



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

January 23, 2004

Stephanie Madsen, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Ms. Madsen:

I am pleased to report that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Essential Fish Habitat Identification and Conservation in Alaska is now complete and available for public comment. The National Marine Fisheries Service posted the document on our website (www.fakr.noaa.gov/habitat/seis/efheis.htm) on January 9, 2004, and a notice of availability appeared in the Federal Register on January 16, 2004 (69 FR 2593). We have mailed copies to everyone on our distribution list, and we are accepting comments through April 15, 2004. We will schedule public hearings in the near future, in consultation with Council staff.

For the Council's information, enclosed is a brief summary of changes we incorporated into the document following Council review of the preliminary draft in October. If you have any questions, please contact Jon Kurland, Assistant Regional Administrator for Habitat Conservation, at 907-586-7638 or jon.kurland@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Balsiger".

James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

Enclosure



Summary of Changes from the September 2003 Preliminary Draft EFH EIS to the January 2004 Draft EFH EIS

- The cover sheet, Executive Summary, and Section 4.5 include clearer statements about the conclusions of the effects of fishing analysis. The revisions clarify the scientific uncertainty and the reasons behind the conclusion that effects of fishing on EFH are minimal.
- Chapter 1 clarifies the relationship between the EFH EIS and the subsequent Environmental Assessment that will be developed to consider site-specific Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs).
- Chapter 2 reflects the preliminary preferred alternatives selected by the Council.
- Chapter 3 includes revisions to update and correct text concerning Steller sea lions.
- Chapter 4 reflects the preliminary preferred alternatives selected by the Council. Additionally, Section 4.3 reflects the updates to the Regulatory Impact Review (Appendix C) discussed below.
- Chapter 6 includes updates to the distribution list.
- The introduction to Appendix B clarifies how localized effects to habitat were considered in the analysis, and clarifies how analysts considered stock status when determining whether continued fishing activities at the current rate and intensity are likely to alter the ability of a managed species to sustain itself over the long term. Appendix B also includes a number of minor technical corrections and clarifications.
- Appendix C includes a number of revisions. A new analytical clarification section addresses assumptions and methodological issues, data limitations and interpretation, and several technical issues concerning application of economic theory. An expanded analysis of first wholesale value impacts captures potential revenue effects at the inshore processing level, by region and alternative. Appendix C reexamines potential operational and economic impacts of the alternatives, within the context of a competitive open access fishery management regime. It includes a revised calculation of revenue at risk in the GOA slope rockfish trawl fishery, and reassesses the method of proportional allocation of catch and revenue at risk for statistical reporting blocks only partially impacted by the alternatives. These changes clarify the economic effects of GOA slope closures, including the industry's ability to make up lost revenues by switching to other areas or gear, and better account for changes in economically important amounts of sablefish and Pacific cod bycatch. The analysts reexamined the relative dependence of several industry sub-sectors to assure that adverse effects on specific components of the industry were not being masked by regional aggregation. Likewise, Appendix C extends the dependent community analysis to clarify distributional impacts between Alaska and non-Alaska communities. Appendix C includes reorganized sections on distributional impacts for each alternative, facilitating the direct comparison of each potential

impact at the level of catcher vessels, catcher/processors, and shoreside sectors, as well as multi-sectoral and secondary (e.g., community) impacts, across alternatives. Finally, Appendix C includes several technical changes to the text to address specific comments on the preliminary draft.

- Appendix G includes revised text in the introduction to clarify that a variety of federal, state, and local laws limit environmental impacts from non-fishing activities and may help to avoid or minimize adverse effects to EFH. Appendix G also adds a discussion of the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act.
- Appendix H provides more information to assist in reading the catch and redistribution maps.
- Appendix J includes revisions to the HAPC process to reflect the guidance in the Council's October 2003 motion.
- Other sections and appendices include a variety of minor corrections and clarifications.