

Discussion about Updating the Groundfish FMP Programmatic SEIS and 2012 Review of the Groundfish Management Policy

1 Introduction

The Council developed its groundfish management policy in 2004, following a comprehensive review of the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries. The Alaska Groundfish Fisheries Programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (PSEIS; NMFS 2004) evaluated the cumulative changes in the management of the groundfish fisheries since the implementation of the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) around 1980, and considered a broad array of policy-level programmatic alternatives. On the basis of the analysis, the Council adopted a management approach statement, and 9 policy goal statements, with accompanying objectives.

In order to track the implementation of the various management objectives over time, the Council developed a workplan to prioritize issues for consideration. The first draft of the workplan was developed in June 2004, and it has since been once revised, in February 2007. The Council is updated on the status of this workplan at each meeting. The management policy and the workplan are appended separately from this discussion paper.

Once a year, the Council conducts a review of the management policy objectives and the implementing workplan, and if appropriate, makes any changes. While changes to the workplan can be made at any time, changes to the policy objectives require an FMP amendment. It has been eight years since the PSEIS was published, and at some point, the current programmatic approach to groundfish fishery management, including the Council's stated objectives and accompanying analysis, will need to be supplemented or revised.

This discussion paper briefly reviews factors that may influence the timing for supplementing or updating the 2004 Groundfish PSEIS, and suggests an approach the Council might take to help in this deliberation. The paper also summarizes changes to the groundfish management program, which have occurred in the years since the adoption of the management policy. The management changes are mapped to the Council's management policy objectives, to provide a basis for Council review. Environmental changes since 2004 are also discussed briefly. Finally, the paper provides a short background on the development of the 2004 PSEIS.

2 Considerations for updating or supplementing the 2004 Groundfish PSEIS

There are several factors that influence when the time is right to supplement or update the 2004 Groundfish PSEIS. These factors include, but are not limited to:

1. consideration of how fisheries management has changed since the objectives and analysis were originally prepared,
2. how environmental conditions affecting the fisheries have changed,
3. the status of the fish stocks and other marine life,
4. whether new information has become available which may indicate the necessity for revised analyses, and
5. whether the Council wants to change the objectives, policy statements, or overall management approach for the groundfish fisheries.

There is no hard and fast rule about when the time is right for revisiting the management policy or the PSEIS. Neither the Council of Environmental Quality or NOAA's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) implementing regulations (NAO 216-6) answer this question directly. As discussed during the development of the PSEIS, a review of NEPA case law suggests that programmatic reviews generally have a defensible lifespan of five to ten years, but there are no mandatory deadlines. It has now been eight years since the adoption of the policy, and we are within the suggested timeframe for considering whether the policy adopted in 2004, and the analysis that supports it, is still appropriate.

Considering whether to supplement or revise the PSEIS may also be an opportunity for the Council to engage in strategic planning about management of the groundfish fisheries in the next few years. The management policy that was adopted in 2004 is the product of just such a strategic planning exercise. The Council's current management program is within the bounds of the 2004 management policy. Nonetheless, some of the management objectives are indicative of particular issues that were Council priorities at the time of its development, and periodically, it may be useful to revisit management objectives in the light of current Council priorities.

One aspect of the 2004 PSEIS which made its preparation particularly challenging was that approximately 25 years of management decisions had to be evaluated as a cumulative whole. The groundfish management program had changed substantially during that time period, from a fishery with a large foreign participation, to an exclusively domestic one. Both FMPs had over 80 amendments that had to be reviewed and analyzed. Since a supplement to the PSEIS (PSEIS 2) would be tiering off of the existing document, the preparation of PSEIS 2 should be more straightforward, as a recent environmental baseline has been established, and the new analysis will focus on the actions taken by the Council and NMFS since that time, along with any changes in environmental conditions. Additionally, if the Council chooses to re-evaluate and re-examine the management goals and objectives and programmatic concepts in the existing document, PSEIS 2 need no necessarily evaluate the same broad array of policy alternatives that were included in the 2004 document.

At this stage, it is the Council's role to determine whether the time is right for updating the PSEIS. In Sections 3, 4, and 5 of this discussion paper, staff has provided a summary of management or environmental changes that have occurred since the Council's adoption of the management policy. The Council can use this summary to assess whether these changes warrant initiating a supplemental programmatic review at this time. The Council should take into account that the development of PSEIS 2 will likely take at least a couple of years.

One approach is for the Council to solicit input from its stakeholders, as a consideration in determining whether the time is ripe to initiate a supplement to the PSEIS. A benefit of this approach is that stakeholder input might also be solicited on the scope and structure of the supplemental analysis, should the Council choose to initiate the process. The Council could consider scheduling an evening session during an upcoming Council meeting. Members of the public would be invited to provide input on the need for and scope of PSEIS 2, concepts that might be considered in the range of alternatives, and proposed changes to the management policy and its objectives.

Staff could then arrange the concepts and proposed changes from the meeting into a series of strawman structures or alternatives for different styles for PSEIS 2, which would vary depending on the proposed scope of the analysis. Staff could also incorporate any other suggestions that have emerged internally based on experience since the 2004 PSEIS. These would be packaged into a report for the Council. On the basis of this report, the Council could deliberate about whether to initiate PSEIS 2, and if so, articulate a preliminary intent and alternatives for the analysis, as is required for the Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS, under NEPA.

Table 1 lays out the milestones that would be associated with this approach, if the Council chooses to move forward. A possible timeframe is also suggested, to give some idea of the length of the proposed process, although this should be very loosely interpreted, and could be shorter or longer depending on the nature of the analysis and the remainder of the Council's workload.

Table 1 Milestones and possible timeframe for supplementing the PSEIS under the proposed approach

Council milestones	Other actions and milestones	Possible timeframe
Council discusses updating the PSEIS, agrees to proposed approach		February 2012
	Public, pre-Notice of Intent scoping meeting to solicit input about whether timing is right for updating the PSEIS, and what the scope of analysis or alternatives might be	April 2012
	Staff prepares public meeting report, categorizes how any proposed analytical concepts or alternatives might be addressed in PSEIS 2, based on different suggestions for scope	(timing depends on range of comments)
Council considers meeting results, decides whether to initiate PSEIS 2		June or October 2012
IF THE COUNCIL DECIDES TO MOVE FORWARD:		
Council identifies a preliminary scope and structure for PSEIS 2, and strawman alternatives		June or October 2012
	NMFS issues a Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS, formal scoping period begins, and comments are solicited	
	Staff prepares report on comments	
Council considers scoping comments, approves PSEIS 2 alternatives for analysis		February 2013
	Staff prepares initial review draft of PSEIS 2	
Council reviews draft PSEIS 2, potentially identifies preferred alternative, releases to public		October 2013
	Staff makes any changes, publishes draft EIS	
	Draft EIS public comment period	45-60 days
	Staff prepares report on comments	
Council reviews public comments, takes final action		April 2014
	Staff finalizes and publishes EIS, mandatory cooling off period	
	NMFS prepared Record of Decision	August 2014

3 Changes in groundfish management since 2004

Since the adoption of the groundfish management policy in 2004, the Council has continued to make changes to its groundfish management program. The changes that have occurred to date can be witnessed in the FMP and regulatory amendments that have been implemented over this time period. Additionally, there have also been national changes affecting the groundfish management program over the last five years. The Magnuson-Stevens Act was reauthorized in 2006, and contained provisions that have affected the groundfish management program to some extent (for example, annual catch limits and provisions governing the development of limited access privilege programs).

Table 2 lists the groundfish FMP amendments that have been implemented from 2004 to the present time, as well as those for which the Council has taken final action, but regulations are still being developed. The Council has recommended 22 amendments to the BSAI FMP since the adoption of its groundfish management policy in April 2004, and 20 amendments to the GOA FMP. Additionally, four BSAI and four GOA amendments had been adopted by the Council prior to April 2004, but had not yet been implemented at the time of the writing of the PSEIS. Table 3 provides a synthesis of the major regulatory amendments that have been implemented during the same time period. Between the two lists, the major changes in groundfish management are captured.

Table 2 BSAI and GOA Groundfish FMP amendments since 2004

BSAI amd	GOA amd	Action	Date of Council action	Effective date of amd
48	48	Revisions to the annual harvest specification process for groundfish	2003	2004
62	62	Single geographic location	2002	2009
	63	Move skates to the target species category	2003	2004
65	65	Identify habitat areas of particular concern, and harvest control measures	2005	2006
	67	IFQ – allow category B quota share to be fished on a vessel of any length, in any area	2005	2007
	68	Rockfish pilot program	2005	2006
	69	Change total allowable catch specification for the 'other species' category	2005	2006
71		CDQ – allow limited non-fishing investments, CDQ oversight, and 3-year allocation cycle (<i>superseded by provisions of the revised Magnuson-Stevens Act</i>)	2002	--
73	77	Remove dark rockfish from the FMP	2007	2009
	72	Rescind retention requirements in shallow water flatfish fishery	2003	2008
78	73	Revise essential fish habitat descriptions, harvest control measures	2005	2006
79		Groundfish retention standard (suspended as of 2011)	2003	2008
80		Sector allocation and cooperative for head and gut groundfish catcher processors	2007	2007
81	74	Revised management policy	2004	2004
82		Allocation of Aleutian Islands pollock total allowable catch to the Aleut Corporation	2004	2005
83	75	Housekeeping updates to the FMP	2004	2005
84		Exempt certain vessels from salmon bycatch savings area closures	2005	2007
85		Pacific cod sector allocations	2006	2008
86	76	Observer program restructuring	2006	--
87		CDQ eligibility (<i>superseded by provisions of the revised Magnuson-Stevens Act</i>)	2006	--
88		Aleutian Islands Habitat Conservation Area boundary adjustment	2007	2008
89		Bering Sea habitat conservation measures	2007	2008
90	78	Allow post delivery transfers for Amendment 80 cooperatives (BSAI 90) and rockfish program (GOA 78)	2007	2009
91		Revise PSC limit for salmon bycatch, rescind savings areas	2009	2010
	79	Set allowable biological catch and overfishing level specifications for the 'other species' category	2008	2008
92	82	Rescind latent trawl gear licenses	2008	2009

BSAI amd	GOA amd	Action	Date of Council action	Effective date of amd
93		Modify rules for Amendment 80 cooperative formation	2010	2011
94		Require gear modification to trawl sweeps for nonpelagic trawl vessels targeting flatfish	2009	2010
	83	Pacific cod sector allocations	2009	2012
	85	Remove BSAI stand down provision for catcher processors participating in rockfish pilot program	2008	2009
	86	Add a Pacific cod fixed gear endorsement to GOA licenses	2009	2011
95		Move skates from the other species to the target species category	2010	2010
96	87	Revise FMP species to fit either in target or ecosystem component categories, describe current practice for setting annual catch limits and using accountability measures	2010	2010
97		Allow vessel replacement for Amendment 80 vessels	2010	--
	88	Central GOA Rockfish Program: allocate exclusive harvest privileges to trawl vessels for Pacific ocean perch, pelagic shelf rockfish, and northern rockfish	2010	2011
	89	Establish area closures around Kodiak for GOA Tanner crab protection	2010	--
98	90	Update EFH descriptions and associated information, and impacts of non-fishing activities on EFH, and extend timing of HAPC process to correlate with the EFH 5-year review	2011	--
	93	Establish PSC limits for Chinook salmon in the Central/Western GOA pollock fisheries, and require full retention of salmon	2011	--

Note: '--' = action has not yet taken place

Table 3 Major regulatory amendments for the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries since 2004

Note: does not include regulatory amendments that implement FMP amendments, or are temporary, interim, corrections or clarifications

Subject	Action	Effective date of amendment
Harvest specifications	2004 BSAI and GOA harvest specifications	2004
	2005-2006 BSAI and GOA harvest specifications	2005
	2006-2007 BSAI and GOA harvest specifications	2006
	2007-2008 BSAI and GOA harvest specifications	2007
	2008-2009 BSAI and GOA harvest specifications	2008
	2009-2010 BSAI and GOA harvest specifications	2009
	2010-2011 BSAI and GOA harvest specifications	2010
	2011-2012 BSAI and GOA harvest specifications	2011
	2012-2013 BSAI and GOA harvest specifications	--
Catch restrictions	remove a harvest restriction on the HLA Atka mackerel fishery in the Aleutian Islands	2004
	full retention of demersal shelf rockfish and donation rules	2004
	allow processors to use the offal from halibut and salmon intended for the prohibited species donation program for commercial products (fish meal)	2004
	adjust the maximum retainable allowance (MRA) enforcement period for BSAI pollock from enforcement at anytime during a fishing trip, to enforcement at the time of offload	2004
	revise the MRAs for groundfish in the GOA arrowtooth flounder fishery	2009
	repeal groundfish vessel incentive program	2008

Subject	Action	Effective date of amendment
	GOA pollock trip limits	2009
	revise the MRAs for groundfish in the BSAI arrowtooth flounder fishery	--
	remove groundfish retention standard requirements	--
	BSAI fixed gear parallel fishery management measures	2012
Bering Sea AFA pollock fishery	remove the expiration date of regulations implementing the AFA	2004
CDQ	simplify the processes for making quota transfers, for authorizing vessels as eligible to participate in the CDQ fisheries, and for obtaining approval of alternative fishing plans	2005
	regulation of harvest	--
BSAI and GOA IFQ sablefish fishery	allow quota share holders in 4C to fish in either 4C or 4D	2005
	IFQ cost recovery fee reform	2006
	exclude tagged halibut and sablefish catches from IFQ account deduction	2006
	allow transfers of quota share for medical reasons; require VMS for vessels harvesting sablefish in the BSAI; allow category B catcher vessel quota share for Southeast Outside District sablefish to be fished on catcher vessels of any length	2007
	allow processing of non-IFQ species on a vessel with B, C, or D shares onboard	2008
	allow longline pot gear in Bering Sea during June, allow mobilized military personnel to make temporary IFQ transfers	2008
	IFQ online access to IFQ account information	2008
GOA rockfish pilot program	revise central GOA rockfish fisheries program monitoring and enforcement provisions	2007
	extension of central GOA rockfish program under MSA	2008
seabirds	revise seabird avoidance measures in the hook-and-line fisheries off Alaska to reduce incidental catch of the short-tailed albatross and other seabird species	2004
	revise seabird avoidance measures to strengthen gear standards for small vessels and eliminate certain unnecessary requirements	2008
	eliminate seabird avoidance requirements for vessels less than or equal to 55 ft LOA in 4E	2009
SSL	revise SSL protection measures for the GOA pollock and Pacific cod fishing closure areas near four SSL haulouts and modify the seasonal management of pollock harvest in the GOA	2005
	Revises SSL protection measures for the Aleutian Islands Atka mackerel and cod fisheries	2010
	Designate critical habitat for the Cook Inlet beluga whale	2011
Research areas	reopen the Cape Sarichef Research Restriction Area in the BSAI to directed fishing for groundfish	2006
	close Chiniak Gully Research Area to all commercial trawl fishing from August 1 to September 20, 2006-2010	2006
Observer program	provide flexibility in the deployment of observers	2004
	electronic reporting for vessels – ATLAS (at-sea observer communication system requirements)	2004
	technical amendment extending the North Pacific observer program beyond 2002	2004
	revise requirements facilitating observer data transmission and improve support for observers (ATLAS 2)	2006
	observer sunset date removal	2007

Subject	Action	Effective date of amendment
	Improve operational efficiency of the Observer Program and collected data	2010
reporting requirements	make effective the collection of information under the AFA amendments	2004
	exempt groundfish catcher processors and motherships with operational VMS from check-in check-out requirements	2008
	implement new electronic groundfish catch reporting system, the Interagency Electronic Reporting System (IERS), and its data entry component, eLandings	2009
	exempt vessels using dinglebar gear from the requirement to use VMS	2009
	Miscellaneous recordkeeping and reporting revisions, incl to e-Landings	
	BS Chinook salmon bycatch economic data collection	--

4 Mapping changes in management to Council objectives

This section examines the Council’s groundfish policy goals and management objectives with respect to the FMP and regulatory amendment changes that have occurred over the last eight years, as well as other management steps that the Council has taken with respect to these goals. The discussion in this section is not necessarily comprehensive, as each amendment may be fitted to many of the Council’s goals and objectives. Rather, it is intended to provide the Council with an overview of the major management changes of the last eight years, and how they compare to the management objectives that the Council set for itself in 2004.

Each of the sections below identifies one of the Council’s policy goals. The specific objectives, sometimes abbreviated, linking to that policy goal are listed in a box at the beginning of the section. If the objectives are also linked to a specific item on the Council’s workplan, that is noted also.

4.1 Prevent Overfishing

1. Adopt conservative harvest levels
2. Use existing OY caps.
3. Specify OY as a range.
4. Periodic reviews of F40 and adopt improvements
5. Improve management through species categories (*on workplan*)

FMP amendments

- revisions to the harvest specifications process (B48/G48)
- moved skates to target category (G63)
- biologically-based specifications for GOA ‘other species’ category (G69, G79)
- amendments to bring FMPs in line with annual catch limit requirements, including moving other species into target category, and creating an ecosystem component category (B95, G87)

Regulatory amendments

- Annual specifications for setting harvest levels

Other

- Regular CIE reviews for stock assessments and harvest strategies
- Upcoming discussion paper to consider grenadiers in the FMP

4.2 Promote Sustainable Fisheries and Communities

6. Promote conservation while providing for OY
7. Promote management measures that avoid social and economic disruption
8. Promote fair and equitable allocation
9. Promote safety

These considerations are applied to all management actions

4.3 Preserve Food Web

10. Develop indices of ecosystem health (*on workplan*)
11. Improve ABC calculations to account for uncertainty and ecosystem
12. Limit harvest on forage species.
13. Incorporate ecosystem considerations in fishery management

Other

- Uncertainty and ecosystem considerations taken into account during stock assessment and harvest specifications
- Ecosystem indices reported and assessed in annual ecosystem SAFE report
- Development of the Aleutian Islands Fishery Ecosystem Plan
- Development of ecosystem synthesis reports for the Bering Sea and the Aleutian Islands ecosystem areas

4.4 Manage Incidental Catch and Reduce Bycatch and Waste

14. Continue and improve current incidental catch and bycatch program (*on workplan*)
15. Develop incentive programs for bycatch reduction (*on workplan*)
16. Encourage research for non-target species population estimates (*on workplan*)
17. Develop management measures that encourage techniques to reduce bycatch (*on workplan*)
18. Continue to manage incidental catch and bycatch through seasons and areas
19. Account for bycatch mortality in TAC accounting (*on workplan*)
20. Control prohibited species bycatch through PSC limits (*on workplan*)
21. Reduce waste to biologically and socially acceptable levels

FMP amendments

- Groundfish retention standard (B79) - *upcoming regulatory amendment to remove*
- Bering Sea Chinook salmon bycatch restrictions (B84, B91)
- Trawl sweep elevation requirement in the Bering Sea flatfish fisheries (B94)
- GOA area closures to reduce bairdi crab bycatch (G89) – *Council approved, not yet implemented*
- Establishment of PSC limits for Chinook salmon in the GOA pollock fishery (G93) – *Council approved, not yet implemented*

Regulatory amendments

- Upcoming regulatory amendment to remove the groundfish retention standard
- Annual specifications for setting prohibited species limits
- Revisions to MRAs
- Revision to regulations for prohibited species donation program and fishmeal

Other

- Upcoming amendment for trawl sweep elevation in the Central GOA flatfish fisheries
- Upcoming amendment on GOA halibut bycatch
- Upcoming amendment for Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch
- Upcoming discussion paper on PSC limits for Chinook salmon in non-pollock GOA trawl fisheries
- Upcoming discussion paper on BSAI halibut bycatch
- Upcoming discussion paper on BSAI crab bycatch
- Council encourages research through annual research priorities
- NMFS and observer program work on improving statistical methods for bycatch accounting (as part of National Bycatch Report initiative)

4.5 Avoid Impacts to Seabirds and Marine Mammals

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">22. Continue to protect ESA-listed and other seabirds23. Maintain or adjust SSL protection measures (<i>on workplan</i>)24. Encourage review of marine mammal and fishery interactions25. Continue to protect ESA-listed and other marine mammals (<i>on workplan</i>) |
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Regulatory amendments

- Revisions to seabird avoidance measures, including in Area 4E
- Revisions to Steller sea lion closures for pollock and cod fisheries in the GOA
- Revisions to Steller sea lion closures for atka mackerel and cod fisheries in the Aleutian Islands

Other

- Council receives protected species report at each meeting, monitoring issues with seabirds and marine mammals

4.6 Reduce and Avoid Impacts to Habitat

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">26. Review and evaluate efficacy of habitat protection measures for managed species (<i>on workplan</i>)27. Identify EFH and HAPC, and mitigate fishery impacts as necessary (<i>on workplan</i>)28. Develop MPA policy29. Encourage research on baseline habitat mapping (<i>on workplan</i>)30. Develop goals and criteria for MPAs; implement as appropriate (<i>on workplan</i>) |
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FMP amendments

- HAPC (B65/G65) and EFH (B78/G73) amendments, and associated fishery area closures in the GOA and AI
- Bering Sea Habitat Conservation (B89) with area closures for non-pelagic trawling
- Trawl sweep elevation requirement in the Bering Sea flatfish fisheries (B94)
- Update to EFH information with findings from the 2010 EFH 5-year review (B98/G90) – *Council approved, not yet implemented*

Other

- Upcoming amendment for trawl sweep elevation in the Central GOA flatfish fisheries
- Upcoming amendment for designating skate nurseries as HAPC
- Discussion paper resulting from EFH 5-year review to look at groundfish impacts on crab EFH (especially red king crab in southwestern Bristol Bay)
- Discussion of a Northern Bering Sea Research Area Research Plan
- Council considering nominating Alaska MPAs to national MPA center register
- Council encourages research through annual research priorities

4.7 Promote Equitable and Efficient Use of Fishery Resources

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">31. Provide economic and community stability through fair allocation32. Maintain LLP and initiate rights-based management programs (<i>on workplan</i>)33. Periodically evaluate effectiveness of rights-based management programs34. Consider efficiency when adopting management measures (<i>on workplan</i>) |
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FMP amendments

- Sector allocations for Pacific cod in BSAI and GOA (B85, G83); fixed gear endorsement in GOA (G86)
- Sector allocations for 3 flatfish species, POP, and Atka mackerel in BSAI, head and gut cooperative; vessel replacement and cooperative formation revisions (B80, B90, B93, B97)
- Latent licenses rescinded (B92/82, G86)
- Cooperative program for rockfish in central GOA (G68); program revisions (G78, G85); new program authorized (G88)
- IRIU rescinded in GOA for shallow water flatfish (G72)
- Single geographic location amended for pollock motherships (B62, G62)
- IFQ B quota share holders can fish on any size vessel (G67)
- AI pollock to the Aleut Corporation (B82)

Regulatory amendments

- BSAI fixed gear parallel fishery management measures
- Minor revisions to AFA, CDQ, IFQ, rockfish programs
- GOA pollock trip limits

Other

- Permit fee authorization (all FMPs)

4.8 Increase Alaska Native Consultation

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">35. Incorporate local and traditional knowledge into fishery management36. Consider ways to enhance local and traditional knowledge collection37. Increase Alaska Native participation in fishery management (<i>on workplan</i>) |
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Other

- Community outreach and consultation policy adopted by Council in 2008
- Community committee helps prioritize outreach (currently focused on BSAI chum salmon analysis)
- Website redesigned to include a rural outreach component

4.9 Improve Data Quality, Monitoring, and Enforcement

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">38. Increase utility of observer data (<i>on workplan</i>)39. Develop equitable funding mechanisms for the NPGOP (<i>on workplan</i>)40. Increase economic data reporting requirements (<i>on workplan</i>)41. Improve technology for monitoring and enforcement (<i>on workplan</i>)42. Encourage development of an ecosystem monitoring program43. Cooperate with NPRB to identify needed research44. Promote enforceability45. Coordinate management and enforcement programs with Federal, State, international, and local partners |
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FMP amendments

- Observer program restructuring (B86/G76) – *approved by Council, not yet implemented*
- Remove dark rockfish from FMP, allow management by State of Alaska (B73/G77)

Regulatory amendments

- Electronic reporting, online accounting
- Changes to VMS requirements (required for sablefish in BS, no longer required for dinglebar lingcod in GOA)
- Repeal of vessel incentive program
- Changes to observer program to provide flexibility in deployment and improve operational efficiency
- Bering Sea Chinook salmon bycatch economic data collection

Other

- Upcoming discussion paper on VMS use and requirements
- Council's economic data collection committee
- Video monitoring is being explored as a tool for monitoring and enforcement
- Council encourages research through annual research priorities, cooperates with NPRB
- Council initiated and participates in Alaska Marine Ecosystem Forum, as well as maintaining other relationships with partner entities

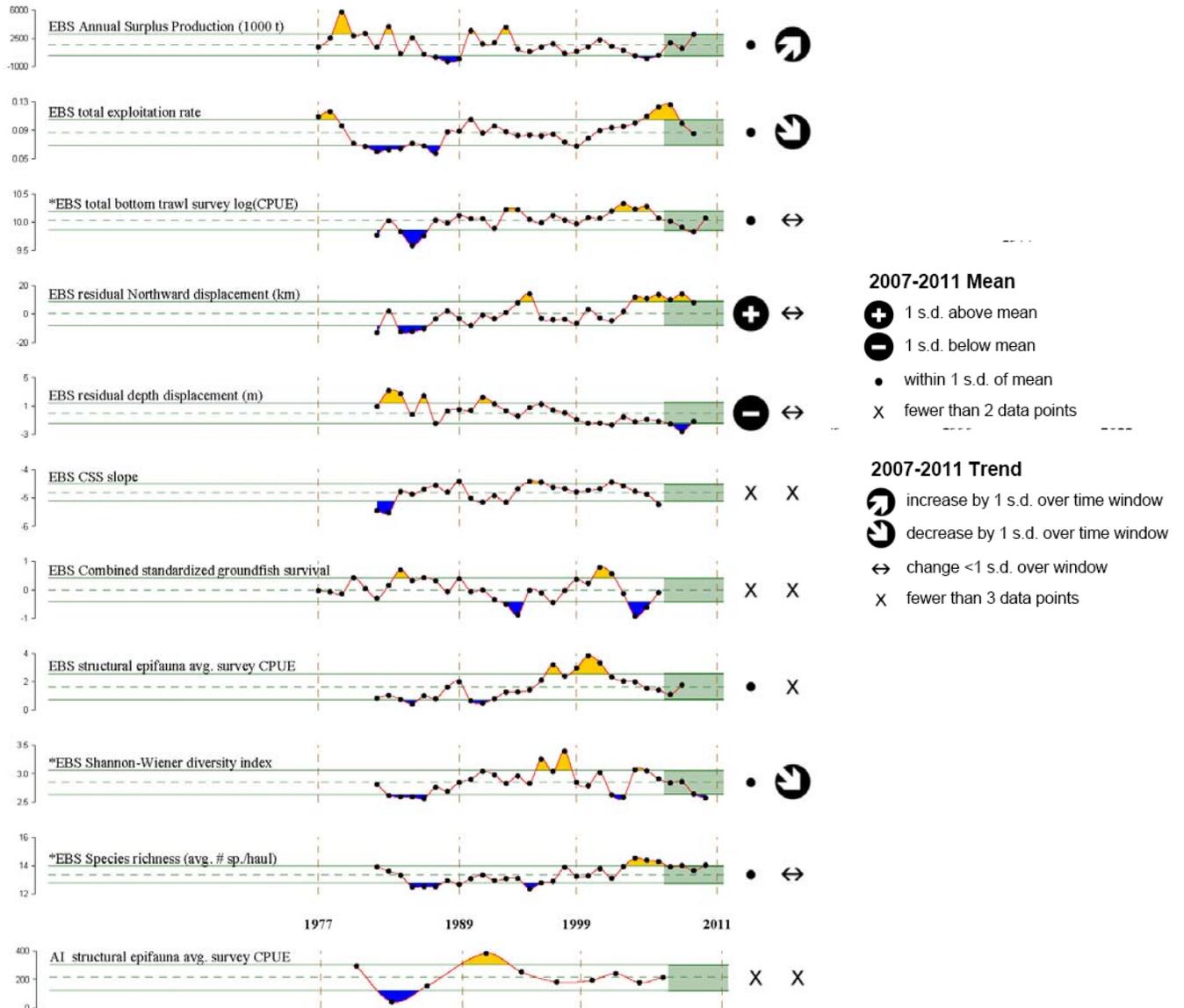
5 Changes in groundfish and environmental conditions since 2004

The Council's annual Ecosystem Considerations chapter of the SAFE report (Zador et al 2011) provides a comprehensive overview of environmental conditions in the BSAI and GOA on an annual basis. No groundfish species is currently, nor has been, overfished or subject to overfishing, since 2004. With respect to climate variability, the Bering Sea cold pool has varied over the last ten years, but is within the range of variability considered in the PSEIS analysis. The cold pool size and location may affect the distribution of some fish species, and may also affect stratification, production, and community dynamics in the Bering Sea.

AFSC staff have developed a format for reporting various indices over time, and comparing the most recent five years against the historical record for each indicator. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show ecosystem indices for the groundfish fishery regions. For almost all of the indices shown, the five year mean is within one standard deviation of the historical mean for the data set, and comparing recent years to the environmental baseline analyzed in the PSEIS indicates that environmental conditions have not changed significantly since 2004. Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5 illustrate fishery indices for the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska. Once again, the five year mean is generally within one standard deviation of the historic mean.

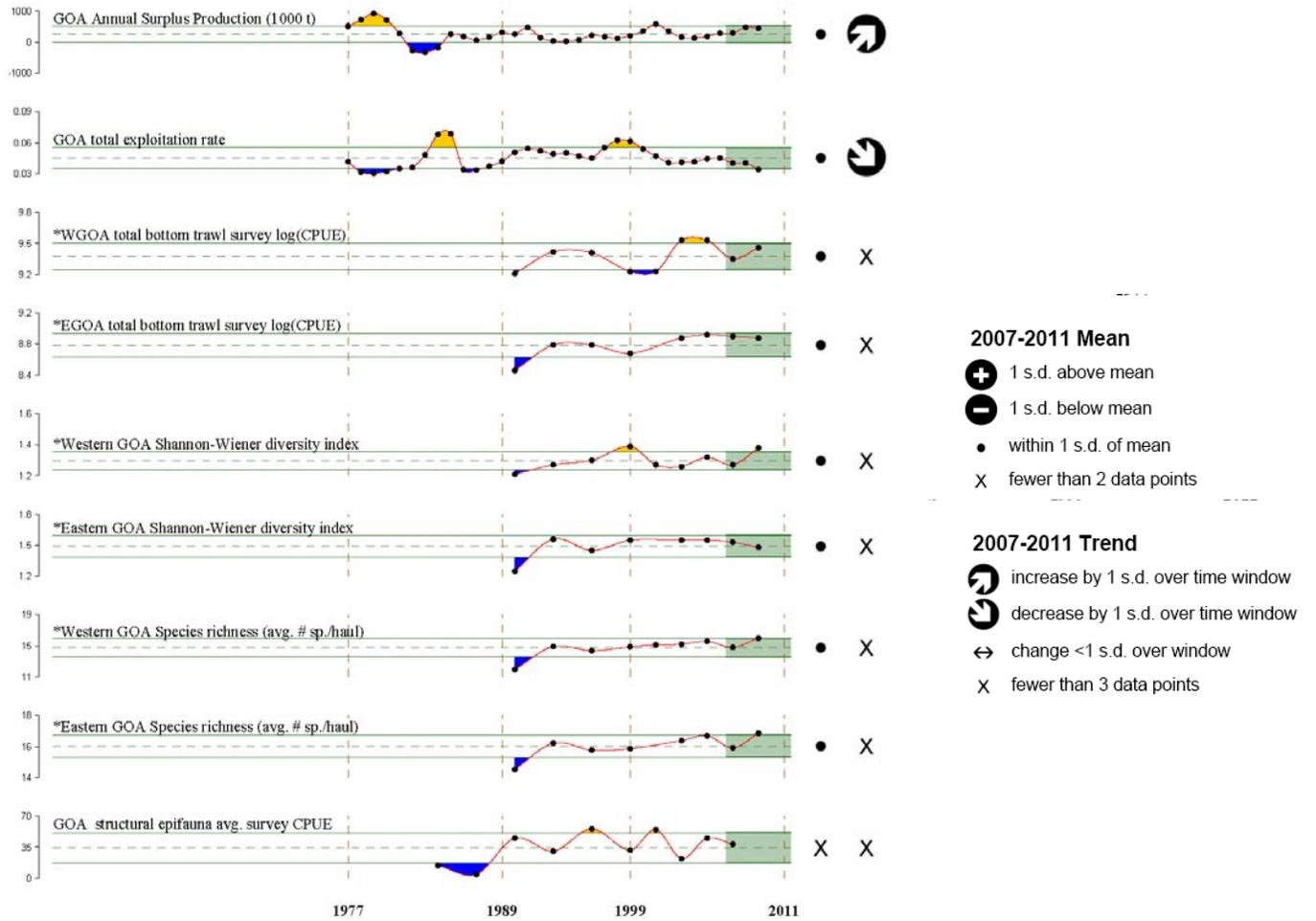
Additionally, the 2010 EFH 5-year review (NPFMC and NMFS 2010) evaluated changes in fishing impacts on habitat from the period analyzed in the EFH EIS (and incorporated by reference in the PSEIS) and the subsequent five-year period. Total fishing effort decreased in all regions for pelagic and non-pelagic trawling between the period analyzed in the EFH EIS (1998-2002) and the subsequent period (2003-2007).

Figure 1 Comparison of 2006-2011 versus historical record of Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands ecosystem indices



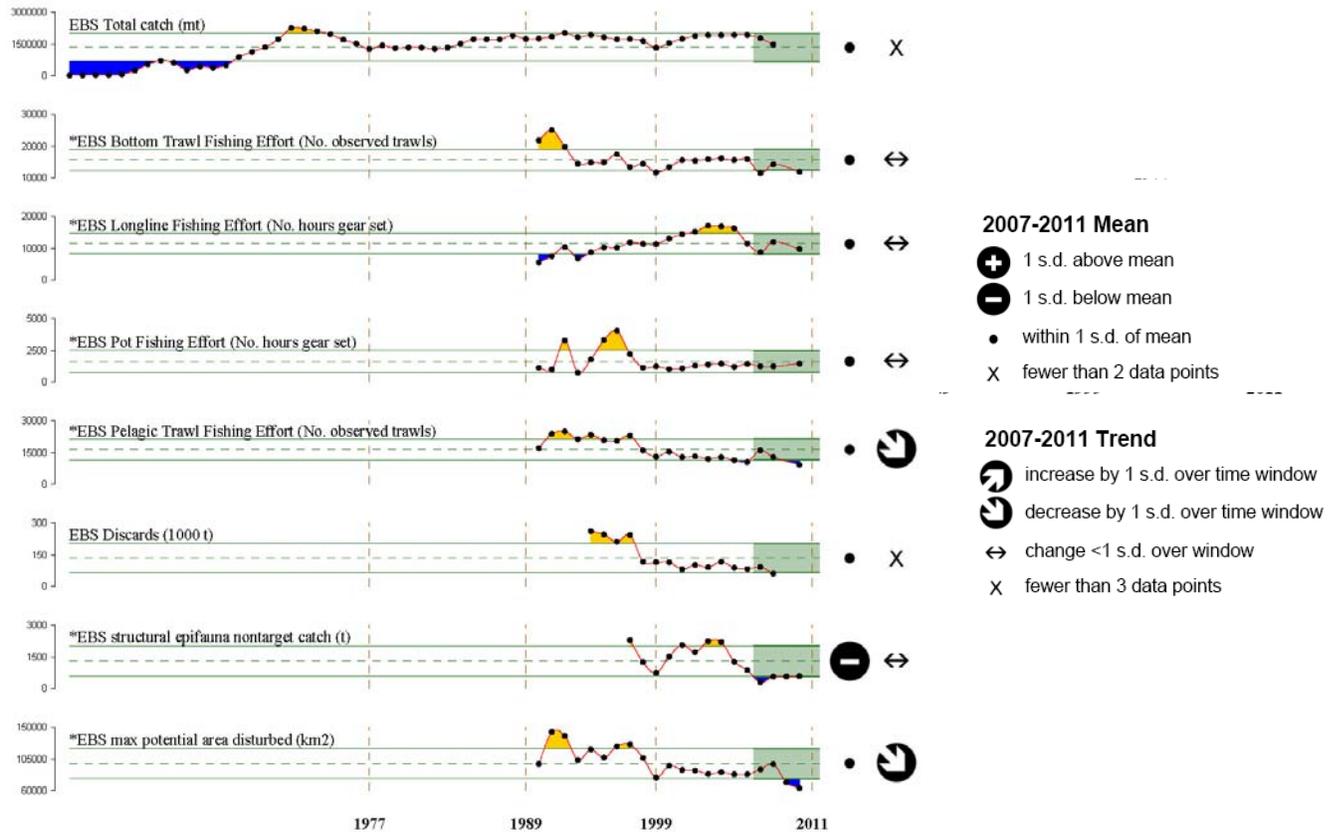
Source: Zador et al 2011.

Figure 2 Comparison of 2006-2011 versus historical record of Gulf of Alaska ecosystem indices



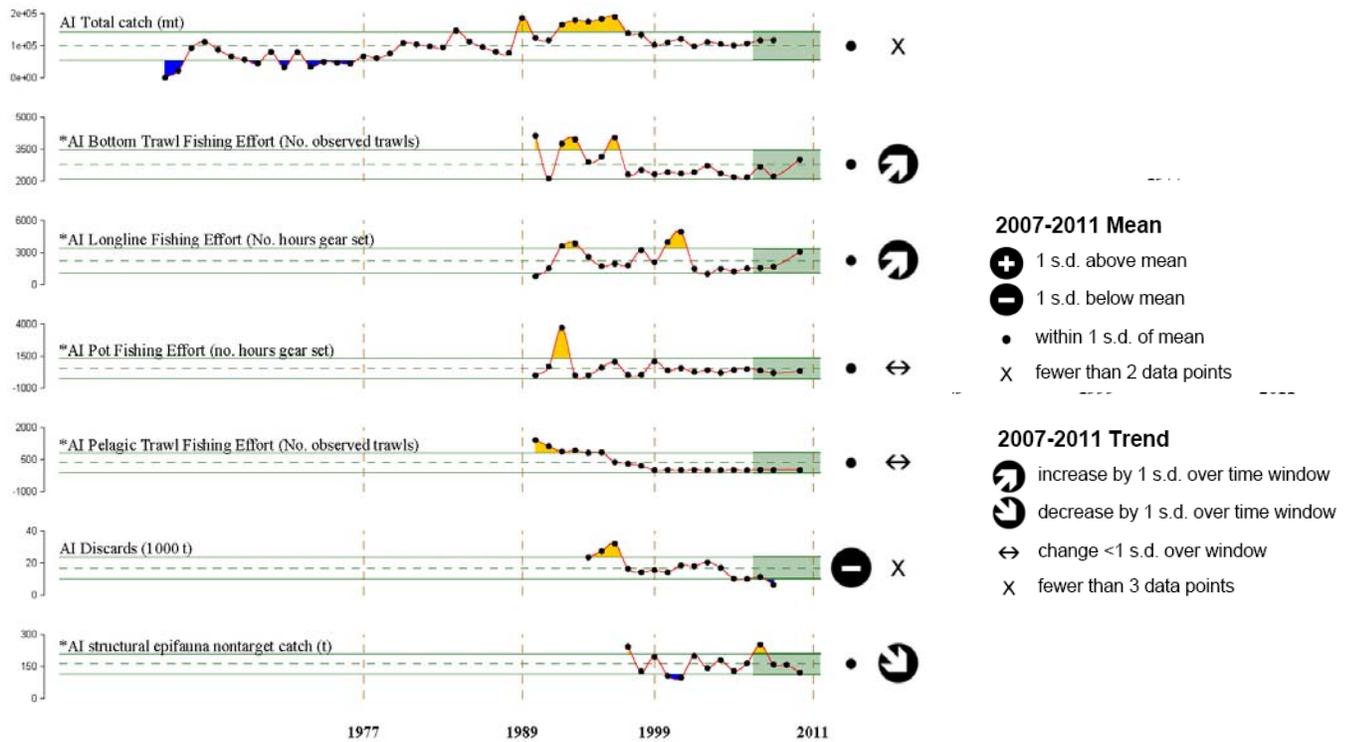
Source: Zador et al 2011.

Figure 3 Comparison of 2006-2011 versus historical record of fisheries indices in the Bering Sea



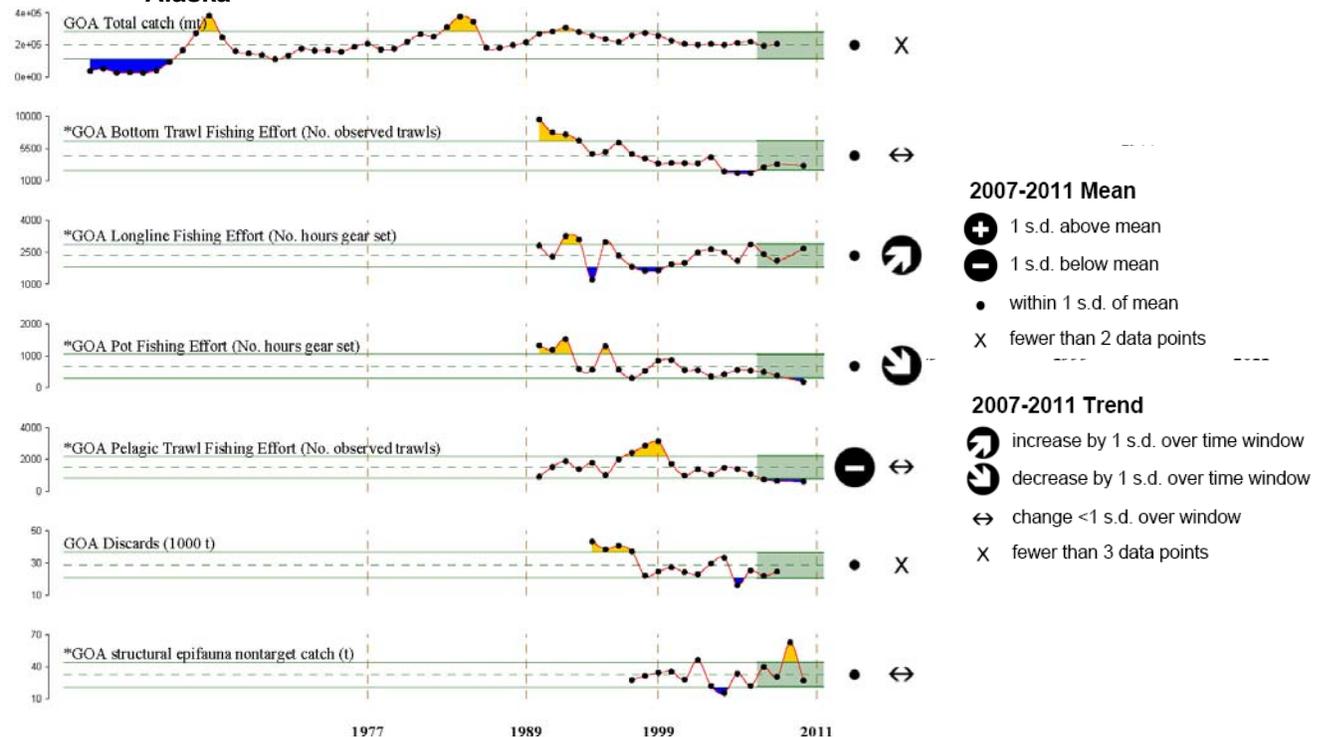
Source: Zador et al 2011.

Figure 4 Comparison of 2006-2011 versus historical record of fisheries indices in the Aleutian Islands



Source: Zador et al 2011.

Figure 5 Comparison of 2006-2011 versus historical record of fisheries indices in the Gulf of Alaska



Source: Zador et al 2011.

6 History of the 2004 PSEIS

In late 1990s, NMFS and the Council realized that they needed to take a broader view of the cumulative effects of their management decisions. Typically, the Council addresses a management problem by developing specific solutions. Staff analyzed the alternatives to determine the direct effects of the alternatives in a variety of context and the Council shares that analysis with the public prior to making a decision and forwarding that recommendation to the agency and the Secretary of Commerce for final review and approval.

Beginning in 2000, the Council and NMFS conducted a comprehensive, programmatic environmental review of the BSAI and GOA groundfish fishery management plans. The analysis evaluated the management of Alaska's groundfish fisheries from a policy-level perspective, with alternatives ranging from a more aggressive harvest management policy to a highly precautionary one. Each management policy was illustrated and framed with a range of management measures within which the Council would intend to implement the alternative. Published as a final programmatic supplemental environmental impact statement (PSEIS) in June 2004, this document serves the Council and NMFS as the overarching EIS in support of federal authorization of the groundfish fisheries off Alaska. It also described the physical, biological and human environment; every fishery and gear type; and scientific data gaps and research needs.

In April 2004, the Council used this PSEIS as the basis for amending its FMPs to incorporate a new policy statement that communicates its intent to take a more precautionary approach to fishery management decision-making when faced with scientific uncertainty. The Council now routinely reviews its policy goals and objectives when making decisions and when developing its annual workplan.

One aspect of the 2004 PSEIS that made its preparation particularly challenging was that approximately 25 years of management decisions had to be evaluated as a cumulative whole. Both FMPs had over 80 plan amendments that had to be reviewed and analyzed, and the management program had changed substantially during the time period, from a fishery with a large foreign participation, to an exclusively domestic one. The next time it is appropriate to revisit the Council's management policy, and supplement the Alaska groundfish PSEIS, it should be more straightforward, as an environmental baseline has been established, and the new analysis will focus on the actions taken by the Council and NMFS since then.

References

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