

June 2005 Council motion on BSAI Salmon Bycatch (Amendment 84)

The Council approved the public release of the EA/RIR/IRFA for amendment 84 to BSAI groundfish FMP once all comments by the SSC and the Council have been addressed and additional information (including a discussion of the new option under alternative 3) has been included.

The Council modified the existing alternative 3 in the analysis by adding the following option and sub-option. (changes in **bold**)

Alternative 3: Suspend the regulatory salmon savings area closures and allow pollock cooperatives and CDQ groups to utilize their voluntary rolling hot spot closure system to avoid salmon bycatch.

Option 1: Reimpose regulatory salmon savings closures if reported non-compliance with agreement merits expedited action

Option 2: Maintain the regulatory salmon savings area triggers and closures but participants in a cooperative voluntary rolling hotspot closure (VRHS) system would be exempted from compliance with savings area closures. This exemption is subject to Council approval and review of the effectiveness of a VRHS system.

Suboption(applies to option 2): Extend the exemption to the chum salmon savings area closure to vessels in the trawl cod and/or flatfish targets.

The suboption to option 2 is only added provided it does not delay the public review draft of the amendment package. The analysis shall include the contribution of the cod trawl and flatfish vessels to the chum salmon bycatch totals in the CVOA.

A review of salmon population abundance and assessment information is requested for presentation at the October meeting as well as an update on the status of efforts by some western Alaskan groups to develop a cooperative research plan.

Amendment Package B

Problem Statement for Amendment Package B:

The Council and NMFS have initiated analysis of a voluntary rolling hotspot (VRHS) alternative to regulatory salmon savings area closures. Concurrent with that analysis and possible implementation, development will continue on the alternatives that could be implemented if the VRHS approach does not achieve the desired bycatch reduction.

Two possible scenarios under which the VRHS system could produce unsatisfactory results are (1) breach of the inter-cooperative agreement (i.e. one or more vessels fail to participate in the VRHS system, or there are substantial violations of VRHS closures that are not effectively halted through penalties or other measures); or (2) compliance what the VRHS system is good, but the VRHS system fails to achieve the Council's desired level of salmon bycatch reduction. In the first scenario, the Council may ask NMFS to reinstate on an expedited basis the regulatory salmon savings area closure system that is based on the best information available. In the second scenario, the Council intends to consider implementation of an

alternative regulatory system from Package B, or consider and evaluate NFMS hot spot management authority as an option for salmon bycatch management.

Alternatives under amendment package B:

Alternative 1: Establish new regulatory salmon savings area closures taking into account the most recent available salmon bycatch data. This analysis should be completed first and be updated regularly so that it can be implanted on an expedited basis if necessary.

Suboption A: Adjust the Chinook and non-Chinook regulatory closure areas annually based on the most current bycatch data available, such as the 2-3 year rolling average of bycatch rates by species and area.

Suboption B: Adjust the Chinook and non-Chinook regulatory closure areas once inseason based on the best bycatch information available.

Alternative 2: Develop a regulatory individual vessel salmon bycatch accountability program.

Suboption A: managed at the individual level

Suboption B: managed at the co-op level

Suboption 1 (to both alternatives): Develop an individual vessel accountability program that may be implemented if, after 3 years, it is determined the pollock cooperatives' "hot zone" closure system has not reduced salmon bycatch.

Suboption 2 (to both alternatives): Analyze the need and implementation strategy of an appropriate cap to meet requirements of National Standard 9.

[The SSC notes that a great deal of analysis is required to support implementation of such a system and that the current hot spot closure system likely requires additional protection measures, such as a cap]

Additionally, the Council requests the analysis cover bycatch of salmon in non-pollock BSAI trawl fisheries whose other salmon bycatch is included in the cap.

Further, the Council has identified the importance of a research plan in cooperation with the pollock fleet, western Alaska entities, NMFS and ADF&G to facilitate salmon bycatch reduction, including:

- Developing methods for reducing salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery through excluder devices, fishing behavior modification, net design and the like;
- Developing methods to gauge salmon abundance preseason or inseason so that trigger rates can be set appropriately based on the best scientific information; and
- Identifying the rivers of origin of salmon bycatch, and the timing and location of bycatch of the various stocks, paying particular attention to stocks of concern and developing methods to avoid these.

As a basis for understanding some of these issues, the Council further adopts SSC recommendations for presentations on, but not limited to:

1. The "BASIS" salmon program, emphasizing new information on the distribution of chum and Chinook salmon in the eastern Bering Sea;
2. Recent genetic stock ID of chum and Chinook salmon in the eastern Bering Sea; and
3. AYK commercial and subsistence salmon overview by ADF&G staff.