plan Team, and SSC and Council review process. The Committee initially suggested that perhaps such a workshop could be convened around the January Marine Science Symposium in Anchorage, but there may not be sufficient time to prepare on that timeframe. A subgroup of the Committee intends to meet before December in order to come up with a more complete proposal for the Council.

### **Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum**

The Committee received the meeting summary of the Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum's most recent meeting, which occurred on August 7, 2008. The Committee was pleased to note that the Forum's continuing momentum.