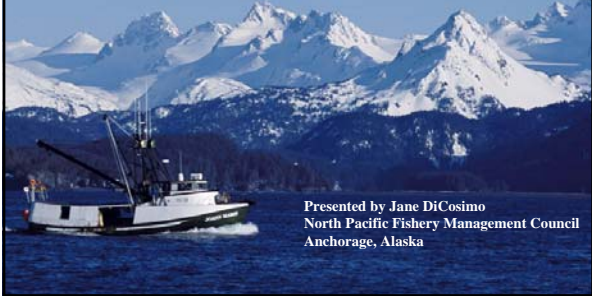**The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Recommendations:**
**How They Might Affect Fishery Management**
**in the North Pacific**

**Presented by Jane DiCosimo**
**North Pacific Fishery Management Council**
**Anchorage, Alaska**

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# Background and Objective

- The U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy was formed by Congress to provide advice on ocean policy (including but not limited to fishery management).
- Final report was released in 2004.
- My objective is to compare the Commission's recommendations with how the North Pacific Fishery Management Council currently manages Pacific halibut, groundfish, crab, and scallop fisheries in federal waters off Alaska.
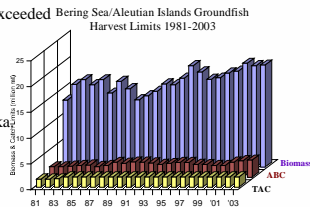
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## U.S. Oceans Commission Recommendations

1. **Base Decisions on Sound Science**
2. **Strengthen Fishery Governance**
3. **End the 'Race for Fish'**
4. **Improve Fisheries Enforcement**
5. **Move Towards Ecosystem-based Management**
6. **Improve International Fisheries Management**
7. **Reorganize NOAA**
8. **Establish National Ocean Council and four Regional Ocean Councils**

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## U.S. Oceans Commission Recommendations

**1. Base Decisions on Sound Science**
- Strengthen Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC)
- SSC should determine biological catch limits
- Independent review of SSC information
- Contingency plan in case of SSC delay
- SSCs would develop research priorities
- Require fishing licenses for all saltwater anglers
- Support cooperative research with fishermen/scientists

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### Existing Practices in the North Pacific

The SSC consists of highly respected scientists from state and federal agencies and universities. SSC members are not compensated.

The SSC provides advice at every meeting on each management action and on research priorities annually.

The allowable biological catch limits are set by the scientists and never exceeded by the Council.

Independent reviews are conducted for controversial science.

Recreational fishery data collected and shared by the State of Alaska.



Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands Groundfish Harvest Limits 1981-2003

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## U.S. Oceans Commission Recommendations

**2. Strengthen Fishery Governance**
- Allow Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to develop interstate fishery management plans (FMPs)
- Each FMP should have one Council responsible
- Broaden Council membership
- Expand training for new Council members

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**Existing Practices in the North Pacific**

The North Pacific Council members are chosen by the Secretary of Commerce, based on a list of 3 names provided by the Governor for each seat when open. The existing Council membership includes representation as follows:

voting:     3 State and 1 Federal Agency representatives
            (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and NMFS)
            5 Commercial Fisheries representatives (3 AK, 2 WA)
            1 Recreational Fisheries representative (AK)
            1 Fishing Community representative (AK)

non-voting: USFWS, USCG, PSMFC, State Dept.

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**U.S. Oceans Commission Recommendations**

**3. End the 'Race for Fish'**
- Amend Magnuson-Stevens Act to allow dedicated access privileges (e.g., IFQs, cooperatives)
- Repeal the Fisheries Finance program and Capitol Construction Fund

**4. Improve Fisheries Enforcement**
- Increase cooperative enforcement between NMFS, States, USCG
- Vessel monitoring systems for all commercial fishing vessels, with US Coast Guard taking the lead

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**Existing Practices in the North Pacific**

North Pacific leads the nation with dedicated access privileges:
- Halibut & sablefish IFQ program                         1995
- Groundfish and crab license limitation                 1998
- Bering Sea pollock offshore cooperative                1999
- Bering Sea pollock onshore cooperative                 2000
- Scallop fishery cooperative                            2000
- Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands crab IFQ/processor QS      2005
- Guided sport halibut IFQ program                       pending
- Gulf of Alaska groundfish IFQ/cooperative              pending
- Bering Sea non-pollock groundfish                      next?

Vessel monitoring systems are required on all vessels fishing for pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel.

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**U.S. Oceans Commission Recommendations**

**5. Move Towards Ecosystem-Based Management**
- Designate essential fish habitat via a multi-species approach
- Develop bycatch reduction plan and address ecosystem impacts.

**6. Improve International Fisheries Management**
- U.S. should ratify Fish Stocks Agreement and UN and FAO Compliance Agreement
- U.S. should fund its commitments for international management
- U.S. should design a National Plan of Action, and encourage other countries to implement FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

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**Existing Practices in the North Pacific**

- Prohibited fishing for forage fish
- Required seabird deterrent devices to minimize their bycatch
- Protected Steller sea lions, and other mammals by seasonal and area quota apportionments and area closures
- Revising management of incidentally caught species (*see poster!*)
- Need better data, models, and guidelines to quantify ecosystem effects and requirements.
- The Council manages Pacific Halibut with International Pacific Halibut Commission; other international conferences.



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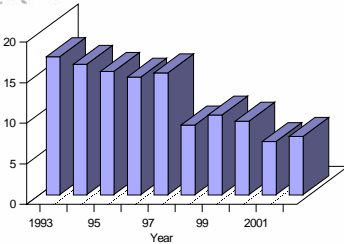**Reducing Bycatch, Discards, and Waste**

Bycatch limits for crab, salmon, halibut, and herring implemented in the 1980s; directed fisheries close when prohibited species catch limit is reached.

Gear restrictions prohibit trawling in Southeast GOA, bottom trawling for BSAI pollock, gillnets and other gear; require biodegradable panels in pots.

Mandatory full retention of all BSAI and GOA pollock and cod, and some GOA flatfish.

Voluntary industry program monitors pooled bycatch data to avoid 'hotspots,' reduce bycatch, extend fishing season, and increase target catch.



Discard Rates of Alaska Groundfish

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## Habitat Conservation

- **Effort Controls**
  - license limitation.
  - IFQs and cooperatives.
- **Gear Restrictions**
  - size limits for pots and dredges
  - trawl prohibitions
- **Closed Areas**

  90,000 nm$^2$ closed to trawling for habitat protection

  60,000 nm$^2$ closed to all fishing for sea lion protection

## Summary

Many of the U.S. Commission's recommendations to improve fishery management in the U.S. have already been implemented for Alaska fisheries.

It is uncertain how Commission recommendations would restructure NOAA.

It is uncertain how national and/or regional ocean councils would impact fisheries management in Alaska; however, Councils prefer that its membership/authority be expanded, rather than have its statutory authority for managing fisheries be absorbed by another entity.