

NPFMC December 2009

C-4 (a) Bering Sea Salmon Bycatch Data Collection Motion

Purpose and Need Statement

In April 2009 the Council approved Amendment 91 to the BSAI groundfish fishery FMP to reduce Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fleet. Under Amendment 91, the pollock fishery has the option of participating in a NMFS-approved Incentive Plan Agreement (IPA) to access a higher hard cap than is available in the absence of an IPA. The IPAs provide a new and innovative method of bycatch management. A data collection program is needed in conjunction with Amendment 91 to understand the effects and impact of the IPAs. The data collection program will focus on: (1) evaluating the effectiveness of the IPA incentives in times of high and low levels of salmon bycatch abundance, the hard cap, and the performance standard in terms of reducing salmon bycatch, and (2) evaluating how the Council's action affects where, when, and how pollock fishing and salmon bycatch occur. The data collection program will also provide data for the agency to study and verify conclusions drawn by industry in the IPA annual reports. To ensure that a full assessment of the program is possible, the data collection program should be implemented at the time Amendment 91 is implemented or as soon as practicable.

To ensure that a full assessment of the program is possible from the start of the program, the data collection program should be separated into two phases, with a suite of data collection measures implemented at the time Amendment 91 goes into effect and sent to the Comprehensive Economic Data Collection Committee after IPAs have been fully developed and submitted to NMFS. The objective of this collection is to provide an improvement in the amount of data available to evaluate the effectiveness of incentives to minimize Chinook salmon bycatch under Amendment 91.

Preferred Alternative

In addition to the status quo data sources:

- (1) Transaction data for salmon and pollock – quantity and price of salmon transfers (survey will be used to determine whether these are arm's length transactions) and quantity of pollock transfers. Require that IPAs and AFA Cooperatives summarize the assignment of Chinook and pollock to each participating vessel at the start of each fishing season, and that they summarize all in-season transfers of Chinook and pollock regardless of whether the transfers were “compensated” transfers.

For all “compensated” salmon transfers, each party (transferor and recipient) must complete and submit to NMFS a Compensated Transfer Form. A transfer is “compensated” if there is an exchange of dollars (or any currency) for bycatch credits from one party to another.

For all compensated transfers, the transfer form will indicate the amount of any monetary compensation for Chinook salmon and whether any other assets were included in the transaction (e.g., pollock quota or non-monetary compensation).

- (2) Information regarding change in fishing grounds defined via identification of any tow prior to a move that is due primarily to salmon bycatch avoidance (implemented through a logbook check box).
- (3) NMFS will administer annual reporting to collect:
Average annual hourly fuel burned fishing and transiting and annual fuel purchases in cost and gallons for each to be used to estimate costs of moving vessels to avoid salmon bycatch (vessel fuel use, transit time, and lost fishing time).

- (4) Post-season surveys of each skipper for each vessel to determine rationale for decision making during the pollock season (fishing location choices and salmon bycatch reduction measures).

The regulations will be developed to provide some flexibility in the information collected on survey forms to respond to data quality and evolving IPA formation and design. The Council will review draft regulations and the initial form structure and any subsequent changes to the form prior to submission to either the Secretary of Commerce or OMB for implementation.