

AMERICANS FOR EQUAL ACCESS

- Working to ensure equal public access to America's natural resources

June 7, 2013

Public Testimony for June Council Meeting
PSC and MRA quotas for Gulf trawlers only

"Thank you Chairman Olson, members of the Council.

For the record, my name is George Hutchings, representing the group Americans For Equal Access - or 'AFEA' - which is a trade and community association of like-minded American citizens who share the common goal of equal public access to public trust resources, including our fisheries.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the extremely important Agenda Item C-5, management of bycatch in the Gulf trawl groundfish fishery.

I am president of AFEA, but also a long-term Alaska resident and commercial fisherman based out of Kodiak.

Our idea is to have a "Bank" of PSC and MRA quota, from which to draw and individual bycatch quota share.

These shares would actually be hard caps because they would be a known entity and amount.

Because some fisheries require more PSC than MRAs, this amount could be calculated into how the quotas of bycatch - both PSC and MRA - could be divided among fisheries species and species complexes, like the shallow and deepwater sole fishery.

Bottom line: the goal is to make each fish count, promote individual responsibility, and to ensure individual accountability.

These fish could be acquired by qualifying vessels per fishery.

Any savings would be rolled into the next quarter or fishery.

These quotas - at this level - could join a co-op and deliver to a certain processor associated with that co-op.

However, none of the bycatch quota could belong to a processor, but it could belong to a processor-owned vessel.

There could be further incentives to reduce the bycatch of PSC by allowing performance-related rewards, much in the way AFA vessels now utilize and share - as well as prioritize - savings in the salmon bycatch plan they have implemented.

A vessel that catches too much PSC - goes over their IBQ - would face forfeiture of salmon in some amount from their next fishery, unless the co-ops agreed to cover vessels exceeding their fair share of the PSC.

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A vessel would also be required to stand down upon reaching - for example - 70% of their PSC quota, per fishery, until said time when a co-op could safely determine a trip for said vessel.

Also, a vessel that acquired savings through performance standards could use those savings where the operator thought best - in some cases, keeping them below the bycatch problem threshold.

All PSC of salmon in all Gulf fisheries would be retained by regulation, and hopefully halibut as well in the future.

Bottom line: a vessel fishing cleanly will catch more of the TAC; a vessel fishing dirty, less.

In regards to MRAs, much the same can be said with that, as with PSC.

We need these PSC and MRA individual quotas to stop the wasteful regulatory mandate of discards over the MRA for that species in another target specie fishery.

This can also be accomplished through a co-operative structure, thereby eliminating the wasteful practice mandated by federal regulations.

With that, I will conclude my testimony and take any questions you may have.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the Council.