


MEMORANDUM

TO: Council, AP, and SSC Members

FROM: Clarence G. Pautzke
Executive Director 

DATE: June 17, 1993

SUBJECT: Expansion of the Seasonal 20 NM Closure Zones

ESTIMATED TIME

1.0 HOUR

ACTION REQUIRED

Final action on the NMFS proposal to expand the 20-mile sea lion protection areas to include potential fall fisheries.

BACKGROUND

At the April Council meeting, the National Marine Fisheries Service presented a draft EA/RIR/IRFA that examined the impacts of a proposed regulatory amendment modifying the seasonal 20 NM Sea Lion Rookery protection zones. Specifically, the analysis considers expanding the seasonal no trawl zones around Steller sea lion rookeries at Sea lion Rocks, Akun, Ugamak, Akutan, Agligadak and Seguam Islands, to November and December when significant pollock harvest is forecasted for these months.

Though the current pollock fisheries ("B" season and CDQ) are expected to harvest allocated amounts of pollock before November, NMFS believes it necessary to have the authority to prevent potential detrimental effects on the survival and recovery of Steller sea lions during the late fall-early winter months in case unforeseen circumstances result in pollock harvest into November and December.

Three alternatives are considered:

Alternative 1: No action, status quo. Existing prohibitions against groundfish trawling within 10 nm of all BSAI and GOA Steller sea lion rookeries year-round and within 20 nm of Akun, Akutan, Ugamak, Sea Lion Rock, Agligadak, and Seguam Islands during the BSAI pollock "A" season would remain in effect. The "B" Season delay would be implemented without additional Steller sea lion conservation measures. Extension of 20 nm trawl closures in November and December would not be required.

Alternative 2: Extend 20 nm trawl prohibition areas during November and December when significant pollock harvest is expected in those months through in-season management. Existing trawl prohibitions around Steller sea lion rookeries would remain in effect. Trawl closures around Akun, Akutan, Ugamak and Sea Lion Rock Steller sea lion rookeries would be extended to 20 nm on November 1 by in-season action if 71,500 mt of pollock harvest is forecasted in the Bering Sea, or around Agligadak and Seguam Steller sea lion rookeries if 7,160 mt of pollock harvest in the Aleutian Islands is projected.

Alternative 3: Implement extended trawl prohibition areas through November and December. Existing trawl prohibitions around Steller sea lion rookeries would remain in effect, and trawl closures around Akun, Akutan, Ugamak, Sea Lion Rock, Agligadak and Seguam Steller sea lion rookeries would be extended to 20 nm on November 1, regardless of the status of the pollock fishery.

Mitigation of potential fishery effects in November and December is necessary due to the numerous coincidental stresses on sea lions in winter months, including severe weather conditions, weaning of pups, early gestation, and low prey diversity. Alternative 2, NMFS' preferred alternative, would afford substantial protection for Steller sea lions without unduly impacting bottom trawl fisheries for which no effect to Steller sea lions has been documented. This action may result in an increase in transportation costs due to the redistribution of vessels trawling for pollock and cod during winter months.

The Council reviewed the draft analysis in April and recommended it go out for public review. The draft EA/RIR was mailed to you on May 21, 1993. The Council can receive a staff report, take public testimony, and then make a final recommendation on this regulatory amendment at this meeting. If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the amendment could be implemented in the Fall of 1993. No written comments were submitted on this amendment proposal.

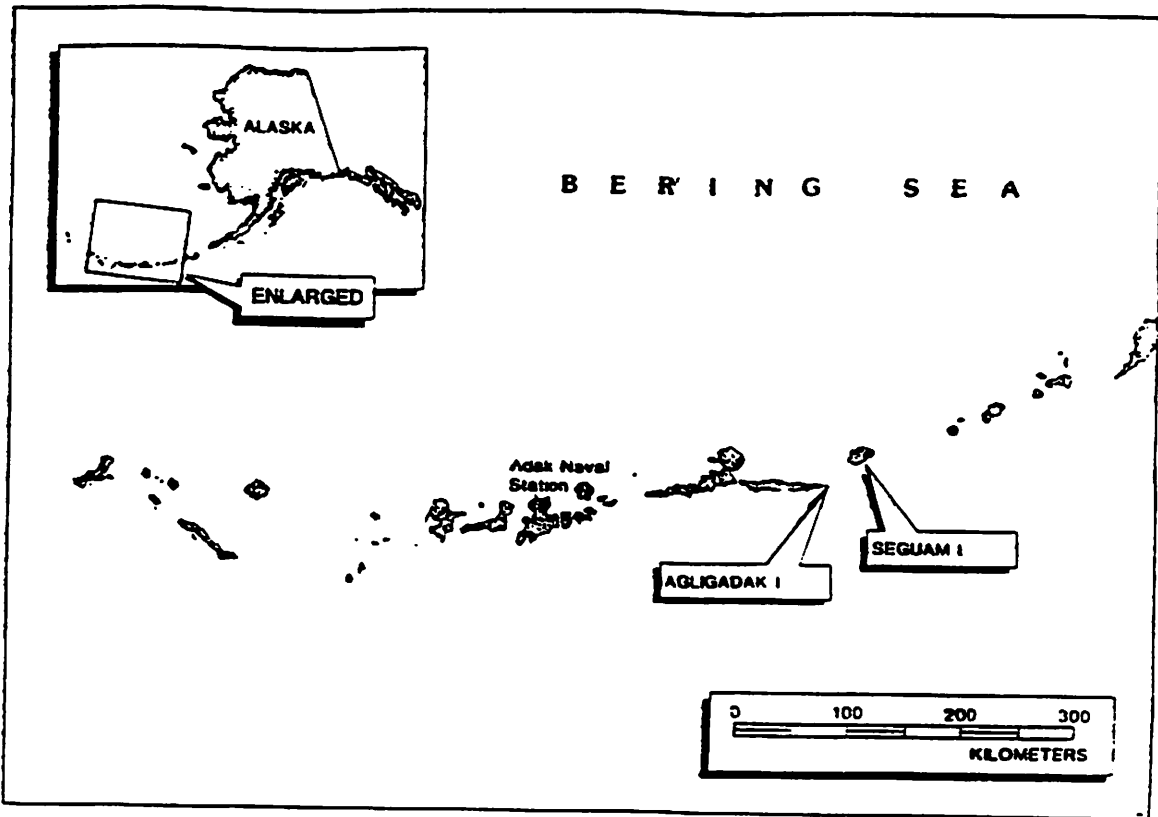
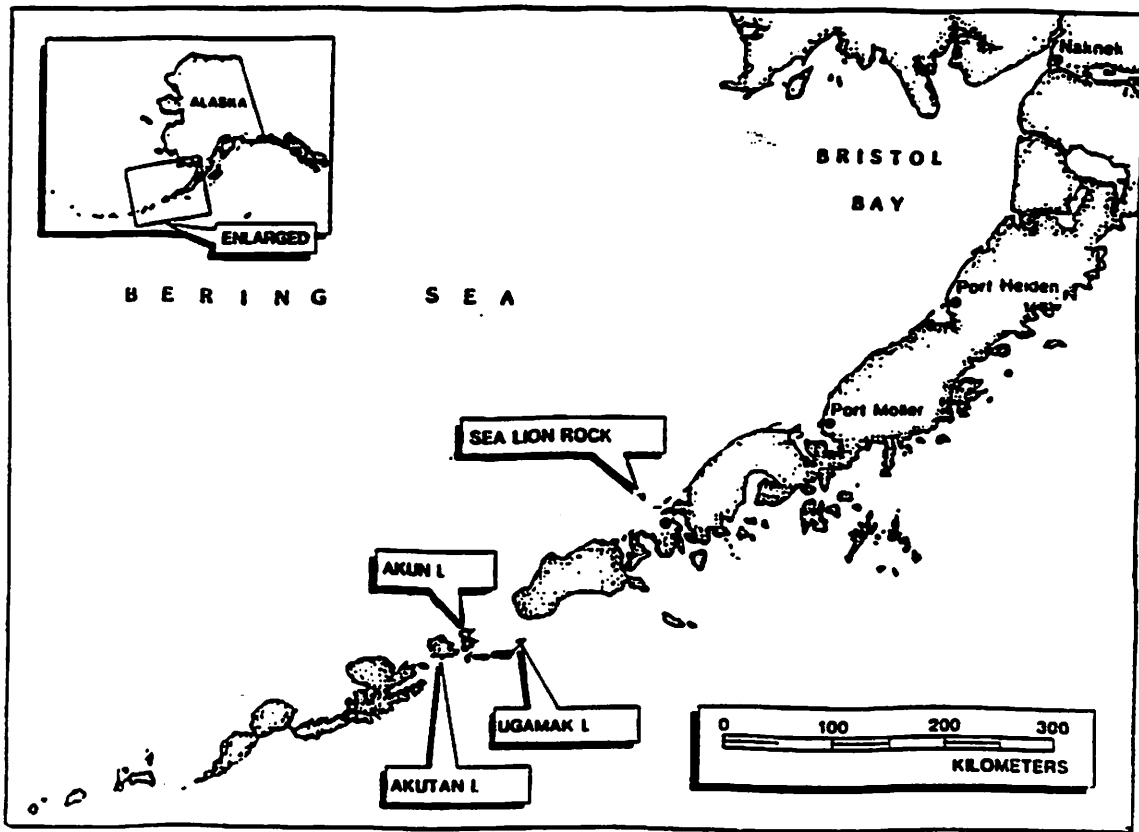


Figure 1.

Location of the six Steller sea lion rookeries that are proposed for extended seasonal closure to groundfish trawling.

closure to