

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, SSC and AP Members
FROM: Chris Oliver *Chris*
Executive Director
DATE: May 22, 2002
SUBJECT: GOA Groundfish Rationalization

ESTIMATED TIME
1 HOUR

ACTION REQUIRED

Review progress from GOA Working Group.

BACKGROUND

The GOA Working Group convened on May 13 and 14, 2002 to continue its development of alternatives, elements, and options for rationalizing the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. The working group will convene briefly on June 3 at 5 PM for a final review of its May minutes. Those minutes, which will include a list of draft elements and options under three rationalization alternatives will be distributed during the Council meeting. Additional work group meetings are scheduled for August 21 in Anchorage and September 19-21 in Kodiak.

NMFS staff has scheduled a series of scoping meetings for this summer. A summary of public scoping comments will be presented at the October Council meeting. The Notice of Intent for Scoping is scheduled to be published in the *Federal Register* on May 28, 2002 and will be included in your supplemental folder.

Sand Point	August 17	9 AM - 12 NOON
King Cove	August 18	9 AM - 12 NOON
Kodiak	August 23	1 - 4 PM
Cordova	September 16	5 - 8 PM
Homer	September 24	2 - 5 PM
Petersburg	September 26	3 - 6 PM
Seattle	October 1	6 - 9 PM

Groundfish Forum

C-1

3201 1st Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98134
(206) 301-9504 Fax (206) 301-9508
www.groundfishforum.org

May 28, 2002

Mr. Dave Benton, Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage AK 99601-2252

RE: C-1 Gulf Rationalization

Dear Chairman Benton,

I am writing on behalf of the Groundfish Forum to once again state our belief that rationalization programs must be comprehensive if they are going to work.

We are very concerned about some proposals that surfaced at the last GOA rationalization committee meeting which would rationalize certain fisheries or sub-areas of the GOA but leave other fisheries 'open access.' For example, proposals have been made to rationalize the GOA trawl fisheries EXCEPT for the flatfish target, which would remain open access.

The spillover effect from rationalization could be devastating. In the instance mentioned above, participants in the GOA flatfish and BSAI non-pollock trawl fisheries have worked hard to minimize bycatch. A sudden influx of fishing effort freed up from the newly rationalized GOA fisheries would be counterproductive to those longstanding bycatch reduction efforts. On a larger scale, no one benefits from concentrating the race for fish into traditionally higher-bycatch fisheries. This would be a drastic step backwards in the management process.

Of course our concern is also with the end result, that fishermen who have historically depended on these target species would be negatively impacted. Sideboards are a possible way of mitigating the spillover effect, but as we have seen, the effort that goes into determining sideboards may be the same as what would be required for full rationalization.

We support rationalizing all of the GOA fisheries concurrent with rationalization of the BSAI non-pollock fisheries. In so doing, the Council can meet the M-S Act mandates and address the real-life concerns of all of the industry participants. While this is understandably a daunting task, any half-way step is likely to either bog down in sideboard analysis or create disproportionate impacts on certain segments of the industry. Further, allowing the race for fish to be focused into fisheries that are the most sensitive to bycatch and environmental concerns is irresponsible and it reverses years of work to make those fisheries as environmentally responsible as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our views.

Sincerely,



John R. Gauvin

Endangered Species Act (ESA) that it adopted for the 14 threatened salmon and steelhead Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESUs) identified in the SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION section. The action provides for limits on ESA prohibitions (Limits) for the various activities set out in the document. The draft EA is a programmatic EA that analyzes the impacts of implementing the Limit for routine road maintenance activities (RRM) of any state, city, county or port (Limit 10). This EA will form the basis for subsequent analyses of activities or programs that may be submitted pursuant to Limit 10. NMFS is furnishing this notification to allow other agencies and the public an opportunity to review and comment on the draft EA. All comments received will become part of the public record and will be available for review.

DATES: Written comments on the draft EA must be received at the appropriate address or fax number (see ADDRESSES) no later than 5 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on June 28, 2002.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to Rosemary Furfey, Protected Resources Division, National Marine Fisheries Service, 525 N.E. Oregon Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97232-2737. Comments may also be sent via fax to 503-230-5441. Copies of the draft EA are available on the Internet at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/1salmon/salmesa/final4d.htm> <http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/salmon.htm>, or from NMFS, Protected Resources Division, 525 N.E. Oregon Street, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97232-2737. Comments will not be accepted if submitted via email or the Internet.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rosemary Furfey at phone number: 503-231-2149, facsimile: 503-230-5441, or e-mail: Rosemary.Furfey@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Species Covered in This Notice

The following species are covered in this Notice:

Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*); threatened Puget Sound (PS), Lower Columbia River (LCR), and Upper Willamette River (UWR).
Coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*); threatened Oregon Coast (OC).
Sockeye salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*); threatened Ozette Lake (OL).
Chum salmon (*Oncorhynchus keta*); threatened Hood Canal Summer-run (HCS) and Columbia River (CR).
Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*); threatened Snake River Basin (SRB), Central California Coast (CCC), South/Central California Coast (SCCC), Lower Columbia River (LCR), Central Valley,

California (CVC), Middle Columbia River (MCR), and Upper Willamette River (UWR).

Background

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that Federal agencies conduct an environmental analysis of their actions to determine if the actions may affect the human environment. Accordingly, before NMFS issued the ESA 4(d) rule for the 14 ESUs identified above it prepared a set of EAs in connection with this regulation and made a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Since the 4(d) rule came into effect on July 10, 2000, various governmental entities and the public have demonstrated interest in having their individual programs reviewed under Limit 10. With this increasing interest in using Limit 10, there is the possibility of increased effects as defined by NEPA. Thus, NMFS is conducting this subsequent NEPA analysis to determine the impacts of implementing Limit 10. States, counties, cities and ports conducting RRM activities would not be subject to ESA section 9 prohibitions provided that they perform the RRM activities using an RRM program that has been approved by NMFS as meeting the requirements of Limit 10.

NMFS is using a staged or sequential approach in its NEPA review of the implementation of Limit 10, and of any RRM that may be submitted under it. The first stage is this programmatic EA, which assesses the environmental impacts associated with just the implementation of Limit 10. It will form the basis for the second stage or subsequent NEPA analyses of NMFS' actions regarding individual RRM programs submitted under Limit 10.

This draft EA analyzes three alternatives: (1) The no action alternative; the 4(d) rule with Limits is not implemented; no ESA section 9 prohibitions are in effect; (2) the proposed action alternative; the 4(d) Rule with section 9 prohibitions and Limit 10 is implemented; and (3) alternative 3; the 4(d) rule without Limit 10 is implemented.

Because the proposed action creates an optional ESA process, its effects are necessarily programmatic in nature. In other words, the only effects that the proposed action may generate are those associated with putting take prohibitions into place and establishing the Limit 10 option for NMFS' approval of RRM programs. The proposed action does not address the possible effects of individual RRM programs because the actual effects, particularly the physical effects, associated with such programs

cannot be measured at this point. Also it is impossible to anticipate what program will be submitted to NMFS or approved by NMFS. During the second stage of NEPA review, NMFS will conduct further NEPA analyses when an RRM program is submitted to NMFS. These subsequent NEPA documents will present a summary of the issues addressed in this draft programmatic Limit 10 EA; as appropriate, incorporate by reference the analyses presented in this programmatic EA; and address any environmental effects of NMFS' action regarding a specific RRM program.

This notice is provided pursuant to the NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1506.6). The final NEPA determinations will not be completed until after the end of the 30-day comment period and NMFS will fully consider all public comments during the comment period.

Date: May 22, 2002.

Wanda Cain,

Acting Director, Office of Protected Resources,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

ER Doc. 02-13408 Filed 5-28-02; 8:45 am]

CALLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 051302A]

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Groundfish Fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS); notice of scoping meetings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces its intent to prepare an SEIS in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) for the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMP). The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) proposes management measures to improve the economic efficiency of the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries and to address conservation, safety, and social concerns. The Council is considering one or more methods of allocating fishing privileges, such as: individual fishing quotas (IFQs); individual processing quotas (IPQs); allocations to communities; fishing cooperatives program; or other measures. The scope of the SEIS will include a review of the GOA groundfish

fisheries that may be affected by management measures that improve the economic efficiency of the GOA groundfish fisheries, the components of these programs, and potential changes to the management of the fisheries under these programs.

NMFS will hold public scoping meetings and accept written comments to determine the issues of concern and the appropriate range of management alternatives to be addressed in the SEIS.

DATES: Written comments will be accepted through November 15, 2002 (see **ADDRESSES**). Public scoping meetings will be held in August, September, and October. For dates and times see **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on issues and alternatives for the SEIS should be sent to Sue Salvesson, Assistant Regional Administrator for Sustainable Fisheries, Alaska Region, NMFS, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK., 99802, Attn: Lori Gravel-Durall, or delivered to the Federal Building, 709 West 9th Street, Juneau, AK. Comments may be sent via facsimile (fax) to 907-586-7557. NMFS will not accept comments by e-mail or internet.

An analysis of the issues and alternatives will be available through the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 605 West 4th, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK., 99501-2252.

Public scoping meetings will be held in Alaska's Sand Point, King Cove, Kodiak, Cordova, Homer, and Petersburg, and in Seattle, Washington. For specific locations, see **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Glenn Merrill, (907) 586-7228 or email: glenn.merrill@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the United States has exclusive fishery management authority over all living marine resources found within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The management of these marine resources, with the exception of marine mammals and birds, is vested in the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary). Eight Regional Fishery Management Councils prepare fishery management plans for approval and implementation by the Secretary. The Council has the responsibility to prepare fishery management plans for the fishery resources that require conservation and management in the EEZ off Alaska.

NEPA requires preparation of an EIS for major Federal actions significantly impacting the quality of the human

environment. Regulations implementing NEPA at 40 CFR 1502.4(b) state:

Environmental impact statements may be prepared, and are sometimes required, for broad Federal actions such as adoption of new agency programs or regulations. Agencies shall prepare statements on broad actions so that they are relevant to policy and are timed to coincide with meaningful points in agency planning and decision making.

The FMP was approved by the Secretary on April 12, 1978. The Secretary has approved numerous amendments to the FMP since that time. Section 304 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act specifies a process for amending FMPs.

The proposed action to be addressed in the SEIS is amendment of the FMP to include policies and management measures that would increase the economic efficiency of the GOA groundfish fisheries. Additional information on EISs pertaining to Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries may be obtained through NMFS (see **ADDRESSES**). Fisheries conducted under such policies and management measures generally are considered more "rational" than other fisheries because capital investment in "rationalized" fisheries tends to be in balance with the amount of fish that can be conservatively harvested. Hence, to "rationalize" the management of the GOA groundfish fisheries implies that the management required will incorporate economic incentives that prevent or reduce excessive capital investment. This is commonly accomplished through the establishment of transferable harvesting privileges or other market-based systems for allocating access to the fishery resources.

Rationalization programs may provide additional opportunities to use fishing methods that reduce the bycatch of non-target species and reduce gear conflicts thereby addressing larger conservation goals. Rationalization programs also may reduce the incentive to fish during unsafe conditions. Rationalization programs frequently result in substantial changes to the existing management regime and these changes may have a significant effect on the human environment.

The SEIS will examine the GOA groundfish fisheries authorized under the FMP, which may be affected by any proposed rationalization program and the potential changes to the management of the fisheries under these programs. The scope of the alternatives analyzed is intended to be broad enough for the Council and NMFS to make informed decisions on whether a rationalization program should be

developed and, if so, how it should be designed, and to assess other changes to the FMP as necessary with the implementation of these programs.

NMFS is seeking information from the public through the scoping process on the range of alternatives to be analyzed and on the environmental, social, and economic issues to be considered in the analysis.

Alternatives

The analysis will evaluate a range of alternative regimes for managing GOA groundfish fisheries. Alternatives analyzed in the SEIS may include those identified here, plus additional alternatives developed through the public scoping process and the Council.

The potential alternatives already identified for the SEIS include: (1) the existing management measures (status quo); (2) a rationalization program; and (3) a modified Licence Limitation Program. The specific options for a rationalization program identified thus far include the use of IFQs, IPQs, fishing cooperatives, and quotas held by communities, either separately or in combination. The particular combination of these options would effectively provide multiple "alternative" rationalization programs. Public scoping meetings will provide the opportunity for comment on the range of alternatives and the specific options within the rationalization alternative.

Specific options for rationalization are derived from preliminary discussions by three separate Council GOA rationalization committees tasked to address this issue, recommendations from the Council's Advisory Panel, and the Council. In addition, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2001 (Public Law 106-554) requires the Council to examine the fisheries under its jurisdiction, particularly the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries, to determine whether rationalization is needed and describes management measures that should be analyzed. Additional information on the specific options for rationalization may be obtained through the Council (see **ADDRESSES**), or via the Council website at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/>.

The Council may recommend specific options for analysis in late 2002. The rationalization alternative, options for consideration, and other alternatives and options, will be developed through this scoping process in coordination with the Council's rationalization committee and the Council. Depending on the rationalization program options selected, Congressional action may be required to provide statutory authority

to implement a specific rationalization alternative preferred by the Council. Lack of statutory authority for any particular alternative or option does not prevent consideration of that alternative or option in the SEIS.

Public Involvement

Scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to the proposed action. A principal objective of the scoping and public involvement process is to identify a reasonable range of management alternatives that, with adequate analysis, will identify critical issues and provide a clear basis for distinguishing between those alternatives and selecting a preferred alternative.

NMFS is seeking written public comments on the scope of issues that should be addressed in the SEIS and on alternatives and options that should be considered for management of the GOA groundfish fisheries.

Public comments on specific aspects of the rationalization programs should be submitted to NMFS (see ADDRESSES). The public also will be able to provide oral and written comments at the meetings listed below. The Council will make a draft analysis of these alternative programs available for public review and comment. Copies of the analysis can be requested from the Council (see ADDRESSES).

Dates, Times, and Locations for Public Scoping Meetings

1. Saturday, August 17, 2002, from 9 a.m. to noon—Aleutians East Borough Office, 100 Mossberry Lane, Sand Point, AK.
2. Sunday, August 18, 2002, from 9 a.m. to noon—King Cove Harbor House, 100 Harbor House Road, King Cove, AK.
3. Friday, August 23, 2002, from 1 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.—Fishery Industrial Technology Center, 118 Trident Way, Kodiak, AK.
4. Monday, September 16, 2002, from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.—Cordova City Library Meeting Room, 622 First Street, Cordova, AK.
5. Tuesday, September 24, 2002, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.—Best Western Bidarka Inn, 575 Sterling Highway, Homer, AK.
6. Thursday, September 26, 2002, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.—City Council Chambers, 12 Nordic Drive, Petersburg, AK.
7. Tuesday, October 1, 2002, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.—Doubletree Hotel, Seattle Airport, 18740 Pacific Highway South, Seattle, WA, in conjunction with the Council's October meeting.

The public is invited to assist NMFS in developing the scope of alternatives and issues to be analyzed for the SEIS. Comments will be accepted in writing at the meetings and at the NMFS address above (see ADDRESSES). Meeting schedules may be delayed due to weather conditions and flight availability in some locations. Meetings may be rescheduled if necessary.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Glenn Merrill, NMFS, (see ADDRESSES), (907) 586-7228, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et. seq.*

Dated: May 21, 2002.

Virginia M. Fay,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. 02-13256 Filed 5-28-02; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

[I.D. 052102F]

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; Public Meetings

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will convene a public meeting of the Socioeconomic Panel (SEP).

DATES: A meeting of the SEP will be held beginning at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, June 12, 2002, and will conclude at 4 p.m. on Friday, June 14, 2002.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Wyndham Riverfront Hotel, 700 Convention Center Boulevard, New Orleans, LA; telephone: 504-524-3200.

Council Address: Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 18 U.S. Highway 901 North, Suite 100, Tampa, FL 33606.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Antonio B. Lamberte, Economist;
telephone: 813-228-2815.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The SEP will meet to review available social and economic information on Gulf king and Spanish mackerel and determine the

social and economic implications of the levels of acceptable biological catch (ABC) recommended by the Council's Mackerel Stock Assessment Panel (MSAP). The SEP may recommend to the Council total allowable catch (TAC) levels for the 2003 fishing year and certain management measures associated with achieving the TACs. In addition, the SEP will review the results of a bioeconomic modeling evaluation of the measures proposed in the Secretarial amendment for rebuilding the red grouper stock.

A report will be prepared by the SEP containing their conclusions and recommendations. The red grouper part of the report will be presented for review to the Council's Reef Fish Advisory Panel and Standing and Special Reef Fish Scientific and Statistical Committee at meetings to be held on the week of June 24, 2002 in Tampa, FL and to the Council at its meeting on the week of July 8, 2002 in Sarasota, FL. The mackerel portion of the report will be presented for review to the Council's Mackerel Advisory Panel and Standing and Special Mackerel Scientific and Statistical Committee at meetings to be held on the week of July 29, 2002 in New Orleans, LA and to the Council at its meeting on the week of September 9, 2002 in Metairie, LA.

Composing the SEP membership are economists, sociologists, and anthropologists from various universities and state fishery agencies throughout the Gulf. They advise the Council on the social and economic implications of certain fishery management measures.

A copy of the agenda can be obtained by calling 813-228-2815.

Although other non-emergency issues not on the agenda may come before the SEP for discussion, in accordance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this meeting. Actions of the SEP will be restricted to those issues specifically identified in the agendas and any issues arising after publication of this notice that require emergency action under Section 305(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, provided the public has been notified of the Council's intent to take action to address the emergency.

Special Accommodations

The meeting is open to the public and is physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to the Council office (see ADDRESSES) by June 5, 2002.