

ALASKA GROUND FISH FISHERIES SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT



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PSEIS ALTERNATIVES UPDATE

What happened at the June 2002 Council meeting?

During its June 4-12, 2002 meeting, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) received a report from NMFS staff on the refinements made to the April 2002 suite of programmatic alternatives and the results of several meetings held with public stakeholder groups. The Council also reviewed written comments from the public and received oral testimony from a number of representatives of fishing industry and environmental organizations. Following a review of all this information, the Council modified, through a series of motions, the wording of alternative policy language as well as details of the alternatives associated FMP frameworks. The Council completed its June action by adopting the suite of alternatives for analysis.

What exactly are the alternatives?

The Council has developed four policy alternatives ranging from relatively less to more environmentally precautionary. Each policy alternative is comprised of a set of FMP policy goal and objective statements. Additionally, except for the status quo alternative (i.e., the existing or current policy), each new policy alternative includes two illustrative FMPs that serve as bookends to a management framework consistent with that policy. Each FMP bookend will be analyzed separately and will proxy a range of future management actions. The bookend framework will indicate the range of environmental effects of that policy. The bookends are not intended to be stand alone alternatives. Instead, once the Council chooses a policy-level alternative (and accompanying bookends), it will be committing, to the extent practicable, to devise and implement a fisheries management plan consistent with that chosen alternative. The bookends therefore establish a range of management tools from which the Council will choose when revising the FMP as well as predicting the range of potential environmental effects from the use of those management tools. This alternative structure recognizes that the resource being managed as well as the marine ecosystem is quite dynamic in nature and only partially understood. Providing a range of management tools and their potential effects for each policy alternative is an attempt to take into account the dynamic nature of the fisheries as a whole and to provide enough management regime flexibility in each alternative to allow the decision-makers to base decisions on the best available science.

So, the alternatives being considered are different management policies?

Yes. Each alternative contains a management approach statement and a suite of comprehensive policy goals and objectives. At the end of this process, the Council and NMFS will determine its preferred policy for managing the Alaska groundfish fisheries in the future. The Council will formally amend the Bering

Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska Groundfish FMPs to incorporate any change in policy.

What happens next?

With this action, NMFS will begin to analyze these alternatives and prepare a revised Alaska Groundfish Fisheries Draft Programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (PSEIS) for public review. Prior to releasing the revised draft PSEIS, the Council intends to select a preliminary preferred alternative. Such an action will provide the public with an indication of the Council's proposed policy with regard to management of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Island and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. Including the preliminary preferred alternative in the draft PSEIS will allow the public to comment on that alternative in addition to commenting on the document as a whole. Following public review, the Council and NMFS will consider the public comments and finalize the preferred alternative, making changes to the alternative as necessary. This final recommendation from the Council to NMFS will be included in the final PSEIS document. The final PSEIS will be available for public review prior to NMFS making its final decision on the future management of the Alaska groundfish fisheries. This final decision will be published in a Record of Decision document.

What role do the FMP frameworks have in the analysis?

The FMP bookends are examples of management plans that are driven wholly by the policy statements. They illustrate different ways the groundfish fisheries can be managed and the range of environmental effects that can be expected from the implementation of a policy alternative. The analysis of the FMP frameworks will be included in the Council's and NMFS's final decision, and will be used to define a range of management actions that will be pursued following completion of the PSEIS.

The "no fishing" scenario received a lot of attention at the Council meeting. Is it truly reasonable as an FMP bookend?

Yes. During the June Council meeting in Dutch Harbor, it became apparent through comments made by the public and Council members that a misconception exists as to the nature of this FMP scenario. Policy alternative 4 emphasizes an extremely precautionary approach to management of fisheries when faced with scientific uncertainty about the impacts of those fisheries on the physical and biological environment. The closure of the fisheries is certainly an approach that can be taken until more is known about fishery effects and the environment (although it ignores any potentially positive socio-economic effects of the fisheries). FMP bookend 4.2, however, does not initiate a

permanent prohibition on fishing. Instead it represents an extremely precautionary approach to fishery management wherein individual fisheries are closed only until sufficient scientific information is obtained to indicate that a fishery has no appreciable negative effects on the physical and biological environment. Once the effects of a fishery have been determined, it will be opened at a level consistent with ensuring that the resource and environment will not be negatively impacted.

How will the Council select its preliminary preferred alternative?

Prior to completing the revised draft PSEIS and releasing it to public review, NMFS staff will present to the Council a report summarizing the results of its analysis of the programmatic alternatives. The report will contain information on the predicted environmental effects for each alternative. Results from this analysis will serve as the basis for the Council's selection of a preliminary preferred alternative for public review. The Council may choose to select one of the four programmatic alternatives in its entirety, or they could choose to construct a new alternative. Each alternative to the status quo includes a policy section containing a number of program goals and objectives, and an FMP framework containing a range of FMP components and tool applications (such as TAC setting, marine protected areas, Steller sea lion measures, bycatch restrictions, etc.).

Together, these provide the Council and the public with a variety of management options at both the policy level as well as at the management tool level, that may be chosen in whole or in combination. The Council will identify its preliminary preferred alternative at a future meeting and the public will have an opportunity to comment on the selection as part of the revised draft PSEIS.

Can the public recommend a different preferred alternative?

Yes. By restructuring the PSEIS in this manner, the public is afforded the full opportunity to review all of the programmatic alternatives including the Council's preliminary preferred alternative. The public will have the opportunity to voice their support for any of the alternatives. They will also have access to the same information in the draft PSEIS to develop and submit their own preferred alternative should it be different from the Council's.

For More Information:

To view the PSEIS alternatives and their corresponding FMP frameworks, or for further information on the next steps in the PSEIS process, consult the NMFS webpage at www.fakr.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/seis, or contact Steve Davis at (907) 271-3523.



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