



AUG 17 2004

Dear Reviewer:

In accordance with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), we enclose for your review the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) Crab Fisheries. The FEIS is also available on the NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region website at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/crab/eis/default.htm>. Additional printed or CD copies of the FEIS may be ordered from this website.

The FEIS serves as the primary decision document for determining a management system for the BSAI king and Tanner crab fisheries. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), in an effort to alleviate the problems caused by excess capacity and the race for fish, has determined that the institution of some form of rationalization program is needed to improve crab fisheries management. The proposed action is to rationalize the crab fisheries by allocating crab harvesting and processing privileges to participants. The FEIS evaluates the environmental and economic consequences of four alternatives: (1) status quo; (2) three-pie voluntary cooperative program; (3) an individual fishing quota program; and (4) a cooperative program. The alternative programs under consideration are a complex set of elements that are designed to balance the interests of several identifiable groups that depend on these fisheries. These groups include harvesters, processors, communities, and crew.

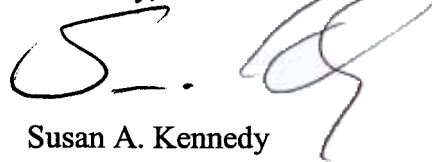
In June 2002, the Council recommended the three-pie voluntary cooperative program as the preferred alternative for rationalizing the BSAI crab fisheries. In January 2004, the U.S. Congress amended the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to establish this Program. NOAA Fisheries will issue a final agency action on the Program in December 2004.

The FEIS also serves as the primary environmental review document supporting the Fishery Management Plan for BSAI king and Tanner Crabs. It summarizes and analyzes the best available scientific information about crab resources and the benthic environment in the BSAI and assesses the environmental impacts resulting from fishery management actions.

Comments or questions on this document submitted during the agency's 30-day review period for the FEIS must be received by October 4, 2004. Written comments on the FEIS should be submitted by mail to James W. Balsiger, Alaska Regional Administrator, NOAA Fisheries, P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802. Faxed comments will not be accepted. Electronic comments may be submitted by email to bsai.feis.comments@noaa.gov; include in the subject line the following identifier: FEIS Crab. A copy of your comments should be submitted to me by mail to the NOAA Strategic Planning Office (PPI/SP), SSMC3, Room 15603, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910; by fax to 301-713-0585; or by e-mail to nepa.comments@noaa.gov.

NOAA Fisheries is not required to respond to comments received as a result of the issuance of the FEIS. NOAA Fisheries will review and consider all comments received for their impact on the issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD). NOAA Fisheries will make the ROD available to the public following final agency action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Kennedy', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Susan A. Kennedy
Acting NEPA Coordinator