

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is Evaluating Measures to Limit Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery



Salmon and pollock are both important fisheries for Alaska. Salmon support large and critically important commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries throughout Alaska and elsewhere, and are the basis of a cultural tradition in many parts of the state. At the same time, the commercial pollock fishery produces significant revenue for the State of Alaska, and participation in the fishery (through royalties and employment) is important for the western Alaska Community Development Quota communities.

Salmon are caught unintentionally in the offshore Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery, and may not be kept. Despite bycatch control measures implemented in the pollock fishery since the mid-1990s, Chinook salmon bycatch has increased over time, and reached an historic high in 2007. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to balance minimizing salmon bycatch, to the extent practicable, with achieving optimal yield from the pollock fisheries.

The Council is developing new measures to limit Chinook salmon bycatch

The Council is preparing a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) that evaluates the following management measures to limit Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery:

- caps on the amount of Chinook salmon bycatch allowed in the pollock fisheries,
 - limits under consideration range from annual amounts of 29,300–87,500 Chinook, divided seasonally into a winter and a summer/fall pollock fishery
- seasonal closure of the pollock fishery when these bycatch limits are reached, and/or
- seasonal closure of areas where high salmon bycatch has traditionally occurred.

Council's preliminary preferred alternative

In June 2008, the Council identified a preliminary preferred alternative (PPA), to focus public comment on the current direction being considered by the Council. Under the PPA, the annual cap level would be 68,392 Chinook, provided the pollock industry develops a self-regulated, incentive-based program to avoid salmon bycatch. If an acceptable program is not proposed, the PPA mandates a lower cap of 47,591 Chinook. The pollock industry intends to present its proposed program to the Council at the February 2009 Council meeting, and the Council will make a final decision at its April 2009 meeting.

The Council is seeking public input

The Council is seeking input from local residents and communities, as well as agencies, organizations, and the general public, prior to making a decision in April 2009. Interested stakeholders are encouraged to contact the Council with their concerns as the Council proceeds with this effort. For ways to provide comments to the Council or to its partner, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), see the back page of this flyer.

NOTICE: *Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery*

HOW TO PROVIDE COMMENTS

Write a letter to the Council or NMFS. The public comment period on the draft EIS is open from December 5, 2008 through February 23, 2009. Send letters by mail or fax to:

North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 W 4th Ave Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501
Fax: (907) 271-2817

National Marine Fisheries Service
Alaska Regional Office
PO Box 21668
Juneau, AK 99802
Fax: (907) 586-7249

Attend a regional meeting. Council and NMFS staff and Council members have attended several regional meetings to present information on the Council's action and the likely impacts. Details of the meeting locations are posted on the Council website:

Dillingham	October 7	Bristol Bay Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting
Bethel	October 8	Association of Village Council Presidents meeting
Nenana	October 15	Eastern Interior Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting
Kotzebue	October 16	Northwest Arctic Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting
McGrath	October 28	Western Interior Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting
Nome	January 22	Outreach meeting: Trigg Hall (Nome Eskimo Community hall), 200 W. 5 th Ave

Testify at the April 2009 Council meeting, when the Council will make its final decision. The April Council meeting will take place from March 30–April 7, 2009, at the Hilton Hotel, in Anchorage. The draft agenda will be posted on the Council website in early March. You may also send a letter by mail or fax to the Council for the April meeting, to the address listed above. In order for the letter to be circulated to Council members, it must be received by March 25, 2009.

Council website: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc>

Proposed timeline for the Council's Chinook salmon bycatch action:

- December 5, 2008 – Draft EIS available for public review. Begins 60-day public comment period to submit comments to NMFS. EIS is available for download at: <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/bycatch/default.htm>. CDs or printed copies may be requested from this website. You may also call NMFS at (907) 586-7228, or the Council at (907) 271-2809, to obtain a printed copy or CD.
- January 20, 2009 – Salmon Bycatch Workgroup meeting, Hilton Hotel, Anchorage. The Council's workgroup will review industry proposed programs for bycatch reduction and provide comments to the Council for their February meeting.
- February 23, 2009 – Formal EIS public comment period ends.
- February 3-10, 2009 – Council meeting in Seattle, WA (Renaissance Madison Hotel). Council reviews industry proposed programs for bycatch reduction; receives committee reports and public comments.
- March 30–April 7, 2009 – Council meeting in Anchorage. Council reviews comments on the EIS, receives public testimony, and decides on a final preferred alternative, to be recommended to the Secretary of Commerce.
- April 2009 to December 2010 – NMFS reviews the Council's preferred alternative, writes regulations; regulations go out for public review; the Secretary of Commerce makes a final decision.
- January 2011 – Management measures are implemented in the Bering Sea pollock fishery.

Chum salmon bycatch

The Council also intends to evaluate similar options to limit chum salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery. The Council reviewed preliminary alternatives at the December 2008 Council meeting in Anchorage. The Council will review these alternatives at the April 2009 Council meeting following final action on Chinook measures. An analysis is planning to be developed, with potential review by the Council in the fall of 2009.