

# ALASKA GROUND FISH FISHERIES

## SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT



*Project Newsletter No. 9*  
*April 2002*

### PSEIS ALTERNATIVES UPDATE

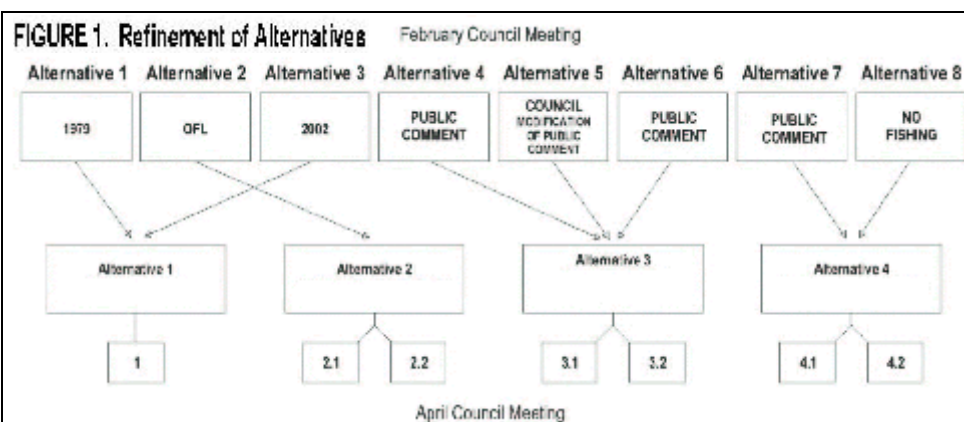
In November 2001, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announced its decision to revise the January 2001 draft programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (draft PSEIS) for the Alaska groundfish fisheries after reviewing public comments. NMFS determined that the draft PSEIS could be improved substantially by restructuring the alternatives from single-focus to multi-component alternatives, by expanding on the cumulative effects analysis, and by making the document more concise and easier to read. Beginning in December 2001, NMFS began developing several versions of the new alternatives for review. In January 2002, NMFS placed these new alternatives on its website and solicited public comment. In February, following review of the public comment, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) adopted a range of eight policy alternatives and case studies ranging from the old 1978/1979 Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) to a No Fishing FMP (Figure 1). The Council requested that NMFS continue to work with these alternatives to make them more specific and differentiable, to address problems of having specific tools mixed with the policy objectives, and to consolidate them if possible. Between the February and April Council meetings, NMFS consulted with public stakeholders and legal counsel to determine the best way to structure the alternatives to provide the specificity needed to differentiate among the policy alternatives as well as provide the detail necessary to conduct a meaningful scientific analysis. At the April 16, 2002 Council meeting, NMFS recommended that the eight alternatives be consolidated into four policy alternatives. Each alternative to the status quo would also include two FMP-like examples that will serve as

bookends to an FMP framework within which future project level management decisions will be made.

This means that in the final Record of Decision (ROD) document, the Council will select a preferred alternative that could contain an amendment to the FMPs' policy goals and objectives. In addition, the Council would also be committing to amending its FMPs on a time schedule developed by the Council (in the ROD) in a manner consistent with the FMP framework.

This approach to developing the programmatic alternatives maintains flexibility in decision making by providing a range of policy goals and objectives from which to choose as the Council and NMFS seek to satisfy its Magnuson Stevens Act obligations. It also provides the Council with flexibility in selecting those policy goals, objectives, and foreseeable actions that it intends to pursue as FMP amendments in the near future. It captures the full range of policy options and actions approved by the Council at the February 2002 meeting. This approach will provide the specificity needed to satisfy the legal requirements of this PSEIS.

This approach, however, does constitute a departure from past briefings by NMFS staff on the scope and eventual endpoint of this PSEIS process. In adopting this approach, the Council recognized that to satisfy the legal requirements of this PSEIS the Council and NMFS need to commit to a review of different policy objectives as well as the "means" of achieving a change in policy direction. Developing an FMP framework range for each alternative to status quo will allow the Council to consider potential FMP management measures. These measures would subsequently be further developed by the Council as follow-on amendments through its normal FMP decision making process. The time schedule for developing any follow-on amendments would be determined after the Council has constructed its preferred alternative, reviewed data requirements and public comment, and prioritized its policy objectives.



## **COUNCIL AND NMFS SOLICIT PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE CURRENT DRAFT ALTERNATIVES**

The Council wishes to finalize the PSEIS alternatives and forward them to NMFS for analysis at its June 2-11, 2002 meeting. Because the meeting is scheduled to be held in Dutch Harbor, Alaska, both the Council and NMFS are encouraging the public to submit written comments prior to the meeting. These comments will be reviewed and used in finalizing the alternatives for analysis. The public can obtain copies of the current draft alternatives and their corresponding FMP frameworks from either the Council's or NMFS' Alaska Region webpage. The webpage addresses are:

Council: [www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/](http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/)

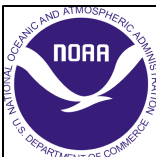
NMFS: [www.fakr.noaa.gov](http://www.fakr.noaa.gov)

If necessary, copies of the alternatives can also be mailed or faxed by contacting Steve Davis, NMFS, at (907) 271-3523.

**Written comments should be mailed so they arrive no later than May 22, 2002** to ensure they are included in the meeting briefing books. Comments on the draft alternatives should be sent to both NMFS and the Council.

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