

**DRAFT Minutes of the RPA Committee Meeting,
August 23-24, 2001**

Members Present:

Larry Cotter (chair)
Dave Benson
Shane Capron
Doug DeMaster
John Gauvin
Terry Leitzell
Alan Parks

Beth Stewart
John Winther
Sue Hills
Wayne Donaldson
Jack Taggart
Bob Small
Fred Robison

Gerald Leape
Jerry Bongen
John Iani
Matt Moir
Dave Cline
Steve Drage

Staff present: *Dave Witherell (coordinator), Cathy Coon (NPFMC), Clarence Pautzke (NPFMC), Ron Berg (NMFS), Mike Payne (NMFS), Sue Salvesson (NMFS), Tamra Faris (NMFS), Melanie Brown (NMFS), Lowell Fritz (NMFS), Lauren Smoker (NOAA GC), Kristin Mabry (ADF&G), Earl Krygier (ADF&G), and several other NMFS staff.*

Background - This Committee was established to respond to the Steller sea lion (SSL) Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA) and experimental design in a technical, operational, and practical sense to try to make it more functional. The remaining task of the Committee is to provide an alternative RPA for analysis (by June), and make recommendations to the SSC, AP, and Council on the analysis.

Meeting - The eighth meeting of the RPA Committee was held August 23 - 24 in Juneau at the NMFS Regional Office, beginning at 8 am. Larry Cotter briefly reviewed the remaining tasks of the Committee, the draft agenda, and format of Committee meetings. The minutes from the previous meeting were approved with one note that Jack Taggart was not present at that meeting. Public comment was allowed after each meal break.

The purpose of the meeting was to review the draft SEIS (including draft BiOp4), which was mailed out to Committee members on August 20. Tamra Faris walked the Committee through the contents of the SEIS. Shane Capron provided an overview presentation on the contents of the draft biological opinion, and Doug DeMaster reviewed the analysis that went into the 'no jeopardy-no adverse modification' determination for Alternative 4. Earl Krygier provided a summary of the Alaska Steller sea lion restoration team, and paper copies of the report were distributed. Bob Small reported on the most recent draft of the telemetry white paper, which is available on the web.

It was noted that the BiOp's conclusions assume that the State will mirror federal regulations during the parallel fisheries, just as originally proposed by the Committee (although at least one committee member felt that this issue was not necessarily clear). In other words, closures would apply for both state and federally permitted vessels during the parallel fisheries, but state managed fisheries within 3 nm would remain unchanged. To date, the State has given no indication that they would adopt these closures within state waters, and the Board of Fisheries cannot take action prior to their next meeting on November 11. Without these closures, however, NMFS may need to revisit their conclusions of the BiOp. Interested parties decided that they would meet prior to the Council meeting to determine the scope of the issue.

The Committee reviewed the two issues regarding GOA pollock contained in the June Council motion. The Committee agreed that Alternative 4 should contain a Western and Central GOA pollock "C" season start

date August 25 vs. the proposed September 1 date. The Committee felt that August 25 would provide additional time needed to take the pollock and cod TAC in the fall openings. The date change did not raise any additional concerns regarding sea lions or salmon bycatch. The Committee did not agree to changing the W GOA “A” season pollock allocation to 30% and “B” season to 20% (vs. the proposed “A” 25% and “B” 25%). While there may be additional benefits of being able to catch pollock when the roe was mature, there were concerns raised by the agency regarding Steller sea lions in that it resulted in additional pollock catches during the mid-winter months.

The Committee reviewed the three options of Alternative 4 and made recommendations for the Council. The Committee recommends that neither option 1 (Chignik small boat exemption) nor option 2 (Unalaska small boat exemption) be adopted. The federal waters in these areas have not been important to the local small boat fleets, based on historical performance as shown in figures and tables from the SEIS. Additionally, the Committee notes that these proposed limited fishing zones occur within areas 4 and 9, which area large areas where no pollock, mackerel, or cod fishing would be allowed. These areas may be important for evaluating the efficacy of management measures. The Committee also recommends that Option 3 (the Pacific cod zonal approach) not be adopted. Option 3 was evaluated in the SEIS and RIR as an option, not as a stand-alone alternative. The Committee noted that although this option may have additional benefits to sea lions, it would result in potentially significant adverse social and economic impacts, and raise safety issues. Adopting this option would also require preparation of a new BiOp.

The Committee was provided with a revised proposal from John Gauvin regarding platooning the Atka mackerel fleet. The proposal (attached), was developed based on management and monitoring concerns raised in the SEIS. The proposal would ease management burdens via pre-announced closures. It also addresses fairness concerns by having random team assignments, establishing team catch limits based on vessel capacity, having team quotas only for inside critical habitat, and stand-down times commensurate with the length of the fishery. A discussion of the proposal with Doug and Shane did not raise any additional concerns relative to sea lions. The Committee accepted the revised proposal for platooning the mackerel fleet, noting that some members (Leape, Cline, Parks) would continue to object.

To address the concerns regarding spatial and temporal measures raised by the BiOp4 cover letter, a proposal for additional restrictions was put forth by Terry Leitzell (attached). For BSAI cod fisheries, additional area closures in Area 8 would apply to longline fisheries, and the trawl fishery would be spread out over 3 seasons with differing apportionments for catcher vessels and catcher-processors. The Bering Sea pollock fishery would be modified by adding a more restrictive catch limit in the SCA, such that only 70% of the catch could be taken within the SCA prior to April 1. Doug re-ran his bump calculations and determined that these revisions would have some positive impacts for sea lions. The revisions would improve the index to -0.28%, up from the BiOp4 index for Alternative 4 of -0.41%. The Committee recommended that these revisions for the BSAI cod and pollock fisheries be adopted as part of the preferred alternative. Note that some members (Leape, Cline, Parks) continue to object.