

2.2 Management Approach for the BSAI [GOA] Groundfish Fisheries

The Council's policy is to apply judicious and responsible fisheries management practices, based on sound scientific research and analysis, proactively rather than reactively, to ensure the sustainability of fishery resources and associated ecosystems for the benefit of future, as well as current generations. The productivity of the North Pacific ecosystem is acknowledged to be among the highest in the world. For the past 25 years, the Council management approach has incorporated forward looking conservation measures that address differing levels of uncertainty. This management approach has in recent years been labeled the precautionary approach. Recognizing that potential changes in productivity may be caused by fluctuations in natural oceanographic conditions, fisheries, and other, non-fishing activities, the Council intends to continue to take appropriate measures to insure the continued sustainability of the managed species. It will carry out this objective by considering reasonable, adaptive management measures, as described in the Magnuson-Stevens Act and in conformance with the National Standards, the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Environmental Policy Act, and other applicable law. This management approach takes into account the National Academy of Science's recommendations on Sustainable Fisheries Policy.

As part of its policy, the Council intends to consider and adopt, as appropriate, measures that accelerate the Council's precautionary, adaptive management approach through community-based or rights-based management, ecosystem-based management principles that protect managed species from overfishing, and where appropriate and practicable, increase habitat protection and bycatch constraints. All management measures will be based on the best scientific information available. Given this intent, the fishery management goal is to provide sound conservation of the living marine resources; provide socially and economically viable fisheries for the well-being of fishing communities; minimize human-caused threats to protected species; maintain a healthy marine resource habitat; and incorporate ecosystem-based considerations into management decisions.

This management approach recognizes the need to balance many competing uses of marine resources and different social and economic goals for sustainable fishery management, including protection of the long-term health of the resource and the optimization of yield. This policy will use and improve upon the Council's existing open and transparent process of public involvement in decision-making.

2.2.1 Management Objectives

Adaptive management requires regular and periodic review. Objectives identified in this policy statement will be reviewed annually by the Council. The Council will also review, modify, eliminate, or consider new issues, as appropriate, to best carry out the goals and objectives of this management policy.

To meet the goals of this overall management approach, the Council and NMFS will use the Alaska Groundfish Fisheries Programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (PSEIS) (NMFS 2004) as a planning document. To help focus consideration of potential management measures, the Council and NMFS will use the following objectives as guideposts, to be re-evaluated, as amendments to the FMP are considered over the life of the PSEIS.

Prevent Overfishing:

1. Adopt conservative harvest levels for multi-species and single species fisheries and specify optimum yield.
2. Continue to use the 2 million mt optimum yield cap for the BSAI groundfish fisheries. [Continue to use the existing optimum yield cap for the GOA groundfish fisheries.]
3. Provide for adaptive management by continuing to specify optimum yield as a range.
4. Provide for periodic reviews of the adequacy of F_{40} and adopt improvements, as appropriate.
5. Continue to improve the management of species through species categories.

Promote Sustainable Fisheries and Communities:

6. Promote conservation while providing for optimum yield in terms of the greatest overall benefit to the nation with particular reference to food production, and sustainable opportunities for recreational, subsistence, and commercial fishing participants and fishing communities.
7. Promote management measures that, while meeting conservation objectives, are also designed to avoid significant disruption of existing social and economic structures.
8. Promote fair and equitable allocation of identified available resources in a manner such that no particular sector, group or entity acquires an excessive share of the privileges.
9. Promote increased safety at sea.

Preserve Food Web:

10. Develop indices of ecosystem health as targets for management.
11. Improve the procedure to adjust acceptable biological catch levels as necessary to account for uncertainty and ecosystem factors.
12. Continue to protect the integrity of the food web through limits on harvest of forage species.
13. Incorporate ecosystem-based considerations into fishery management decisions, as appropriate.

Manage Incidental Catch and Reduce Bycatch and Waste:

14. Continue and improve current incidental catch and bycatch management program.
15. Develop incentive programs for bycatch reduction including the development of mechanisms to facilitate the formation of bycatch pools, vessel bycatch allowances, or other bycatch incentive systems.
16. Encourage research programs to evaluate current population estimates for non-target species with a view to setting appropriate bycatch limits, as information becomes available.
17. Continue program to reduce discards by developing management measures that encourage the use of gear and fishing techniques that reduce bycatch which includes economic discards.
18. Continue to manage incidental catch and bycatch through seasonal distribution of total allowable catch and geographical gear restrictions.

19. Continue to account for bycatch mortality in total allowable catch accounting and improve the accuracy of mortality assessments for target, prohibited species catch, and non-commercial species.
20. Control the bycatch of prohibited species through prohibited species catch limits or other appropriate measures.
21. Reduce waste to biologically and socially acceptable levels.

Avoid Impacts to Seabirds and Marine Mammals:

22. Continue to cooperate with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to protect ESA-listed species, and if appropriate and practicable, other seabird species.
23. Maintain or adjust current protection measures as appropriate to avoid jeopardy of extinction or adverse modification to critical habitat for ESA-listed Steller sea lions.
24. Encourage programs to review status of endangered or threatened marine mammal stocks and fishing interactions and develop fishery management measures as appropriate.
25. Continue to cooperate with NMFS and USFWS to protect ESA-listed marine mammal species, and if appropriate and practicable, other marine mammal species.

Reduce and Avoid Impacts to Habitat:

26. Review and evaluate efficacy of existing habitat protection measures for managed species.
27. Identify and designate essential fish habitat and habitat areas of particular concern pursuant to Magnuson-Stevens Act rules, and mitigate fishery impacts as necessary and practicable to continue the sustainability of managed species.
28. Develop a Marine Protected Area policy in coordination with national and state policies.
29. Encourage development of a research program to identify regional baseline habitat information and mapping, subject to funding and staff availability.
30. Develop goals, objectives and criteria to evaluate the efficacy and suitable design of marine protected areas and no-take marine reserves as tools to maintain abundance, diversity, and productivity. Implement marine protected areas if and where appropriate.

Promote Equitable and Efficient Use of Fishery Resources:

31. Provide economic and community stability to harvesting and processing sectors through fair allocation of fishery resources.
32. Maintain the license limitation program, modified as necessary, and further decrease excess fishing capacity and overcapitalization by eliminating latent licences and extending programs such as community or rights-based management to some or all groundfish fisheries.
33. Provide for adaptive management by periodically evaluating the effectiveness of rationalization programs and the allocation of access rights based on performance.
34. Develop management measures that, when practicable, consider the efficient use of fishery resources taking into account the interest of harvesters, processors, and communities.

Increase Alaska Native Consultation:

35. Continue to incorporate local and traditional knowledge in fishery management.
36. Consider ways to enhance collection of local and traditional knowledge from communities, and incorporate such knowledge in fishery management where appropriate.
37. Increase Alaska Native participation and consultation in fishery management.

Improve Data Quality, Monitoring and Enforcement:

38. Increase the utility of groundfish fishery observer data for the conservation and management of living marine resources.
39. Develop funding mechanisms that achieve equitable costs to the industry for implementation of the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program.
40. Improve community and regional economic impact costs and benefits through increased data reporting requirements.
41. Increase the quality of monitoring and enforcement data through improved technology.
42. Encourage a coordinated, long-term ecosystem monitoring program to collect baseline information and compile existing information from a variety of ongoing research initiatives, subject to funding and staff availability.
43. Cooperate with research institutions such as the North Pacific Research Board in identifying research needs to address pressing fishery issues.
44. Promote enhanced enforceability.
45. Continue to cooperate and coordinate management and enforcement programs with the Alaska Board of Fish, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Alaska Fish and Wildlife Protection, the U.S. Coast Guard, NMFS Enforcement, International Pacific Halibut Commission, Federal agencies, and other organizations to meet conservation requirements; promote economically healthy and sustainable fisheries and fishing communities; and maximize efficiencies in management and enforcement programs through continued consultation, coordination, and cooperation.

Groundfish Policy Workplan *(revised February, 2007)*

1. Prevent Overfishing

- a. continue to develop management strategies that ensure sustainable yields of target species and minimize impacts on populations of incidentally-caught species
- b. evaluate effectiveness of setting ABC levels using Tier 5 and 6 approaches, for rockfish and other species as appropriate
- c. continue to develop a systematic approach to 'lumping' and 'splitting' that takes into account both biologic and management considerations

2. Preserve Food Web

- a. encourage and participate in development of key ecosystem indicators
- b. reconcile procedures to account for uncertainty and ecosystem considerations in establishing harvest limits, for rockfish and other species as appropriate
- c. develop pilot Fishery Ecosystem Plan in the Aleutian Islands

3. Manage Incidental Catch and Reduce Bycatch and Waste

- a. explore incentive-based bycatch reduction programs in GOA and BSAI fisheries
- b. explore mortality rate-based approaches to setting PSC limits in GOA and BSAI fisheries
- c. consider new management strategies to reduce incidental rockfish bycatch and discards
- d. develop statistically rigorous approaches to estimating bycatch in line with national initiatives
- e. encourage research programs to evaluate population estimates for non-target species
- f. develop incentive-based and appropriate biomass-based trigger limits and area closures for BSAI salmon bycatch reduction, as information becomes available
- g. assess impact of management measures on regulatory discards and consider measures to reduce where practicable

4. Reduce and Avoid Impacts to Seabirds and Marine Mammals

- a. continue to participate in development of mitigation measures to protect SSLs through the MSA process, including participation in the FMP-level consultation under the ESA
- b. recommend to NOAA Fisheries and participate in reconsideration of SSL critical habitat
- c. monitor fur seal status and management issues, and convene committee as appropriate
- d. adaptively manage seabird avoidance measures program

5. Reduce and Avoid Impacts to Habitat

- a. evaluate effectiveness of existing closures
- b. consider Bering Sea EFH mitigation measures
- c. consider call for HAPC proposals on 3-year cycle
- d. request NMFS to develop and implement a research design on the effects of trawling in previously untrawled areas

6. Promote Equitable and Efficient Use of Fishery Resources

- a. explore eliminating latent licenses in BSAI and GOA
- b. consider sector allocations in GOA fisheries

7. Increase Alaska Native and Community Consultation

- a. Develop a protocol or strategy for improving the Alaska Native and community consultation process
- b. Develop a method for systematic documentation of Alaska Native and community participation in the development of management actions

8. Improve Data Quality, Monitoring, and Enforcement

- a. expand or modify observer coverage and sampling methods based on scientific data and compliance needs
- b. explore development programs for economic data collection that aggregate data
- c. modify VMS to incorporate new technology and system providers

Groundfish Workplan

Priority actions revised in February 2007, status updated to current

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| General Priority (in no particular order) | Specific priority actions | Related to management objective: | Status (updated 9-27-10) | 2010 | | 2011 | | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|--|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | | | Oct | Dec | Feb | Apr | Jun | Oct | Dec |
| Prevent Overfishing | a. continue to develop management strategies that ensure sustainable yields of target species and minimize impacts on populations of incidentally-caught species | 5 | Aggregate ABC/OFL for GOA "other species" in Apr 08 BSAI skates TAC breakout in Oct 2009 remaining other species mgmt addressed under ABC final action in Apr 10 | | | | | | | |
| | b. evaluate effectiveness of setting ABC levels using Tier 5 and 6 approaches, for rockfish and other species | 4 | AFSC responding to CIE reviews to plan harvest specifications process | | | | | | | |
| | c. continue to develop a systematic approach to lumping and splitting that takes into account both biological and management considerations | 5 | BSAI Pcod split discussion in Dec 10 report from non-target species committee in Dec 09 | █ | | | | | | |
| Preserve Food Web | a. encourage and participate in development of key ecosystem indicators | 10 | ecosystem SAFE presented annually; AI FEP identified/refined indicators for the Aleutians (report Feb 2011); EBS indicator synthesis for 2010 | █ | █ | | | | | █ |
| | b. Reconcile procedures to account for uncertainty and ecosystem considerations in establishing harvest limits, for rockfish and other species | 11 | report from non-target species committee in Dec 09 | | | | | | | |
| | c. develop pilot Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the AI | 13 | FEP brochure published Dec 07 FEP updates, AI report for Feb 2011 | █ | █ | | | | | |
| Manage Incidental Catch and Reduce Bycatch and Waste | a. explore incentive-based bycatch reduction programs in GOA and BSAI fisheries | 15 | partially addressed in BSAI salmon bycatch EIS partially addressed in Tanner crab area closures around Kodiak, final action Oct 2010 also GOA Chinook discussion paper in Dec 10 | █ | | | | | | |
| | b. explore mortality rate-based approaches to setting PSC limits in GOA and BSAI fisheries | 20 | partially addressed in BSAI salmon bycatch EIS analysis of BSAI crab bycatch limits in 2011 | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| | c. consider new management strategies to reduce incidental rockfish bycatch and discards | 17 | | | | | | | | |
| | d. develop statistically rigorous approaches to estimating bycatch in line with national initiatives | 14, 19 | National Bycatch Report update in Dec 07 | | | | | | | |
| | e. encourage research programs to evaluate population estimates for non-target species | 16 | Part of research priorities, adopted in June 2007 | | | | | | | |
| | f. develop incentive-based and appropriate biomass-based trigger limits and area closures for BSAI salmon bycatch reduction, as information becomes available | 14, 15, 20 | bycatch limit for Chinook adopted Apr 09, preliminary chum bycatch analysis in Feb 2011 | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| | g. assess impact of management measures on regulatory discards and consider measures to reduce where practicable | 17 | partially addressed by GOA arrowtooth MRA action (Council action Oct 07) BSAI arrowtooth MRA analysis final action Oct 10 | █ | | | | | | |

2010 Review of Groundfish Management Policy

The Council developed a comprehensive groundfish management policy in 2004, following a programmatic review of the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries (NMFS 2004). The Council adopted a management approach statement, and 9 policy goal statements, with accompanying objectives.

In order to track the implementation of the various management objectives over time, the Council developed a workplan to prioritize issues for consideration. The first draft of the workplan was developed in June 2004, and it has since been once revised, in February 2007. The Council is updated on the status of this workplan at each meeting. The management policy and the workplan are appended separately from this discussion paper.

Once a year, the Council conducts a review of the management policy objectives and the implementing workplan, and if appropriate, makes any changes. While changes to the workplan can be made at any time, changes to the policy objectives require an FMP amendment. This paper briefly examines the Council's groundfish policy goals and management objectives with respect to the FMP and regulatory amendment changes that have occurred over the last six years, as well as other management steps that the Council has taken with respect to these goals. The discussion in this section is not necessarily comprehensive, as each amendment may be fitted to many of the Council's goals and objectives. Rather, it is intended to provide the Council with an overview of the major management changes of the last six years, and how they compare to the management objectives that the Council set for itself in 2004.

Each of the sections below identifies one of the Council's policy goals. The specific objectives linking to that policy goal are listed in a box at the beginning of the section. If the objectives are also linked to a specific item on the Council's workplan, that is noted also.

Prevent Overfishing

1. Adopt conservative harvest levels
2. Use existing OY caps.
3. Specify OY as a range.
4. Periodic reviews of F40 and adopt improvements
5. Improve management through species categories (*on workplan*)

FMP amendments

- revisions to the harvest specifications process (B48/G48)
- moved skates to target category (G63)
- biologically-based specifications for GOA 'other species' category (G69, G79)
- amendments to bring FMPs in line with ACL requirements, including moving other species into target category, and creating an ecosystem component category (B95, others)

Regulatory amendments

- Annual specifications for setting harvest levels

Other

- Regular CIE reviews for stock assessments and harvest strategies
- Upcoming amendments to improve management of nontarget species
- SSC recommendation to split out BSAI Pacific cod by subarea

Promote Sustainable Fisheries and Communities

6. Promote conservation while providing for OY
7. Promote management measures that avoid social and economic disruption
8. Promote fair and equitable allocation
9. Promote safety

These considerations are applied to all management actions

Preserve Food Web

10. Develop indices of ecosystem health (*on workplan*)
11. Improve ABC calculations to account for uncertainty and ecosystem
12. Limit harvest on forage species.
13. Incorporate ecosystem considerations in fishery management

Other

- Uncertainty and ecosystem considerations taken into account during stock assessment and harvest specifications
- Ecosystem indices reported and assessed in annual ecosystem SAFE report

Manage Incidental Catch and Reduce Bycatch and Waste

14. Continue and improve current incidental catch and bycatch program (*on workplan*)
15. Develop incentive programs for bycatch reduction (*on workplan*)
16. Encourage research for non-target species population estimates (*on workplan*)
17. Develop management measures that encourage techniques to reduce bycatch (*on workplan*)
18. Continue to manage incidental catch and bycatch through seasons and areas
19. Account for bycatch mortality in TAC accounting (*on workplan*)
20. Control prohibited species bycatch through PSC limits (*on workplan*)
21. Reduce waste to biologically and socially acceptable levels

FMP amendments

- Groundfish retention standard (B79)
- Chinook salmon bycatch (B84, B91)

Regulatory amendments

- Annual specifications for setting prohibited species limits
- Revisions to MRAs
- Revision to regulations for prohibited species donation program and fishmeal

Other

- Upcoming amendment for chum salmon bycatch
- Upcoming amendment on GOA area closures to reduce bairdi crab bycatch
- Upcoming discussion paper revisions on GOA Chinook bycatch
- Council encourages research through annual research priorities
- NMFS staff and observer program working on improving statistical methods for bycatch accounting as part of National Bycatch Report
- Upcoming changes to groundfish retention standard

Avoid Impacts to Seabirds and Marine Mammals

22. Continue to protect ESA-listed and other seabirds
23. Maintain or adjust SSL protection measures (*on workplan*)
24. Encourage review of marine mammal and fishery interactions
25. Continue to protect ESA-listed and other marine mammals (*on workplan*)

Regulatory amendments

- Revisions to seabird avoidance measures, including in Area 4E
- Revisions to Steller sea lion closures for pollock and cod fisheries in the GOA

Other

- Upcoming revision of Steller sea lion protection measures following issuance of revised biological opinion
- Council consideration of additional protection at walrus haulout at Hagemeister Island in northern Bristol Bay
- Council receives protected species report at each meeting, monitoring issues with seabirds and marine mammals

Reduce and Avoid Impacts to Habitat

26. Review and evaluate efficacy of habitat protection measures for managed species (*on workplan*)
27. Identify EFH and HAPC, and mitigate fishery impacts as necessary (*on workplan*)
28. Develop MPA policy
29. Encourage research on baseline habitat mapping (*on workplan*)
30. Develop goals and criteria for MPAs; implement as appropriate (*on workplan*)

FMP amendments

- HAPC (B65/G65) and EFH (B78/G73) amendments, and associated fishery area closures in the GOA and AI
- Bering Sea Habitat Conservation (B89) with area closures for non-pelagic trawling
- Trawl sweep elevation requirement in the Bering Sea flatfish fisheries (B94)

Regulatory amendments

- Annual specifications for setting harvest levels

Other

- EFH 5-year review, and trailing discussion papers to look at groundfish impacts on sablefish and crab EFH
- HAPC call for proposals for skate nurseries
- Council considering designating Alaska MPAs on national MPA center register
- Council encourages research through annual research priorities

Promote Equitable and Efficient Use of Fishery Resources

31. Provide economic and community stability through fair allocation
32. Maintain LLP and initiate rights-based management programs (*on workplan*)
33. Periodically evaluate effectiveness of rights-based management programs
34. Consider efficiency when adopting management measures (*on workplan*)

FMP amendments

- Sector allocations for Pacific cod in BSAI and GOA (B85, G83); fixed gear endorsement in GOA (G86)
- Sector allocations for 3 flatfish species, POP, and Atka mackerel in BSAI, head and gut cooperative; vessel replacement and cooperative formation revisions (B80, B90, B93)
- Latent licenses rescinded (B92/82, G81)
- Cooperative program for rockfish in central GOA (G68); program revisions (G78, G85); new program authorized (G88)
- IRIU rescinded in GOA for shallow water flatfish
- Single geographic location amended for pollock motherships
- IFQ B quota share holders can fish on any size vessel
- Permit fee authorization (all FMPs)

Regulatory amendments

- Other IFQ amendments revisions
- GOA pollock trip limits

Other

- Upcoming changes to Amendment 80 program replacement vessel and groundfish retention standard programs

Increase Alaska Native Consultation

35. Incorporate local and traditional knowledge into fishery management
36. Consider ways to enhance local and traditional knowledge collection
37. Increase Alaska Native participation in fishery management (*on workplan*)

FMP amendments

- CDQ revisions (B71)
- AI pollock to the Aleut Corporation (B82)

Other

- Community outreach and consultation policy adopted by Council in 2008
- Community committee helps prioritize outreach (currently focused on BSAI chum salmon analysis)
- Website redesigned to include a rural outreach component

Improve Data Quality, Monitoring, and Enforcement

38. Increase utility of observer data (*on workplan*)
39. Develop equitable funding mechanisms for the NPGOP (*on workplan*)
40. Increase economic data reporting requirements (*on workplan*)
41. Improve technology for monitoring and enforcement (*on workplan*)
42. Encourage development of an ecosystem monitoring program
43. Cooperate with NPRB to identify needed research
44. Promote enforceability
45. Coordinate management and enforcement programs with Federal, State, international, and local partners

FMP amendments

- Observer program restructuring (B86/G76)
- Remove dark rockfish from FMP, allow management by State of Alaska (B73/G77)

Regulatory amendments

- Electronic reporting, online accounting
- Changes to VMS requirements (required for sablefish in BS, no longer required for dinglebar lingcod in GOA)
- Repeal of vessel incentive program

Other

- Council's economic data collection committee
- Video monitoring is being explored as a tool for monitoring and enforcement
- Council encourages research through annual research priorities, cooperates with NPRB
- Council initiated and participates in Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum, as well as maintaining other relationships with partner entities