

**DRAFT Minutes of the RPA Committee Meeting,
May 9-11, 2001**

Members Present:

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

Beth Stewart
John Winther
Sue Hills
Dave Jackson
Bob Small
Fred Robison
Gerald Leape

Jerry Bongen
John Iani
Matt Moir
Dave Cline
Steve Drage

Staff present: *Dave Witherell (coordinator), Ron Berg (NMFS), Mike Payne (NMFS), Sue Salveson (NMFS), Tamra Faris (NMFS), Lauren Smoker (NOAA GC), Kristin Mabry (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 sixth meeting of the RPA Committee was held on May 9 -11 in Juneau at the Federal Building, beginning at 10 am. Larry Cotter briefly reviewed the tasks of the Committee, the draft agenda, and format of Committee meetings. Public comment was taken after each meal break.

Reports

Dave Witherell reviewed the process for developing the analysis (EIS/RIR/RFA) of an amendment to address fishery/Steller sea lion interactions. This amendment would implement management measures designed to meet ESA standards relative to the November 30 Biological Opinion conclusions regarding sea lions and pollock, cod, and mackerel fisheries. The RPA Committee's primary job is to develop Alternative E for this analysis, in addition to the four already proposed and reviewed by the Council. The RPA Committee may also wish to meet during the public review period (late September) to review the analysis and recommend a preferred alternative to the Council, for their final action in October.

Alternatives proposed for EIS analysis.

Alternative A	Regulatory measures implemented by emergency rule, and designed to protect Steller sea lions, would expire.
Alternative B	The RPA measures for the 2000 pollock and Atka mackerel fisheries, and seasons and CH catch limits for Pacific cod.
Alternative C	Alternative 2 measures plus all trawling prohibited in critical habitat.
Alternative D	The BiOp RPA measures.
Alternative E	The RPA developed by the Council and its Committees.

The Committee discussed ESA criteria for the 2002 analysis. Shane noted that 2001 was a phase-in year due to the appropriations bill. The 50%/75% criteria used in 2001 to develop open and closed areas should not be considered as a bar for determining jeopardy

or adverse modification for 2002 measures. **The guidelines for meeting ESA standards we have are: 1) the expected trend of SSL, and 2) the ratio of forage available to prey consumed (as in Appendix 3 of the BiOp).** Doug noted that the BIoP considered trends for the western stock of SSL (-0.7%/year), but that the Committee could consider more regional trends when developing measures. Doug agreed to provide a detailed description of the formula used to calculate the trend later in the meeting. Unfortunately, ‘recovery’ for SSL is not defined, so at this point we need to craft measures that in the worst case scenario, would result in better population growth than resulting from the BiOp RPA. The measures developed by the Committee could include measures such as protection of rookeries and haulouts, spatial and temporal apportionment of the catch, a global control rule, and experimental design monitoring. Doug noted that the forage ratio calculations from the BiOp were based on the entire western stock CH, but that these could be based more regionally (e.g., GOA, AI, BS).

Committee recommendation: Assemble the new SSL recovery team to develop a recovery plan for SSL as soon as possible that includes a definition of recovery, delisting criteria, and a re-assessment of the CH designation.

Robin Angliss provided an update on the 2001 Steller sea lion research projects. She provided a handout showing what projects were being done this year, and how each project addressed the 13 issues identified for research by Congress.

Sally Bibb reported on monitoring and enforcement issues. She distributed a draft discussion paper that provides guidance on many of the elements discussed by the Committee at previous meetings. Sally noted that anything is possible, but some things are more difficult to implement. Committee discussion focused on VMS monitoring. VMS has some enforcement benefit if vessel operators believe that someone may be watching their movements, however it is difficult to determine whether or not a vessel is fishing. When combined with observer data, VMS has added value for quota monitoring.

Dave Ackley provided 1999 catch data tables and figures. He converted catch data from ADF&G statistical areas to buffers around SSL areas: 0-3nm, 3-20 nm, and beyond. Because there is some overlap of statistical areas at the 20nm boundary, the numbers are approximate. Tables were distributed showing catch data broken down by FMP area, target species within target fisheries, vessel size, and week. CDQ data were not included, and confidential data were masked. Dave also provided figures showing catch by week within the buffer zones.

Bob Small briefed the Committee on development of the white paper on SSL telemetry. He distributed an outline of issues to be discussed. He was planning to provide a draft white paper at the next meeting.

Doug Demaster provided a report from the experimental design subcommittee. The Committee has recommended small scale experiments as opposed to a large scale adaptive management design like the one in the BiOp. Two of these experiments on localized depletion are already being conducted in Kodiak and Seguam. The Committee is interested in conducting an experiment with cod, perhaps off the Alaska Peninsula. The subcommittee will meet again at the next RPA Committee meeting and provide a more complete report .

Proposals

Proposals for elements of the Committee’s recommended Alternative E were reviewed. Each proposal was submitted in writing, and in the format requested by the chairman.

John Gauvin proposed continuing with the 50/50 seasonal apportionment, CH limitations, and other measures for the Atka mackerel fishery, but added the split team (platoons) among the AI to split effort. It would also require pre-registration with a 14 day standdown to limit vessels from moving in and out of the Atka mackerel fishery.

Sue Robinson proposed that all BSAI cod fisheries be subject to a 67/33% seasonal apportionment, with specific seasons by gear type to spread out effort. Other measures would include the 3/20 nm trawl closures around rookeries and exclusive registration for pollock or cod through April 1.

John Winther proposed that BSAI longline fisheries should be exempted from any RPA measures because the harvest rates were lower than reported in the BiOp, and most of the catch was taken in areas well outside of CH. He provided maps showing catch distribution.

Alan Parks proposed a zonal approach for GOA cod fisheries. Basically, the approach would limit what vessels could fish within specified buffer zones (0-3, 3-12, 0-20 nm) depending on gear type or vessel size. The proposal contains lots of other provisions including seasons, global control rule, PSC for octopus, TAC rollover limits, halibut PSC apportionment, MRB reduction for cod, and increased observer coverage.

Jerry Bongen proposed a 70/30 seasonal allocation for the BSAI Pacific cod pot quota. Pot vessel <60' could fish everywhere except within 3 nm of rookeries, and pot vessel >60' could fish everywhere except within 3 nm of haulouts, 10 nm of rookeries, Area 518 and the Seagum foraging area.

Matt Moir proposed that GOA cod fisheries should return to a single season and pollock TAC should be apportioned into 4 equal seasons. Rookery and haulouts closures should be established out to 10 nm. Pollock and cod vessels < 60' would be allowed to fish within 10 nm of haulouts. In Area 3, all vessels would be allowed to fish within Gull Point, Ugak Island, Barnabus, and Ikolik haulouts.

Brent Paine proposed 10 nm closures of rookeries and haulouts for BS cod trawl fisheries, and closure of Area 9. The BSAI cod TAC would be split into two management areas with separate TACs, but one season that opens January 20.

Gerry Leape and Dave Cline proposed an RPA with 5 elements: 1) reduced TAC levels for pollock, cod, and mackerel; 2) four seasons for all three species; 3) no trawling in CH; 4) for fixed gear cod fishery use daily catch limits and vessel size/gear limits to disperse effort; 5) prohibit pollock fishery in AI.

Terry Leitzell proposed two seasons (40/60% TAC allocation) for BSAI pollock and 10 nm closures around rookeries and haulouts in the AI and BS (with a few exceptions), as well as Area 9 and the Seguum foraging area. The AI fishery would only occur during the first season.

Chairman Larry Cotter made several closing remarks. He noted that this first meeting amounted to a 'dance' among Committee members. Industry will need to develop a composite proposal for the next meeting; the environmental community will need to do the same. Larry believes that the amendment should incorporate a framework concept so that management can readily change as new information becomes available.

The meeting ended at approximately 12:30 pm on May 11.