

Aleutians East Borough Proposed Alternative 2
for Steller Sea Lion Mitigation Measures in the current EIS.
Submitted for Consideration by the
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
Steller Sea Lion Mitigation Committee

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Statement of Proposed Alternative

Change the opening date of the Pacific cod A-season in the Western Gulf of Alaska NMFS reporting area 610. The current season opening date is January 1 for fixed gear, January 20 for trawl gear. The proposed A-season opening date would be February 1 for all gear types.

Objectives of Proposal

The first objective for this alternative is to increase the economy of fishing operations. By allowing fishermen to wait until fish are aggregated, fishing effort is more efficient thereby reducing fuel and other costs. Also, cod tend to aggregate during peak spawning periods, and harvesting during these periods could result in a more valuable catch, resulting in better prices paid for fish.

The second objective for this alternative is to reduce the amount of bycatch. Bycatch rates are lower when the cod are aggregated and bycatch rates are higher in during ‘scratch’ fisheries. The result of the proposed delayed A-season opening date may be fishing during stronger aggregations of cod, and in turn, result in lower bycatch rates.

Impacts of Proposal

The intent of the proposed alternative is to delay the A-season opening to coincide with aggregated Pcod stocks. The proposed change should have little or no impact on the wDPS of the SSL or designated critical habitat. Local communities, however, will be positively impacted by giving fishermen the opportunity to bring better fish to market and receive higher prices, and resulting in higher raw fish taxes for municipalities.

Supporting Data and documentation

The following discussion paper was presented to the Council at the March 2012 meeting:

GOA Pacific Cod A Season Opening Date Change available online at:

http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/PDFdocuments/catch_shares/Pcod/AseasonDiscPap-GOApcod_312.pdf

Alternative Solutions

An alternative solution would be to have the fixed gear sector open earlier on January 15, and only the trawl sector open February 1st. This staggered opening may mitigate any SSL nutritional stress concerns.

Justification for Council Action

The Council is currently establishing a program to provide tools for comprehensive bycatch reduction in the CGOA. This proposal by the AEB was originally introduced as a homegrown alternative to catch shares that reduces bycatch and increases harvested catch value. Considering this proposal and revisiting the discussion paper is warranted in light of the current bycatch tools discussion and requests by the Council for WGOA fishermen to propose program goals and objectives for the WGOA groundfish fisheries.