

**North Pacific Fishery Management Council
Steller Sea Lion Mitigation Committee
August 27-28, 2003 Meeting**

Minutes

Chairman Cotter reviewed the agenda for this meeting, which focused almost exclusively on a review of proposals for amending Steller sea lion¹ protection measures in the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries; a report from the SSLMC's subcommittee on experimental design was the other main subject of this meeting. Minutes of the July 28-29 meeting were approved as drafted and circulated prior to the meeting. The final July meeting minutes will be posted on the Council's web site.

Committee members attending this meeting were: Chairman Larry Cotter and members Dave Benson, Julie Bonney, Shane Capron, Tony DeGange, Doug DeMaster, John Gauvin, Sue Hills, Terry Leitzell, Chuck McCallum, Matt Moir, and Beth Stewart. Bill Wilson attended as NPFMC staff.

Bill Wilson reviewed a possible timeline for taking the measures this committee develops through the Council review, public review, and regulation implementation process. NMFS asked the committee to develop one action for NMFS review. This action would contain a suite of measures with supporting documentation and rationale; Cotter and Wilson agreed to take what the committee recommends, develop a draft package, and circulate it to the committee for review and approval. This draft amendment proposal package will then go to the Council for review at their October meeting, and if approved, will be forwarded to NMFS for review and informal consultation on protected resources issues. The committee may meet again to review NMFS comments, if necessary. The proposed amendment package would then be developed by NMFS into an Environmental Assessment, possibly by February 2004, possibly as late as April 2004. After Council review and then public review, the Council would review the final package in June 2004 for final approval. The amendment package would then proceed through the NMFS noticing, regulation writing, and implementation process. If the above proceeds as anticipated, measures approved in the above process would be effective for the 2005 fishing season.

Proposal Review Process

Cotter recommended that the committee first conduct an initial review of each proposal for clarity and to allow the committee to ask questions. NMFS reminded the proposers that the proposal should consider that changes in wSSL protection measures are a zero sum process. If changes are proposed to allow fishing in previously closed protection areas, then the proposal should suggest a closure at another site that would compensate for the proposed action, with a net effect that is of approximately the same magnitude as the proposed action.

Beth Stewart expressed concern that this approach may be difficult to follow because of the uncertain linkage between wSSL declines and fishing activities, particularly regarding whether fishery removals of pollock and cod are a factor. She noted that communities in the GOA are suffering economic hardships, and some villages are seeing human population declines because of poor local economic conditions. Stewart noted that in the western Gulf, the few remaining eastern Aleut peoples are leaving villages to seek better economic conditions elsewhere. Fishermen are frustrated when they see population declines in Gulf communities while some wSSL rookeries and haulouts are experiencing increasing numbers of animals.

¹ Steller sea lions discussed in these minutes are the western population and are designated wSSL. When used, SSL refers to the combined western and eastern populations.

Doug DeMaster acknowledged that there are no widely accepted criteria for determining when the wSSL population has returned to a level of abundance that this population can be delisted under the Endangered Species Act. He noted the difficulty in determining at what point we go under the bar of jeopardy and adverse modification. Shane Capron also noted that the recent rebound of wSSLs in parts of the Gulf may be due to the fishing restrictions that are in place, and this gives some support to not relaxing these measures prematurely when we may be achieving success.

Julie Bonney noted that there are two main issues in the set of proposals before the committee: 1) a set of proposed openings of areas closed as wSSL protection measures, and 2) several apportionment and fishing season measures. Bonney asserted that in some cases, relaxing wSSL closures in some areas might have small effects on wSSLs because of other layers of fishing restrictions that would remain unchanged. She noted that industry in the central GOA primarily wants a change in how Pacific cod is allocated. Two possible approaches exist: either for fishermen to have access to more quota earlier in the fishing season, or to apportion Pacific cod quota by gear type.

The committee discussed further the process for reviewing proposals, and what kind of metrics might be used to judge the merits of each proposed action. Without a BUMP analysis, what other tools might the committee use? Cotter suggested that some of this will require a qualitative screening, perhaps using a 0 to 10 scale for evaluating impacts on wSSLs and a similar 0 to 10 scale for how the proposed action benefits fishermen. DeMaster noted that probably the most important issue to wSSLs is the 0 to 10 n mi zone; telemetry data show a strong affinity to the 10 n mi zone around haulouts and rookeries. Areas outside of 20 n mi probably are of much less concern to wSSLs (in terms of fishery harvest of prey).

Terry Leitzel recommended that the committee proceed with a reasoned review of proposals, and not worry too much about legal challenge or the potential for NMFS consultation on the package the committee develops. Let the science guide the committee actions, and if this takes us beyond the zero sum process, the committee should consider submitting such a package for NMFS review and consultation, even formal consultation if necessary.

John Gauvin cautioned that as the committee attempts to compare geographic areas as to their value to SSLs, the committee should remember that catch statistics do not provide a complete picture of sea lion prey availability. CPUE data indicate where fish have been caught, yes, but only where fishing effort has occurred. Many areas of the Gulf are not fished because of rough bottom conditions and other reasons; thus there are no CPUE data for such areas, even though they may provide habitat for fish – fish that are important to SSLs. This may confound the committee's ability to reasonably evaluate geographic area countermeasures to some of the proposals because of the lack of CPUE data in some areas – areas that may be good foraging habitat for wSSLs.

The committee recognized the limitations and constraints as discussed above. But agreed to press forward with a review. Fifteen proposals were submitted. The following is a recap of the committee discussions of each.

Proposal Review – Round One

Proposal # 1 Remove the requirement for quarterly two-week pollock trawl fishery stand-down periods (between the A and B seasons and between the C and D seasons) in the GOA. The seasonal TACs would still be allocated as they are currently. This measure would allow fishermen more fishing time, and would eliminate some of the costs in gearing up repeatedly over the year. Bonney noted that if CPUEs are high, however, a “stand down” might still occur between some seasons anyhow (fishermen would take the TAC allocation before the next season started). But fishermen desire to remove this regulation

because it would give the fleet the flexibility to optimize fishing effort, and would enhance safety (would give more fishing time to the fleet and thus the choice to avoid periods of poor weather conditions). The Aleutians East Borough supports this measure. Initial NMFS reaction is that this would be a “sea lion neutral” measure that would not adversely affect wSSLs and likely could move forward. [Note: this proposal also has pollock TAC rollover consequences, but these were addressed with in the NMFS Proposal # 9.]

Proposal # 2 Allow pollock trawl fishing to 10 n mi near Marmot Island. Other fishing restrictions around Marmot Island would remain as is. A proposed countermeasure would be to close to directed pollock trawl fishing in an area of comparable size around Sea Otter Island. The effect of this proposal is to allow access to fishing areas that are close to Kodiak, which is of particular importance to smaller vessels, and to restrict fishing around a known wSSL haulout at Sea Otter Island. The proposal also suggests including the proposed fishing around Marmot Island in any future adaptive management experiment on fishing effects on wSSLs.

Capron expressed concerns that wSSLs are still declining at Marmot (the 1991 – 2000 decline is significant [p=0.10]). DeMaster noted that recent pup counts at Marmot Island increased between 1998 and 2002; however, it was too early to infer whether this represents an increasing trend in pup production at this rookery. Also the level of fishing at Sea Otter Island is currently unknown, and the tradeoffs between the two might not be comparable. The committee noted that because of the size of geographic area that would be included in the proposed closure at Sea Otter Is, this could possibly provide some protection for wSSLs that forage near Marmot. DeMaster reminded the committee of a major research effort ongoing at Marmot; additional fishing closer to shore could impact those efforts. The committee noted that this proposal would still preserve a closure from 0 to 10 n mi, the area that is most important to wSSLs according to telemetry data.

Proposal # 3 Change the P cod seasonal TAC apportionment in the GOA to either a 60-20-20 or an 80-20 scheme. The AEB supports this measure. Bonney noted that GOA fishermen would prefer an apportionment that more closely reflects the fishing regime that existed before the current SSL protection measures. DeMaster noted that part of the reason for the current 60-40 split is to ensure that large amounts of cod are not removed during the winter months, a period of importance to weaning wSSLs. Capron also noted that concentrating fishing early in the year is part of what NMFS called jeopardy on several years ago, and the 60-40 split helped remove the jeopardy determination. She suggested that, if the proposed 80-20 split option wouldn't be acceptable, the proposed alternative with a 60-20-20 split might be a good compromise, preserving the 60% TAC harvest in the first part of the year thought to be important to weaning wSSLs. Stewart stated that this split would put fishing effort in proportion to the availability of cod, which are aggregated during winter months.

DeMaster noted that it could be argued that trawling disperses fish, making fish harder for sea lions to forage. Capron added that in recent years, NMFS managers have found it difficult to maintain the desired split, resulting in fishery harvests that have been closer to 75-25 which negates the desired 60-40 split recommended in the BiOp. NMFS desires to retain the 60-40 split, particularly because the State water fishery also is removing cod during the first season. NMFS' proposal (# 10) is to revise regulations to ensure that the TAC split returns to harvests that are closer to the desired 60-40 scheme. Thus proposals # 3 and # 10 are somewhat in opposition to each other.

Gauvin noted that a gear split of TAC in the GOA would go a great distance in relieving some of industry's concerns. The committee hopes that the Council will include gear allocations in the Gulf Rationalization process (see next proposal).

Proposal # 4 Fast track implementing a provision for allocating P cod by gear type and sector. This would enable industry to work out among themselves an optimal means of harvesting cod, with benefits to small Gulf communities and still preserving the goal of spreading out harvest. The committee noted that this proposal might be beyond our scope of work, but that the committee strongly endorses this as a necessary positive step the Council should take in improving fishing conditions in the GOA. The committee asks the Council to expeditiously move forward with Gulf Rationalization, in phases if possible, and do TAC splits among gear types and sectors first to provide economic relief to stakeholders as soon as possible.

Proposal # 5 Allow pollock trawl fishing at the Puale Bay haulout to 3 n mi from January 20 to June 10 and to 10 n mi from June 10 to November 1. A countermeasure is to close to pollock trawl fishing more area at Cape Douglas (Shaw Island) – i.e. close the area out to 20 n mi. Industry feels this is a major safety issue; Shelikof Strait is dangerous, especially in winter and particularly for small vessels, and by allowing fishing closer to Puale Bay, vessels do not have to venture further offshore. Some on the committee speculated that this proposal offers a larger area as a countermeasure than the size of area proposed to be opened at Puale Bay. NMFS noted that the tradeoff, in terms of protection of sea lions, might not be equal (in the other direction) because of the significance of the decline at Puale and that fewer wSSLs may haul out at Cape Douglas.

Proposal # 6 Open to 3 n mi pollock and P cod trawl fishing in the closed area around Cape Chiniak. As a countermeasure, close more area around Latax Rocks (out to 20 n mi). This proposal would preserve the seasonal closure that is part of the NMFS fishing experiment in the Chiniak area should funding be restored for this work. Capron noted a strong concern that additional fishing within the Chiniak foraging area could adversely affect sea lions. Bonney stated that this proposal gives back to fishermen a previously important fishing area close to Kodiak, an area that has been part of the bread and butter of the Kodiak economy. Furthermore, Bonney noted that diet studies in this area suggest sea lions consume many fish species, including pollock, and thus fishing may not have a serious impact on wSSL diets near Cape Chiniak. Cotter asked if there aren't similar numbers of sea lions at both Chiniak and Latax, making this a comparable trade-off. Capron noted that Chiniak has historically supported larger numbers of wSSLs.

[The committee then discussed at length the process to be used for judging these proposals. Without a BUMP analysis tool, it is difficult to determine the merits of competing proposals. Capron suggested that a tool could be constructed using area, prey density, wSSL counts and trends, etc. Some on the committee expressed frustration over how to weigh different features of these proposals. And the committee asked: should historic high counts of wSSLs at rookeries and haulouts be used as some kind of benchmark, more heavily weighting sites that had historic high counts and weighting less those sites where historic counts were lower?]

Proposal # 7 Change the way incidental catch of P cod is calculated in those fisheries that target other species of groundfish. The committee noted that a large amount of hook and line and trawl fishing occurs between directed P cod seasons in the GOA, and with these fisheries comes a moderate incidental catch of P cod, thereby reducing the amount of TAC remaining for pot fisheries. Pot fishermen suffer the consequences since the entire B season TAC can be taken as bycatch in fisheries targeting species other than cod. The proposal suggests using observer data to calculate actual bycatch rates as a replacement for the currently established MRAs for these fisheries.

The committee discussed the difficulty in calculating “natural” bycatch rates because of the lack of comprehensive observer coverage in the Gulf. The committee also acknowledged that the proposal suggests an alternative – provide for sector splits of TAC for P cod in the Gulf. This is part of the Council’s Gulf Rationalization efforts, which the SSLMC endorses and again asks that the Council move

forward expeditiously to provide for more rational fisheries in the Gulf. Stakeholders recommend a gear and sector TAC split measure as soon as possible.

Proposal # 8 Reduce the closures around Kak and Sutwik Islands to allow pot P cod fishing to 3 n mi. Provide as a countermeasure larger wSSL protection zones around Chirikof Island (to 40 n mi) and Kilokak Rocks (a new closure, to 20 n mi). Stewart noted that a closure at Kilokak Rocks might be of concern to some fishermen using this area now. The committee discussed that if too large an area were opened at Kak and Sutwik, vessels from other areas could move in and negate the desired effect of this proposal – i.e. to provide more fishing opportunity close to Chignik for local fishermen. DeMaster stated that the proposed countermeasure for closing more area around Chirikof would not likely help sea lions. Benson suggested that an alternative might be to reduce the size of the proposed open areas, perhaps limiting the proposal to Kak only.

Proposal # 9 Change the regulations on pollock rollovers. This would help fishermen take the entire allocated TAC; a more efficient fishery would result. But NMFS is asking industry for a preferred way of doing the rollovers. Discussion of the proposed options seemed to suggest a preference for rolling over unused TAC from one region into the remaining open areas in proportion to the projected biomass in those regions (as estimated by the Plan Teams at the beginning of each year). NMFS desires to do the rollovers in a manner to solve two problems: 1) to allow fish to be caught in some proportion to where they are thought to be distributed, and 2) to do the rollover so as to not contravene the intended allocation scheme currently in place.

Proposal # 10 Revise regulations to allow managers to ensure that P cod harvests in the GOA are closer to the desired 60 % in the A season. This would modify the current management process that in recent years has resulted in P cod harvests being closer to 75 % in the A season. The proposal would count P cod harvest taken after June 10 (the end of the A season) but before September 1 against the TAC for the B season. The committee noted that this proposal is the same issue addressed in a competing proposal - # 3. Galen Tromble reviewed how inseason managers account for P cod by season. The committee then discussed at length various options for changing the P cod fishing seasons in a manner that would benefit fishermen yet accommodate the intent of the sea lion measures (that cod harvests not be concentrated early in the year). Stewart suggested using the proposed three-way split outlined in Proposal # 3: a 60-20-20 split with the seasons set as January 1 to March 31, April 1 to August 31, and September 1 to December 31.

Gauvin noted that the real solution to this issue would be embodied in Gulf Rationalization. The committee asked that the Council move forward with a gear split now as in initial measure in the overall Gulf Rationalization process.

Proposal # 11 This proposes several measures to improve groundfish fishery management in the GOA including fast tracking the Council's Gulf Rationalization process, discouraging topping off of P cod in other directed fisheries (including reducing the MRAs for P cod in other GOA fisheries and minimizing P cod discarding), re-evaluating the P cod seasonal allocation scheme and NMFS' management of harvests in these seasons, and ensuring that all gear types are equally bearing the impacts of the sea lion protection measures in the GOA.

The committee noted that all of these proposed measures are, in one way or another, being addressed in other proposals before the committee and that they will be addressed in these other proposals.

Proposal # 12 Change the seasonal fishery for pollock in Area 610 to an A and B seasonal apportionment with 50 % of the TAC in each season, not quarterly as prosecuted currently. Fishermen now harvest the TAC in this area very quickly because of high abundance of pollock. Allowing more TAC in the first part

of the year would benefit local fishermen. NMFS is concerned that such an apportionment scheme would allow too large a harvest of pollock early in the year, which contradicts the intent of spreading out harvests to improve wSSL foraging opportunities.

Proposal # 13 Allow increased cod pot fishing at Chernabura Island to 3 n mi. NMFS noted that this is already provided for in current regulations. The proposal was subsequently withdrawn.

Proposal # 14 Allow fishing close to Castle Rock. To effect this, NMFS would have to open a portion of the SSL closure around Atkins Island because the Atkins closure overlaps Castle Rock. The intent is not to allow fishing near Atkins, but to facilitate fishing near Castle Rock. Fishermen desire to fish to the beach at Castle Rock with jig and pot gear, and to trawl to within 3 n mi of Castle Rock.

Proposal # 15 Allow pot fishing to the beach at Caton Island. NMFS noted that this is now provided for with a recent change in regulations. This proposal was subsequently withdrawn.

Metrics for Proposal Evaluation

Cotter recommended that a small group of SSLMC members meet to develop ideas for how to measure the biological impacts of each of the proposals before the committee. DeMaster suggested using the Experimental Design Subcommittee as the core of this group, with others from the committee joining in as desired. A small group met during the afternoon of August 27, and from this effort a rating sheet was developed. The rating sheet included these metrics: pup and nonpup wSSL counts and trends; area affected by the proposal (in the 0-3, 3-10, 10-20, and beyond 20 n mi zones); would the proposal affect a rookery or a haulout; availability of food habits and telemetry data; target and nontarget fish harvest in area. The full committee recommended also including consideration of the economic value to fishermen and communities of the proposed measure.

The full committee discussed how to evaluate proposals that do not involve changing SSL protection area but rather address allocational or apportionment issues. A primary measure is how closely would the proposed measure retain the desired TAC split recommended in the BiOp. The committee also questioned evaluating proposals based on the highest ever-recorded wSSL counts; are these counts relevant? Capron noted they give a measure of the potential of a site for supporting sea lions. Considerable committee discussion focused on this issue. Discussion included concerns that these counts were conducted by various agencies and under various conditions, possibly compromising their comparability. Some counts could have been errors.

Sue Hills noted that the review process could be considered “filtering” the proposals for their neutrality to wSSL concerns. The committee felt that this process also must include weighing the potential economic impact of a proposal, since this is the primary charge to this committee from the Council.

Stewart noted that wSSLs were routinely intentionally killed in the 1950s through the 1970s and 80s in the Gulf; when shooting was prohibited in the early 1990s, the dynamics of the wSSL population likely changed. Stewart felt that recent rookery and haulout counts likely have been greatly influenced by the historic intentional kills. It is likely that some (much) of the wSSL decline could be attributed to intentional shooting by fishermen who viewed this as a means to protect fish catches and fishing gear.

The committee heard a brief report from Martin Dorn and Anne Hollowed about the GOA pollock stock assessment. The assessment is not complete. Considerable data are being evaluated, including data from a new Gulf-wide summer acoustic survey in 2003 as well as the recent Gulf summer 2003 bottom trawl surveys and the winter 2003 Shumagin Islands and Shelikof Strait acoustic surveys. Dorn noted that

these surveys are not additive, and some overlap of signal return occurs between acoustic surveys and bottom trawl surveys. These concerns are being factored into the pollock stock assessment process.

Experimental Design Subcommittee Report

At its June meeting, the SSLMC reviewed the NRC committee's report on the SSL decline in Alaska. During that meeting, the committee tentatively concluded that such an experiment would be very difficult to conduct given the large number of uncertainties and factors that could be influencing SSLs and the potentially significant obstacles to such an experiment because of the Endangered Species Act. The SSLMC formed an Experimental Design Subcommittee to further evaluate the NRC committee's recommendations and to report back to the SSLMC with some recommendations. DeMaster reported that the Experimental Design Subcommittee has developed a draft Request for Proposals that could be released by the Council. The RFP would call for interested scientists to propose to develop a design for an adaptive management experiment that would rigorously test how fishing affects wSSLs. The National Research Council's committee recommended such an experiment. The objective of this procurement would be to see if members of the scientific community at large might have innovative approaches or other perspectives on this issue. The subcommittee recommends that sufficient funds would need to be allocated by the Council to this effort so that the proposed project would attract quality proposals. The RFP would spell out what data are available, and would reference the National Research Council's report on the decline of SSLs in Alaska. The subcommittee also noted that there would be flexibility in the RFP for bidders to suggest various kinds of studies that would look at effects of fishing on SSL prey.

If the Council releases the RFP, DeMaster suggested that the SSLMC or its Experimental Design Subcommittee could review the proposals. DeMaster noted that if the RFP were released in December 2003, proposals could be reviewed by Spring 2004 and perhaps the work could be completed by the end of 2004 or early 2005.

The SSLMC suggested a few changes to the draft RFP. DeMaster indicated he would finalize the draft and obtain subcommittee reviews so that it could be presented to the Council at their upcoming October meeting (concurrent with the SSLMC's proposed amendment package developed from among the proposals reviewed at this meeting).

The SSLMC urged the Council to support continued and adequate funding for NMFS to continue the Chiniak/Barnabas pollock fishery/wSSL study.

Proposal Review – Round Two

Cotter summarized the status of the proposals and suggested how the committee could proceed back through the proposals to make their recommendations. Cotter suggested the proposals be grouped as follows:

- Proposals that have been withdrawn or set aside: # 4, 7, 11, 13, and 15
- Proposals that are approved and will be supported by the committee: # 1
- Proposals that are tentatively supported but require more discussion: # 9
- Proposals that require more review: # 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 14

Cotter then suggested that the proposals still under consideration be lumped into categories:

- Proposals that deal with geographic area openings/closures: # 2, 5, 6, 8, and 14
- Proposals that address the pollock season: # 12
- Proposals that deal with a P cod TAC split: # 3 and 10

Proposals that deal with the pollock rollover: # 9

The second review of proposals was organized around the groupings listed above, starting with # 12.

Proposal # 12

Stewart presented some of the issues associated with the Gulf pollock fishery in Area 610. Pollock have been abundant in the area and fishermen can take the TAC fairly quickly. To be more economically efficient, fishermen would prefer a 50/50 % TAC seasonal apportionment. Pollock roe is of highest quality early in the year; with 50 % of the TAC allocated to the period when roe is of high quality, this could provide more economic return to the region. Another option would be a 50/25/25 % apportionment with the A and B seasons combined, leaving the C and D seasons with 25 % each. The committee reviewed catch statistics for 610 and discussed pollock roe quality as it relates to season and area and economic value of Area 610 versus other areas. Some concerns were expressed by NMFS over the potential effects of a combined A and B season; if, in the future, pollock were not as abundant in 610 yet 50 % of the TAC were still taken from a single season, this could perhaps compress the harvest; the current SSL protection measures seek to spread out the harvests over time. This proposal was subsequently withdrawn.

Proposal # 8

Discussion of this proposal centered on the countermeasures proposed at Chirikof Island and Kilokak Rocks. Closing the fishery beyond 20 n mi at Chirikof would be of little additional benefit to wSSLs, and the population of wSSLs at Kilokak is small and not of major concern to NMFS. There may be some difficulty tracking the harvest in some areas; electronic logbooks could help. DeMaster suggested an alternative: open just the western portion of the proposed area around Kak Island. This is closest to Chignik and is a fairly small area, and would likely not have a major effect on wSSLs. McCallum noted this might be suitable, although Chignik fishermen were looking for a larger area opened at Kak and Sutwik. DeMaster noted that the wSSL population at Kak is a haulout and numbers appear to be stable. McCallum clarified that the requested Kak open area would be for jig and pot P cod fishing only; since jig fishing is already permitted, the request is for pot fishing only. Stewart noted that such an opening would likely not draw many fishermen from other areas. Other discussion focused on how to develop an appropriate offsetting closure to compensate for an open area at Kak; closures at Kilokak and Ikolik were discussed. DeMaster suggested that with an open area on the west side of Kak, perhaps the offset could be a closure to pot fishing offshore from Kilokak to 10 or 20 n mi, noting that either might result in pot fishermen giving up more than they would be gaining. The consensus was to only open Kak to 3 n mi for P cod pot fishing, and the offset would be to close Kilokak to either 10 n mi for P cod pot fishing.

Proposals 2, 5, and 6

These proposals deal with proposed open areas at Marmot Island, Cape Chiniak, and Puale Bay, in order of importance to Kodiak fishermen (Marmot is desired the most). These proposed open areas are also in order of concern to NMFS (Marmot is of most concern). Capron pointed out the telemetry data available at Marmot and the apparent heavy use of the area by wSSLs. Capron stated NMFS' preference would be to not change measures at Cape Chiniak. Capron suggested looking at the proposed closure at Sea Otter Island as an offset for a change at Marmot. To open fishing to 3 n mi at Puale Bay, industry proposed closing more area at Cape Douglas; Capron suggested a closure around the Cape Ikolik haulout as an

offset rather than enlarging Cape Douglas. Matt Moir noted the importance of Ikolik to Kodiak area fishermen, and suggested looking at Kilokak as a pollock fishing area offset.

Proposal # 2 (Marmot opening) was discussed further. NMFS and the proposers suggested a compromise: drop the request for P cod fishing. Allow trawling for pollock around Marmot in the A and B seasons to 10 n mi (in the C and D seasons this would revert back to 20 n mi). Increase the closed area around Sea Otter Island from 10 to 20 n mi in the A and B seasons.

Proposal # 5 also was discussed further with the following compromise tentatively reached: Proceed with the proposed opening at Puale and allow trawl pollock fishing to 3 n mi January 20 to June 10 only (status quo after that). Close Cape Douglas/Shaw Island January 20 to June 10 to pollock trawl fishing out to 20 n mi, reverting to status quo after that.

Proposal # 6 was withdrawn.

Proposal # 14

The proposal seeks to have the closure around Atkins Island modified such that fishermen can fish around Castle Rock (which is currently closed because of the overlap of the Atkins closure). The committee discussed how this might be effected. Stewart noted the proposal includes allowing fishing to the shoreline for pollock, but DeMaster stated this would be a difficult measure to get approved as it would set a major precedent (allowing trawling to the beach at a wSSL haulout). The committee reached a tentative compromise to open a wedge in the current closure at Atkins so that cod trawl fishing can occur from 3 to 10 n mi on the Castle Rock side of Atkins; also, pot gear could be used within 3 n mi at Castle Rock. The committee proposed to let NMFS and local fishermen design an appropriate shape and size of the wedge in the Atkins Island closure to provide for the proposed cod trawl fishery.

Proposals # 3 and 10

These proposals were reviewed as a group, all dealing with P cod apportionment. Cotter reviewed the issues around changing the apportionment of P cod TAC in the Gulf to a 60-20-20 scheme, and recounted some of the past history of P cod apportionment in the Bering Sea. Cotter thought that there was not a biological concern with a 60-20-20 split in the Bering Sea and suggested this might be an acceptable scheme for the Gulf as well. Cotter offered the following: apportion the remaining TAC (after a bycatch set-aside for other fisheries): 60 % to March 31, 20 % April 1 to August 31, 20 % from September 1 to October 31 (for trawl gear; to December 31 for fixed gear). Under this scheme, Cotter noted that there would be no trawl fishery in November and December, a period in early winter when cod may be beginning to aggregate, which is also a period of importance to SSLs that feed on aggregating cod schools. Capron noted that NMFS' goal was to limit the catch in the first half of the year to roughly 60 % of the TAC, which would require a change to Proposal # 3 that allowed no directed P cod fishery in the second season (April 1 to August 31). The committee discussed the issues around having a second season as bycatch only versus bycatch plus a directed fishery. Galen Tromble suggested that regardless how the second season is defined, in reality it probably would be a bycatch only fishery with the possibility of a small directed fishery if permitted, but that a directed fishery would likely be fairly limited. The committee noted that fishermen need to know in advance if a season is to be directed or bycatch only so they can plan effectively. Cotter suggested that perhaps a biomass trigger could be added, such that if cod stocks were high, a directed fishery could occur in the second season, and if low, NMFS could make it a bycatch only second season. The committee tentatively agreed to forward this proposed scheme, but with two sub-options for the second season: bycatch only, and bycatch plus a directed fishery. Later in the meeting the committee felt the proposal should be forwarded to the Council and NMFS with a second season directed fishery with the TAC limited to 20 %, acknowledging that some or most of this second

DRAFT

season TAC would be for bycatch. The Committee is also forwarding NMFS' Proposal # 10 as well along with the modified Proposal # 3 as two possible options.

The committee again noted the importance of rationalization in the Gulf. A sector split for these fisheries would greatly alleviate some of these concerns. The committee also expressed some frustration because Gulf Rationalization may be many years in the future, and some of these economic hardships to Gulf communities and fishermen need resolution now.

The committee also discussed the issue of P cod MRAs and topping off with cod in other directed fisheries. Should the MRA for P cod in some of these fisheries be lowered? The issues around setting MRAs are complex and require more analysis before adjustments might be proposed. The Council's IR/IU Committee is working on this issue.

Proposal # 12

This proposal was withdrawn.

Proposal # 9

The committee suggested that NMFS proceed with a pollock TAC rollover scheme that apportions left-over TAC in an area to the next season, first to the area from which it came, and any additional underharvested TAC to the other areas in proportion to the estimated biomass for those areas for that year.

Amendment Package

Cotter and Wilson agreed to develop a draft proposal package that summarizes the intent discussed in the above and circulate this to the committee members for review and comment. An approved draft amendment package will then be presented to the Council at their October meeting. (The schedule for processing the amendment package is provided earlier in these minutes.)

Next Meeting

The SSLMC has not scheduled a meeting at this time. Chairman Cotter will notify members if/when such a meeting is called.

For questions or comments, contact Bill Wilson (bill.wilson@noaa.gov) at the NPFMC, 605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, AK 99501. Phone: 907-271-2809, FAX: 907-271-2817.