

DRAFT
Non-Target Species Committee
AFSC-Seattle
March 23, 2010

Members in Seattle: Dave Benson, Karl Haflinger, Michelle Ridgway, Dr Paul Spencer, Lori Swanson, Anne Vanderhoeven

Members by phone: Julie Bonney, Janet Smoker, Jon Warrenchuk

Members absent: Dr Ken Goldman, John Gauvin

Committee staff in Seattle: Jane DiCosimo, Dr Olav Ormseth

Agency staff: in Seattle: Dr Loh-lee Low, Dr Grant Thompson, Dr Anne Hollowed, Dr Liz Conners; by phone: Mary Furuness, Tom Pearson, Dr Cindy Tribuzio, Dave Clausen, Cara Rodgveller, Clayton Jernigan, Maura Sullivan, Dr Phil Rigby

Agenda The Non-Target Species Committee convened at 9 am (PST) on Tuesday, March 23, 2010. The main agenda topics included discussion of final action on the Groundfish ACL plan amendments to conform to requirements for annual catch limits (ACL) and accountability measures (AM) under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and to discuss potential management changes to address management issues for non-target species.

Review status of proposed groundfish ACL action. Jane DiCosimo briefly reviewed the proposed timeline for action for revising the groundfish fishery management plans (FMPs) to meet requirements for ACLs and AMs. Final action is needed by April 2010 so that implementation can occur by the statutory deadline of January 2011. Alternative 1 would be the no action alternative. Target species, BSAI squids, and GOA and BSAI skates currently are managed under catch limits (status quo). Alternative 2 would 1) manage GOA squids, GOA and BSAI sculpins, GOA and BSAI sharks, and GOA and BSAI octopuses under group catch limits; 2) manage prohibited species and forage fishes (with no change to their regulations) under the EC category, and 3) moving non-specified species out of the FMP. Alternative 3 differs from Alternative 2 by managing forage fish in the fishery. It would require adoption of proposed biological reference points for these groups by the Council in October 2010.

The committee discussed the differences between the two action alternatives, principally the placement of forage fish in the FMPs. The EA identified that data on forage fish was limited for identifying essential fish habitat or for setting biological reference points, particularly by the statutory deadline. Jon Warrenchuk asked why OFLs could not be set for forage fish. Anne Hollowed responded that it may be possible to do so in a few years after major research initiatives that were ongoing in the BSAI and were planned for the GOA were concluded; however this may be achieved for select forage species. Olav Ormseth cautioned that biomass estimates based on acoustic surveys might provide a minimum estimate because the survey is not targeted on forage fish species (such as capelin). He suggested that such efforts could prove costly. He added that the current catch deterrents (i.e., maximum retainable allowances) likely are more appropriate than catch limits; further, new requirements for total catch accounting would be difficult to perform for these species. Paul Spencer noted that with expected advancements in our knowledge of forage fish species under BSEIRP and GOAIERP, the AFSC may be able to develop biomass estimates and ACLs for them. Leaving them in the EC category may result in their being ignored. He and Olav suggested that species listed in the EC category should have a mandatory periodic review. The committee discussed the need for a periodic review of the placement of species both 'in the fishery' and in the EC category.

Dave Benson recognized that the advancement of science is a good idea, and asked whether the committee wanted to recommend that it may reconsider the placement of forage fish in the future? Michelle Ridgway responded that because we do not know the impacts of their removals on the ecosystem, we would reconsider the management category for forage fish (and all species) on a periodic basis in the future. The committee recognized that the placement of stocks under these plan amendments was necessary to meet the statutory deadline to identify those in the fishery, which are subject to ACLs and AMs. Jon expressed concern that the best available science was being determined because of timing

and that the EA should be more explicit in this regard. Other federal actions identify that forage fish are those that would be affected first; they live on the edge of energy budgets, are more vulnerable to pollution.

Committee members commented on specifics of the ACL EA. Lori asked why quantitative estimates of foregone losses to directed fisheries on target stocks as a result of separate ACLs for sharks, sculpins, octopuses, and GOA squid were not provided. Jane responded that she was not able to project what the group level TACs might be, nor which directed fisheries would be closed as a result of attaining those hypothetical TACs. Julie commented that the cumulative GOA other species OFL and ABC projected for 2010 in Figure 8 conflicted with similar data reported in an earlier table. She also said that she contacted Mary Furuness regarding catches assigned to certain GOA gear/target categories presented in Figures 20 and 21. Mary responded that her staff will provide corrected data/figures to the Council prior to final action.

After additional discussion, the committee recommended that the Council select Alternative 2 as its preferred alternative for both the BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMPs.

Next steps. After a brief review of potential action that the Council might take based on past discussions of the Council and its advisory bodies, Jane suggested that the committee could consider recommending that staff prepare a discussion paper of issues of interest. The committee concurred with that approach. The following list of items was recommended for the paper. Additional guidance to staff was provided but not reported here.

- For stocks in the fishery:
 - Discuss how species could be apportioned to particular targets/gears as is done with PSC (a ‘skeleton’ framework for apportionments with actual numbers determined in the annual specification process)
 - Update Smoker and Miller (cite) that includes spatial and seasonal analysis, along with potential impacts on directed fisheries, and including tables of the data along with graphical interpretations;
 - Effects of moving grenadiers in the fishery by FMP area;
 - General discussion of discard mortality rates (DMR), with focus on sharks and octopus examples. Include discussion of effect of retention requirements (GRS) on mortality.
 - Description of Agency authority to control catch to prevent large closures (e.g., area-specific closures, careful release programs)
 - Discussion of effect of unobserved fisheries on determination of total catch
- For stocks in the EC category:
 - Effects of managing squids and/or octopus (compared to status quo);
 - Effects of managing grenadiers (compared to status quo or in the fishery) by FMP area;
 - General discussion of current NMFS management authority for EC species (specific issues include 1) processing limits, 2) how to define EC criteria of “not generally retained,” 3) MRAs, 4) DMRs, 5) mandatory review of species, and 6) frequency of vulnerability analyses;
 - General discussion of management implications for total catch accounting (e.g., observer program) for stocks moved into the EC category

New Business. No new business

Next meeting. Schedule for a next meeting would be linked to review of discussion paper

Adjourn. The committee adjourned at approximately noon.