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News & Notes

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

April 2015

Senator Sullivan Addresses Council

Alaska Senator Dan Sullivan addressed the Council on the second day of the meeting. He outlined current issues his office is addressing, as well as discussed Magnuson-Stevens Reauthorization. He encouraged the Council to provide comments and keep his office informed of MSA priorities as the reauthorization process evolves.



Kenny Down on Council, Tweit vice-chair

The president and CEO of Blue North Fisheries, Kenny Down, was sworn in on Wednesday to fill the seat vacated by John Henderschedt. Mr. Down has served on the Observer Advisory Committee, as well as the Steller Sea Lion mitigation committee. Also at this meeting, Mr. Bill Tweit, from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, was elected vice-chairman.



Photo: David Witherell

GOA Sablefish IFQ Pots

The Council took action to allow the use of longline pot gear in the GOA sablefish IFQ fishery. The preferred alternative gives vessel operators the choice to use either pot longline gear or hook-and-line longline (HAL) gear. Public testimony and the Council's analysis indicated that pot gear could help fishermen reduce the negative effects of whale depredation. Reduced depredation could also mitigate a source of unaccounted sablefish mortality, thus enhancing the precision of stock abundance estimates. The Council selected elements of its preferred alternative that are intended to limit the likelihood and severity of gear conflicts and grounds preemption that might result from the introduction of a second gear type. IFQ holders who use longline pots are formally encouraged to develop protocols for providing information that helps all fishermen share the fishing grounds. NMFS will report on pot gear effort in its management reports to the Council, and the Council will conduct a review of the fishery three years after rule implementation to identify any need for further management action.

In order to limit the amount of space that pots occupy on the fishing grounds, each vessel is limited in the number of pots that it can deploy in

each GOA management area. No more than 120 pots can be used in the West Yakutat or the Southeast Outside districts of the Eastern Gulf. No more than 300 pots can be used in the Central or the Western Gulf. NMFS will establish a system of pot tags to enforce this limitation. Vessels fishing longline pot gear, regardless of their size, must also fill out a NMFS logbook to aid in enforcement. The Council also limited the amount of time that pot gear can be left on the grounds without being moved or tended. Gear cannot be left for more than five days in CGOA and WY, and not for more than seven days in WGOA. Vessels in SE must remove their pots from the grounds when making a sablefish delivery. The different limits reflect the four GOA areas' varied fleet size, fishing area concentration, and run-times to port. To aid in enforcement, vessels using longline pot gear will be required to use VMS, and to declare the status of their pots when making a Prior Notice of Landing.

The Council recommended that legal-size halibut caught incidentally in GOA sablefish pots should be retained (by those holding halibut IFQ). Implementation of the halibut retention requirement is contingent upon rulemaking by IPHC, which would not occur until early 2016. If IPHC does not make longline pots a legal gear for halibut, any halibut caught in this fishery with pot gear would have to be discarded.

Staff contact is Sam Cunningham.

Retirement Calls

Gail Bendixen, a long-time administrative assistant, administrative officer, finance officer and executive secretary for the Council, has decided 29 plus years is long enough to be "Managing our Nation's Fishery Managers." She will be retiring in June this year, and the Council took an evening to thank her for her service.



Gail receiving the plaque from Chairman Dan



Retirement well-wishers

Bering Sea Salmon Bycatch

The Council took final action on a comprehensive package to manage salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. After deliberating on alternative management measures for several meetings, the Council selected a preferred alternative which modifies current management of Chinook salmon bycatch (a program previously implemented under Amendment 91 in 2011) as well as management of chum salmon bycatch. The Council received a detailed analysis and heard extensive testimony from the public on the range of management measures under consideration. The Council has engaged in extensive outreach to western Alaskan communities to best inform them as to measures under consideration and receive direct input. The Council also received hundreds of letters and resolutions providing input on the different approaches. While bycatch in recent years has been lower than historical levels, concerns remain due to critically low western Alaskan and Upper Yukon Chinook stocks, a high proportion of western Alaskan Chinook in the stock composition of the bycatch, and the potential impact rate of the pollock fishery on those stocks should current cap levels be reached in times of low abundance. The Council's previous action under Amendment 91 was intended to minimize bycatch at all levels of salmon and pollock abundance and has been largely successful. However given concerns with continued poor western Alaskan Chinook returns, and indications that some improvements could be realized in the summer season as well as at the individual vessel level, the Council initiated this action in 2014. Additionally, the Council expressed its intent to comprehensively manage Chinook and chum salmon bycatch within the pollock fishery in a coordinated manner.

The preferred alternative combines a range of management measures including incorporation of chum salmon into existing industry-managed incentive plan agreements (IPA), tools to facilitate flexibility for the pollock fleet to best operate at times of lower bycatch rates by shifting quota to the winter season, more stringent IPA provisions to require excluders and address vessel-level behavior and late summer season Chinook bycatch rates, as well as a reduction to overall cap levels in times of low western Alaskan Chinook salmon abundance. The Council's preferred alternative explicitly reduces the

bycatch caps when an index of western Alaskan and Upper Yukon Chinook salmon abundance is below a designated threshold. This measure was incorporated into the Council's management approach in recognition of the need for more stringent measures in times of critically low western Alaskan Chinook abundance. The reduction in cap levels (from 47,491 to 33,318, and from 60,000 to 45,000) in times of low abundance is designed to provide for increased incentives to the pollock fleet to reduce bycatch to the maximum extent practicable to help in efforts to rebuild critically low western Alaskan Chinook stocks. These reduced cap levels will be enacted in all years where the index for assessing the status of western Alaskan Chinook stocks is below a designated threshold that indicates very poor run sizes. All other provisions of bycatch management will also be in place in those years.

The Council reiterated its commitment to maintain efforts to monitor and adjust bycatch management strategies as needed for salmon in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. Additional reporting requirements to assess the efficacy of the bycatch management program will be implemented in conjunction with the new regulations. The Council is also committed to continuing outreach efforts to affected communities. The full Council motion with all of the modifications to the management program including cap levels, index threshold and program details is posted on the Council website as is the analysis (EA/RIR/IRFA) of the impacts of the range of alternatives.

The Council also requested staff provide a white paper evaluating the feasibility of further temporal and spatial refinements of stock composition data, including identification of the minimum number of samples necessary to meet accuracy and precision standards. The Council further requested more rapid timelines for both BSAI and GOA genetic reports. Staff contact is Diana Stram.

Upcoming Meetings

Crab Plan Team: May 4-7, Anchorage Hilton

Anchorage EM Workgroup: April 27, 2015;
Anchorage/teleconference

Observer Advisory Committee: May 29, 2015;
Anchorage, AK

Legislative Advisory Committee: June 2, 2015,
Sitka (T)

Area 4A Halibut Retention in BSAI Sablefish Pots

The Council received a staff presentation on management measures that could be implemented in tandem with the IPHC allowing the retention of Area 4A halibut in pots that fish for BSAI sablefish IFQ or CDQ. In 2013, correspondence from the Council to the IPHC recommended that the IPHC allow the retention of Area 4A halibut in pots that fish BSAI sablefish IFQ or CDQ for entities that hold both available sablefish IFQ/CDQ as well as Area 4A halibut. The IPHC responded by stating that while they were supportive of the concept of halibut retention in sablefish pots from a resource conservation perspective, they were only prepared to take action conditional on the Council taking action to ensure the take of halibut IFQ in sablefish pot remained at incidental levels only. Therefore the discussion paper presented to the Council set up management measures the Council may adopt in order to discourage the targeting of halibut with sablefish pot gear.

While Council acknowledged the policy importance of the efficient utilization of the halibut resource, given the limited number of active users in the BSAI sablefish IFQ/CDQ fishery in recent years for which these provisions would apply, the Council deemed action not to be of an urgent nature. Additionally, there was a desire to receive IPHC feedback on the potential retention of halibut in GOA sablefish pots before determining action in the BSAI. Therefore the Council chose to take no action at this time. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

Cooperative Reports

At the April meeting, the Council reviewed cooperative reports for the Amendment 80 Program, Central Gulf of Alaska Rockfish Program, American Fisheries Act Program, and BSAI Crab Program. As part of the cooperative programs, cooperatives have provided annual written reports detailing the use of the cooperative quota. At this meeting, the Council requested that historical GOA harvest activity for AFA sideboard exempt and non-exempt catcher vessels be included in future AFA Catcher Vessel Intercooperative reports to ascertain changes in fishing behavior for these vessels in the GOA.

The Council expressed their appreciation to the cooperative managers the written reports and oral presentations. The Council underscored that the reports are an invaluable resource for the Council to track the effectiveness of the different cooperatives and provide insight on effectiveness of the cooperative in meeting the Council's goals and objectives for the respective programs. The Council recognized and expressed appreciation for improvements and thoroughness of some of the written reports and voluntary oral presentations, demonstrating the utility of this important information exchange. The Council underscored the importance of participation to those cooperatives in the crab program that chose not to submit, and encouraged cooperatives that provided only minimal information to be more comprehensive in their

reports. Copies of the cooperative reports are available on the Council website. Staff contact is Jon McCracken and Sarah Marrinan.

Observer Program Small CPs

The Council reviewed an initial review draft analysis to revise the allowances for placing certain small catcher processors in the partial observer coverage category, and selected a preliminary preferred alternative (PPA). Currently, under the Observer Program, there is a general requirement that all catcher processors are placed in the full coverage category, with limited exceptions intended to address vessels with small levels of groundfish production. Under the Council's PPA, the exceptions would be revised such that only a fixed gear catcher processor vessel that is not participating in a catch share program would be eligible for partial coverage, and only if their production is below an average weekly level of 79,000 pounds (35.8 metric tons). Under the PPA, the three vessels that qualify for the current exceptions could continue in partial coverage if their fishing patterns remain unchanged, and potentially five to seven more vessels may qualify in future. The Council requested the analysis be revised with additional information, including SSC recommendations, and released for public review. The motion is available online, and staff contact is Diana Evans.

Ecosystem Committee

The Ecosystem Committee met March 17-18, to consider the application of the Council's Ecosystem Vision Statement, receive updates on recent habitat related science in the Bering Sea, and discuss the prospective development of a Bering Sea Ecosystem Plan. The Council passed a motion to explicitly incorporate the Council's Ecosystem Vision Statement as an element in scoping for Council actions and to ensure discussion of the Ecosystem Vision Statement occurs during final deliberation of Council actions. The Council also approved the next meeting of the Ecosystem Committee to be held August 6-7, 2015 in Juneau, AK. Staff contact is Steve MacLean.

Appointments to Plan Teams

The Council announced the appointment of Sarah Webster to the Scallop Plan Team, and Cindy Tribuzio to the BSAI Groundfish Plan Team. Ms. Webster is the Program Manager for the Fisheries, Aquatic Science and Technology lab in the Department of Environmental Science at Alaska Pacific University, and has worked on two current scallop research projects. Ms. Tribuzio is a research fishery biologist for the National Marine Fisheries Service at the Auke Bay Lab in Juneau. Ms. Tribuzio has worked with plan teams in the past, and has authored many SAFE chapters. We welcome both and look forward to working with them in the future.

Staff Tasking

In addition to discussing the timing and relative priority of previously tasked projects, and tasking for various workgroups and committees, the Council provided clarifications on several important issues. Additionally, the Council took the following actions:

- Established a new standing committee consisting of 4-5 Council members to review relevant national legislation, including future proposed MSA revisions.
- Provided feedback comments on MSA revision bill HR 1335.
- In its discussion of Council Committees, the Council expressed its intent to reconstitute the Rural Outreach Committee, including appointment of a new Committee Chair to replace previous Chair Eric Olson, and task it with discussion of various approaches to more regular outreach, in addition to issue-specific outreach efforts.
- Approved minutes from the February meeting, and committed to a future review of the new revised format for preparing meeting minutes. The new format is a combination of action memos, motions with voting records, the newsletter and audio files.
- Agreed to send a letter in support of ALFAs proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for funding to support EM implementation.

Scallop Management

The Council reviewed the annual stock assessment and fishery evaluation (SAFE) report for Alaska weathervane scallops. The Council approved the SAFE and recommended the SSC's determination of 1.161 million pounds of shucked scallop meats as the acceptable biological catch (ABC) limit. This ABC is equivalent to 90% of the overfishing limit (OFL) of 1.29 million pounds and is the maximum allowed under the Scallop FMP's ABC control rule. While ABC applies statewide, guideline harvest levels (GHLs) for the different scallop registration areas in Alaska are established by ADF&G.

The Council was informed that an open access State waters fishery was in place in 2014 following the sunseting of a moratorium on scallop vessels in Alaska. The state-waters management plan allows ADF&G to manage scallop beds in waters of Alaska separately from those in adjacent federal waters. Although several new vessels were registered to participate in the state fishery, only vessels that had been active under existing federal permits harvested scallops in 2014.

A CamSled (camera sled) survey that collects images as it is pulled over scallop beds could replace the state's more traditional dredge surveys. The processing of images from the CamSled would provide scallop density estimates which would be the basis for abundance estimates in a given survey area. Alaska Pacific University's Fisheries, Aquatic Science, and Technology Lab is currently involved in processing the image collection. A data-poor assessment workshop for scallop stocks is expected to be held towards the end of 2015 with participation by the members of the Scallop Plan Team, among others. Staff contact is Jim Armstrong.

3 Meeting Update

Due to time limitations, as well as logistics, associated with the June meeting in Sitka, the following items (originally scheduled for the June meeting agenda) have been postponed to the October meeting agenda, in order to allow ample time for completion of major agenda items associated with the Observer Program and BSAI halibut PSC limits in June:

- final action on AI Pacific cod processing allocations
- discussion paper on 100% observer coverage requirements for GOA trawl vessels
- discussion paper on biomass-based (halibut) PSC limits
- slope and canyon survey report from the Alaska Fisheries Science Center - the report will be

released over the summer, and this issue will be scheduled for October where the Council will consider recommendations/alternatives from interested proposers and determine next steps.

Crab 10 Year Review

The SSC received a presentation from Council and AFSC staff soliciting feedback on the proposed scope and methods for the BSAI Crab rationalization 10-year program review. The presentation included a discussion of two AFSC studies related to the crab program and a proposed work-plan which included an annotated table of contents.

The SSC commented on the research and the proposal, and discussed the merits of having a more rigorous assessment of the impacts of the program using model-based approaches compared to the more rudimentary descriptive assessment of impacts currently proposed. Ultimately the SSC recommended a draft analysis be presented to the SSC at a later date so that major impacts can be identified for, potentially, more rigorous model-based analysis. The SSC also made several specific recommendations on information to include and ways to include the information.

The SSC also provided feedback on the two AFSC studies proposed for inclusion in the program review. The first study presented included information from semi-structure interviews solicited from a wide range of stakeholders in the crab fisheries. Members of the SSC remarked on the intrinsic merit of this work and supported further endeavors by the AFSC in this direction. However, significant concern was expressed regarding the way the information was presented and how it may be relied on for the purposes of a 10-year review. The SSC recommended that this work be limited to a supportive role for establishing hypothesis tests or data from other sources. The SSC recommended the inclusion of the AFSC's study on Community Vulnerability metrics in the 10-year review, conditional on incorporating feedback detailed in their minutes.

The Council received the SSC report and presentation. It clarified in staff tasking that, at this point, it was not comfortable with the AFSC's study on industry perception of the crab program going into the 10-yr review. Staff contact is Sarah Marrinan.

DRAFT NPFMC THREE-MEETING OUTLOOK - updated 4/21/2015

June 1-9, 2015 Sitka, AK	October 5-13, 2015 Anchorage, AK	December 7-15, 2015 Anchorage, AK
National Standard 1 Guidelines: Review and Comment SSL Critical Habitat: Update (T) OAC report: Review Observer Program Supplemental EA: Review Observer Program Annual Report: Review EM Workgroup report: Review Observer coverage on small CPs: Final Action Observer coverage on BSAI trawl CVs: Define Alternatives Bering Sea Halibut PSC: Final Action Research Priorities: Determine priorities WAI GKC Partial Offloads: Initial Review BSAI Crab: Plan team report; OFL/ABC for 3 stocks	North Pacific Climate Vulnerability Assessment: Review (T) GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Preliminary Analysis Charter Halibut RQE Program: Initial Review (T) AI Pcod A/B Seasonal Apportionment: Discussion paper AI Pcod Allocation: Final Action AFA program review: Review Workplan (T) Observer Program 2016 Annual Deployment Plan: Review EM Workgroup recommendation for 2016 Pre-implementation Observer coverage on BSAI trawl CVs: Initial Review (T) 100% Observer coverage for GOA Trawl: Discussion paper Biomass based BSAI Halibut PSC Limits: Discussion paper Halibut Deck Sorting Scales 2016 EFP: Review BS FEP: Discussion paper, Ecosystem Ctte Report Groundfish Policy and Workplan: Review Proposed groundfish harvest specs: Approve; PT report WAI GKC Partial Offloads: Final Action (T) BSAI Crab SAFE/ specs for 6 stocks: Approve; PT report Pribilof Canyon Corals: Receive Survey Report/Next Steps	Enforcement Precepts: Review Paper GOA Trawl Bycatch Management: Action as necessary (T) Charter Halibut RQE Program: Final Action (T) Charter Halibut Measures for 2016 Halibut/Sablefish IFQ program review: Review Workplan (T) Observer coverage on BSAI trawl CVs: Final Action (T) Final groundfish harvest specs: Approve; PT report EFH 5-year Review: Review Draft Report (T) ITEMS BELOW NOT YET SCHEDULED Salmon genetics spatial/temporal refinement: Disc Paper EM Integration: Initial Review (June 2016) BSAI Crab bycatch limits/area closure evaluation: Disc paper Observer Lead Level 2: Discussion paper for Reg Am Observer Tendering: Initial Review

AI - Aleutian Islands
AFA - American Fisheries Act
BiOp - Biological Opinion
BSAI - Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands
BKC - Blue King Crab
BOF - Board of Fisheries
CQE - Community Quota Entity
CDQ - Community Development Quota
EM - Electronic monitoring
EFH - Essential Fish Habitat
EFP - Exempted Fishing Permit
EIS - Environmental Impact Statement
FEP - Fishery Ecosystem Plan
FLL - Freezer longliners
GOA - Gulf of Alaska
GKC - Golden King Crab
GHL - Guideline Harvest Level

HAPC - Habitat Areas of Particular Concern
IFQ - Individual Fishing Quota
ICA - Inter-cooperative Agreements
IPA - Incentive Program Agreements
LLP - Limited License Plan
MPA - Marine Protected Area
MRA - Maximum Retainable Allowance
PSC - Prohibited Species Catch
RKC - Red King Crab
ROFR - Right of First Refusal
RQE - Recreational Quota Entity
SIR - Supplemental Information Report
SSC - Scientific and Statistical Committee
SAFE - Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation
SSL - Steller Sea Lion
TAC - Total Allowable Catch
VMS - Vessel Monitoring System

Future Meeting Dates and Locations

June 1-9, 2015, Sitka
October 5-13, 2015 Anchorage
December 7-15, 2015, Anchorage
February 1-9, 2016, Portland
April 4 - 12, 2016, Anchorage
June 6-14, 2016, Kodiak
October 3 -11, 2016 Anchorage
December 5-13, 2016, Anchorage

(T) = Tentative