

**Non-target Species Committee Meeting  
Seattle, WA  
November 15, 2004**

Committee members: Dave Benson (chair), Lori Swanson, Julie Bonney, Karl Haflinger, Paul Spencer, Whit Sheard, Janet Smoker, Eric Olson, Dave Wood. Michelle Ridgway was absent (jury duty). Staff: Jane DiCosimo and Sarah Gaichas. Ten agency staff also attended.

At its previous meeting, the committee discussed whether to define non-target species as a separate fishery management unit with unique management objective(s). John Lepore reviewed the MSFMA definition of “fishery,” at the request of the committee. The Act defines a “fishery” as “(a) one or more stocks of fish which can be treated as a unit for purposes of conservation and management and which are identified on the basis of geographical, scientific, technical, recreational, and economic characteristics; and (b) any fishing for such stocks.” Therefore, the Act allows a definition based on either a single species or multiple species caught together or on those that fish on those single or multi-species stocks, or both. The Act requires that FMPs define fisheries, although the BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPs do not do so. Defining fisheries would achieve consistency with the Act if the OFL and OY acts at the same level of aggregation. Future FMP amendments under the non-target species initiative may include options to define the fisheries.

The Council did not take the September 2004 committee report at its October 2004 meeting; *the committee reiterated its request for Council clarification regarding its draft problem statement for revisions to management of non-target species and its recommendation for a 3-step approach which prioritizes the development of a FMP amendments to revise management of non-target rockfishes, and subsequent analyses for non-target flatfishes and “other species.” The committee also had requested that the Council provide additional direction to the committee as to whether it should also develop recommendations for target rockfish management, as some species that are targeted in the GOA are caught incidentally in the BSAI.*

The committee reviewed revised draft alternatives recommended by the ad hoc working group in November 2004 (attached). It discussed that it may not be prudent to proceed with initiation of an analysis until proposed revisions to the National Standard Guidelines are published as a final rule. In the interim, *the committee recommended initiating a GOA FMP amendment to revise how the GOA “other species” TAC is set as a near term conservation act with final action in June 2005, as follows:*

- Alternative 1. No action (TAC = 5 percent of sum of all GOA TACs).
  - Alternative 2. Revise the TAC-setting formula for GOA “other species.”
    - Option 1. Set TAC ≤ 5 percent, sufficient to allow for a directed fishery to occur during the fishing year.
    - Option 2. Set TAC at a level sufficient to meet anticipated catch levels in other directed fisheries during the fishing year
- Suboption: Revise maximum retainable allowances for “other species” by fishery.

**Problem Statement:** In May 2004, a final rule was published which removed skates from the “other species” complex in the Gulf of Alaska. This rule established ABCs and TACs, based on survey biomass, for big, longnose, and other skates and thus provided a measure of protection against possible overfishing of skates in the Gulf of Alaska. Those species remaining in the other species complex include sharks, sculpins, and octopi. None of these species are currently the object of a target fishery, although the complex is open for directed fishing. While no ABC or OFL is set for this complex, TAC is defined as 5% of the combined TACs of all other groundfish species in the GOA.

While recognizing that no members of the complex are targeted, the Non-Target Species Committee also noted that the removal of skates from the complex resulted in the potential for increased harvest of the remaining “other species”. This is because the harvest of skates no longer accrues to the “other species” category. In addition, when a member is removed, the sum of all the single species TACs increases, resulting in an increase of the “other species” TAC when the 5% default TAC is applied. Ideally, the TAC for the “other species” complex would be lowered when a member such as skates is removed. Unfortunately, biomass estimates for most of the species in this group cannot be determined reliably by trawl surveys, and the remaining species still exist in a group with TAC determined by the TACs of other groundfish species in the Gulf of Alaska. Lacking any means of determining a survey-based TAC for this group leads to the conclusion that when members are removed, the Council should consider reducing the percentage basis for the other species TAC to something less than 5% of the combined members.

The committee intends to meet again immediately prior to or coincident with the February 2005 Council meeting in Seattle. Availability of the draft rockfish discussion paper will inform the choice of meeting date.