

North Pacific Fishery Management Council
Final BSAI Salmon Bycatch Motion
April 2005

Amendment Package A

Problem Statement for Amendment Package A:

In the mid-1990s, the Council and NMFS implemented regulations to control the bycatch of chum salmon and Chinook salmon taken in the BSAI trawl fisheries. These regulations established closure areas in areas and at times when salmon bycatch had been highest based on historical observer data. Information from the fishing fleet indicates that bycatch may have been exacerbated by the current regulatory closure regulations, as much higher salmon bycatch rates were reportedly encountered outside of the closure areas. Some of these bycaught salmon include Chinook and chum stocks of concern in western Alaska. Further, the closure areas impose increased costs on the pollock fleet and processors. To address this immediate problem, the Council will examine and consider other means to control salmon bycatch that have the potential to be more flexible and adaptive, but still meet Council intent to minimize impacts to the salmon in the Eastern Bering Sea.

Alternatives under amendment package A:

Alternative 1: Status Quo

Alternative 2: Eliminate the regulatory salmon savings area closures.

Alternative 3: Suspend the regulatory salmon savings area closures so long as the pollock cooperatives and CDQ groups have in place an effective salmon bycatch voluntary rolling "hot spot" (VRHS) closure system to avoid salmon bycatch. The Council will require that the VRHS agreement have a term (meaning length of time) sufficient for analysis and implementation of the alternatives in Package B.

Suboption. The ICA managers will report to the Council immediately if there is non-participation or non-compliance without effective enforcement action under the VRHS system. In that event, the Council may recommend re-imposition of the regulatory salmon savings area closures on an expedited basis. If the regulatory closure area system is reinstated, it is the Council's intent that the closure areas be based on the most recent information available and if the analysis of Package B alternative 1 supports the approach, with regular adjustments.

The Council moves to require an annual report on the results of salmon bycatch by the cooperatives should the closures be suspended. The industry is requested to provide an annual review of performance that will be evaluated by the Council. The industry report should include the following in the bycatch reduction criteria:

- Evidence of moving the fleet away from hot spots-this is dependant on trigger rates, the spread of bycatch rates between areas, and the size of area closed.
- Trigger rates-These should recognize abundance, so rates are lower in years of low abundance and higher in years of high abundance. Guidelines for setting initial trigger rates and generally acceptable total catches are probably needed. An annual review of performance will be essential.
- Individual accountability-while there is a certain amount of randomness in salmon bycatch, there are also measures vessels can take to minimize bycatch. The co-ops should be encouraged to continue work on bycatch avoidance and individual accountability and required to report annually on these efforts.
- Review of the reliability of the total bycatch estimates

The Council recommends the development of amendment package A with high prioritization for initial review in June and final action in October.

Amendment Package B

Problem Statement for Amendment Package B:

The Council and NMFS have initiated analysis of a voluntary rolling hotspot (VRHS) alternative to regulatory salmon savings area closures. Concurrent with that analysis and possible implementation, development will continue on the alternatives that could be implemented if the VRHS approach does not achieve the desired bycatch reduction.

Two possible scenarios under which the VRHS system could produce unsatisfactory results are (1) breach of the inter-cooperative agreement (i.e. one or more vessels fail to participate in the VRHS system, or there are substantial violations of VRHS closures that are not effectively halted through penalties or other measures); or (2) compliance what the VRHS system is good, but the VRHS system fails to achieve the Council's desired level of salmon bycatch reduction. In the first scenario, the Council may ask NMFS to reinstate on an expedited basis the regulatory salmon savings area closure system that is based on the best information available. In the second scenario, the Council intends to consider implementation of an alternative regulatory system from Package B, or consider and evaluate NFMS hot spot management authority as an option for salmon bycatch management.

Alternatives under amendment package B:

Alternative 1: Establish new regulatory salmon savings area closures taking into account the most recent available salmon bycatch data. This analysis should be completed first and be updated regularly so that it can be implanted on an expedited basis if necessary.

Suboption A: Adjust the Chinook and non-Chinook regulatory closure areas annually based on the most current bycatch data available, such as the 2-3 year rolling average of bycatch rates by species and area.

Suboption B: Adjust the Chinook and non-Chinook regulatory closure areas once inseason based on the best bycatch information available.

Alternative 2: Develop a regulatory individual vessel salmon bycatch accountability program.

Suboption A: managed at the individual level

Suboption B: managed at the co-op level

Suboption 1 (to both alternatives): Develop an individual vessel accountability program that may be implemented if, after 3 years, it is determined the pollock cooperatives' "hot zone" closure system has not reduced salmon bycatch.

Suboption 2 (to both alternatives): Analyze the need and implementation strategy of an appropriate cap to meet requirements of National Standard 9.

[The SSC notes that a great deal of analysis is required to support implementation of such a system and that the current hot spot closure system likely requires additional protection measures, such as a cap]

Additionally, the Council requests the analysis cover bycatch of salmon in non-pollock BSAI trawl fisheries whose other salmon bycatch is included in the cap.

Further, the Council has identified the importance of a research plan in cooperation with the pollock fleet, western Alaska entities, NMFS and ADF&G to facilitate salmon bycatch reduction, including:

- Developing methods for reducing salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery through excluder devices, fishing behavior modification, net design and the like;
- Developing methods to gauge salmon abundance preseason or inseason so that trigger rates can be set appropriately based on the best scientific information; and
- Identifying the rivers of origin of salmon bycatch, and the timing and location of bycatch of the various stocks, paying particular attention to stocks of concern and developing methods to avoid these.

As a basis for understanding some of these issues, the Council further adopts SSC recommendations for presentations on, but not limited to:

1. The "BASIS" salmon program, emphasizing new information on the distribution of chum and Chinook salmon in the eastern Bering Sea;
2. Recent genetic stock ID of chum and Chinook salmon in the eastern Bering Sea; and
3. AYK commercial and subsistence salmon overview by ADF&G staff.