

ACDC Cod Proposal #1

Introduction materials

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Brief Statement of Proposal

Reinstate the pre-2010 RPA to allow fishing for cod in the Aleutian Islands management area, without the 'no concurrent fishery' provisions, and adopt a cap on cod removals in the AI based on the best estimate of biomass, either the ratio of AI survey biomass to EBS survey biomass, or an AI TAC based on an SSC approved stock assessment model.

Objectives of Proposal

Problems:

The RPA for the AI cod fishery adopted based on the 2010 BiOp reduces fishing opportunities for cod in the Aleutians.

The current RPA results in a spatially compressed fishery for cod that could lead to local depletion.

The current RPA results in redeployment of effort into higher bycatch areas in Unimak Pass.

The current RPA results in reduced landings to the community of Adak which is highly dependent on the cod fishery.

Proposed Changes to Regulations:

This proposal would reopen critical habitat to cod trawling in 543 and in 542 west of 178 west, outside of 10 miles of listed haulouts and rookeries. East of 178 west in 542 and in 541 it would reopen critical habitat to cod trawling outside of 10 miles from rookeries and 3 miles from haulouts.

The proposal would eliminate the provision from the 2001 RPA that required that the Atka mackerel platoons complete their HLA harvest prior to allowing a cod trawl fishery between 10 and 20 miles of a listed site.

For fixed gear, it would reopen critical habitat west of the Seguam foraging area except outside of 3 miles from rookeries and within 10 miles of the Buldir rookery

It would add a cap on cod removals in the AI based on the best estimate of biomass, either the ratio of AI survey biomass to EBS survey biomass, or an AI TAC based on an SSC approved stock assessment model.

Justification:

As noted by the CIE and Bernard et al, there is no evidence that the current RPA provides any benefits to SSL and thus are un-necessary under the ESA. This proposal is more consistent with MSA objectives relative to good management of cod in the Aleutians to attain optimum yield and to meet the national standards relative to fishery dependent communities.

The ‘no concurrent’ fishery provision was an artifact of the Atka mackerel platoon system. The Amendment 80 coops are a better tool to spatially and temporally disperse effort in the mackerel fishery than platoons and ‘no concurrent fishery’ rules.

Impacts of Proposal

Based on the CIE review and the States’ Independent review there is no scientific evidence of either positive or negative effects of the AI cod fishery on Steller sea lions.

Cod stocks may benefit from avoiding local depletion that could result from spatially compressed effort.

EBS cod fishers may benefit due to lower halibut bycatch rates in the Aleutians which allowing more cod to be harvested without reaching the halibut bycatch cap governing the BSAI.

The Aleutian Island community of Adak is more likely to receive more landings of cod, generating jobs and revenue for the community.

Supporting data and other documentation

Both the “Independent, Scientific Review of the Biological Opinion (2010)” by Bernard, et al, and the three reviews of the BiOp by the Center for Independent Experts question the basis of the 2010 BiOp RPAs.

Adak Community Development Corporation’s “Comments on the Draft August 2010 Groundfish Biological Opinion Submitted September 3rd, 2010 to Jim Balsiger, Regional Administrator Alaska Region, NMFS” and “Comments on the November 24, 2010 Final Groundfish Biological Opinion (RIN 0648-BA31) Submitted February 26, 2011” identified a variety of information that was either ignored or misinterpreted in the 2010 BiOp.

In particular ACDC's comments provide detailed documentation of the limited degree of competitive overlap between SSLs and the cod trawl fishery in the AI. A brief summary of the limited nature of overlap follows here:

Type of fish eaten/caught – Based on the information in Aydin's Ecosystem modeling, cod are a small percent of the AI biomass of species in the preyfield that show up in the SSL scat.

Size of fish eaten/caught - Observer data shows less than 10% of AI trawl cod by numbers are <60 cm. Scat analysis (NMFS 2000) showed that less than 10% of cod consumed by SSL were >60 cm

Depth of fishing/foraging - Observer data shows less than 15% of AI trawl cod hauls were <100 meters. New SSL dive data (Lander, 2011) still shows less than 15% of adult female dives >100 meters.

Area of fishing/foraging - 95% of locations associated with diving to > 4m stratified by distance to shore and seafloor depth in the Eastern and Central Aleutian Islands combined 29 sea lions during November-April were with 5 miles of land and in less than 100 meters seafloor depth while less than 15% of trawl location were less than 100 meters seafloor depth. 100% of juvenile winter telemetry locations in the Central/Western Aleutians were inside 10 miles of a listed CH site.

Season/time-of-day of fishing/foraging – Cod trawling occurs primarily during daylight hours in the AI, while SSL foraging activity occurs mostly at night.

Alternative solutions

ACDC is submitting an alternative proposal (proposal #2) for cod based on the Council's proposed RPA in response to the draft 2010 BiOp. It is sub-optimal at addressing the negative impacts of the current RPAs and imposes additional costs on the fishery with no evidence of additional benefit to SSL.

Justification for Council action

If the Council doesn't take action, Adak will continue to bear the brunt of the negative economic impact of RPAs for cod that, according to the weight of independent scientific review, are unlikely to provide any benefit to SSL.