



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

*National Marine Fisheries Service*

*P.O. Box 21668*

*Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

September 8, 2003

Dennis Austin, Interim Chair  
North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
605 West Fourth Avenue, Suite 306  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Mr. Austin:

Enclosed please find the Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Essential Fish Habitat Identification and Conservation in Alaska (EFH EIS). The document evaluates alternatives for three actions: describing and identifying EFH, adopting an approach to identify Habitat Areas of Particular Concern, and minimizing the adverse effects of fishing on EFH.

We are sending copies of the EFH EIS to all Council members as well as the Advisory Panel and Scientific and Statistical Committee. We are also sending copies to a number of stakeholders who have been actively following this issue. The EFH EIS will also be posted on the Alaska Region's web site at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/habitat/seis/efheis.htm>. Interested parties may review the preliminary draft and provide comments during the October Council meeting.

At the October Council meeting, staff will present the methods of analysis and the results of the EFH EIS. We anticipate that the Council will select its preferred alternative for each of the three actions. Staff will then revise the document accordingly. The formal public comment draft will be available by January 16, 2004. We will solicit comments on that draft for 90 days.

Any questions regarding the EFH EIS should be directed to Jon Kurland, Assistant Regional Administrator for Habitat Conservation, at 907-586-7638 or [jon.kurland@noaa.gov](mailto:jon.kurland@noaa.gov).

Sincerely,

James W. Balsiger  
Administrator, Alaska Region

Enclosure

