

AKSC Proposal 2 to SSL Committee: Modify 2011 RPAs to allow limited fishing for Atka mackerel in the western Aleutian Islands (AI 543) outside CH and at Buldir Island

- Introduction materials – (Provide name of proposer or institution, address and telephone number of proposer, email address for primary contact)

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- Brief Statement of Proposal – (Provide a single, brief paragraph that concisely describes the action to be taken. Details will be specified in additional sections)

Modify current AI Atka mackerel regulations to allow fishing outside of SSL critical habitat in the western Aleutian Islands (AI 543) and to allow fishing outside 10 nm at Buldir Island.

- Objectives of Proposal – (Begin with a concise statement of the problem to be addressed in the proposal, and the remedy for the problem. Provide detailed description of the proposed changes to regulations, and justification for each).

This proposal is intended to be an intermediate step between rolling back all SSL measures to the pre-2010 Bi-op measures and the 2010 Bi-op measures themselves. The current SSL regulations prohibit any retention of Atka mackerel in area 543. This measure was adopted, in our opinion, without taking a hard look at the offshore location data in Fadely 2010 and Boor 2010 that were cited as the sources of information to conclude that SSL had a greater dependence on areas outside of critical habitat. Offshore locations for SSL in the two sources are mostly in the vicinity of very deep ocean trenches (more than 1000 meters) rather than the depth stratum inhabited by Atka mackerel (100-400 meters). An additional component of this proposal addresses the (former) rookery at Buldir Island which has seen nearly no SSL presence during the last two SSL survey counts. Specifically, NMFS' land and aerial based pup surveys in 2010 and 2012 found one and zero SSL pups in those years respectively and the NMFS survey of adult SSL found only one animal in 2012. While some adjacent WAI sites have seen nominal increases in pups over the 2011 to 2012 time period (e.g. around Attu) it appears that SSL adult and pup counts have steadily declined at Buldir Island since the 2001 Bi-op measures extended the trawl closure from 10 to 15 nm. At the same time the extension of the Buldir closure to 15 nm has effectively rendered the fishing grounds inaccessible to the mackerel fishery because virtually all of the mackerel grounds are inside the closure. In spite of the near elimination of mackerel fishing around Buldir by the 15 nm closure in the 2001 Bi-op, the the SSL survey counts suggest that Buldir is no longer an important or functional WAI SSL rookery site. This proposal would restore fishing to the area from 10 to 15 nm around Buldir in addition to opening fishing grounds outside of SSL CH in AI 543 to mackerel directed fishing.

- Impacts of Proposal – (Briefly outline the effects that you think the proposed changes to management will have, including effects on Steller sea lions, other sectors of the fishery, and Aleutian Island communities).

If implemented, the proposed changes would restore outside of SSL CH fishing grounds to the Atka mackerel fishery in AI 543 and would restore fishing grounds at Buldir from 10 to 15 nm adjacent to the (former) SSL rookery site on the Island. These two changes would allow the 543 mackerel fishery to catch some or all of the 543 TAC while still closing all the critical habitat area adjacent to functional SSL sites in AI 543.

As outlined above, the AKSC believes that the current restrictions on fishing for mackerel in AI 543 are not warranted. AKSC has submitted another more extensive proposal to roll back restrictions on mackerel to the pre-2010 Bi-op level in AI 542 and 543. This proposal proposes less extensive changes than the AKSC's other proposal and focusses on AI 543. The Council and NMFS could consider this as an intermediate step relative to the rollback of all 2010 Bi-op restrictions requested in the AKSC's wider and more expansive proposal.

- Supporting data and other documentation – (Provide any relevant data or other information to support your proposal).

Telemetry data for tagged SSL that were tracked in the western and central Aleutians in Fadely, 2010b, and figures from the Boor 2010 paper as referenced in 2010 Bi-op. NMFS' most recent SSL count (found in Memorandum from Melanie Brown and Doug Demaster to Jim Balsiger 21 August 2012: www.afsc.noaa.gov/nmml/PDF/SSL-Survey-memo-2012.pdf) and NMFS' opinion in the 2010 BiOp that Buldir has likely ceased functioning as a rookery (2010 BiOp pg 84). . Mackerel catch in area (CIA) for fishing in the vicinity of Buldir Island from 2001-2012. Comments on 2010 draft and final Bi-op by Alaska Seafood Cooperative and Adak overlay bathymetry on SSL locations in Fadely 2010 and Boor 2010 to show that offshore SSL locations do not overlap with Atka mackerel fishing grounds outside of SSL CH in AI 543.

- Alternative solutions – (Provide other potential solutions to the problem, if any, that the Council could consider to address the problem).

AKSC's proposal for large-scale changes to the current RPAs is outlined in a separate proposal. This proposal is for a more moderate change to the current RPAs in AI 543.

- Justification for Council action – (Provide an explanation of why Council action is required, and the consequences should the Council not take action).

We would prefer the Council to adopt our other proposal for more sweeping changes to the SSL RPAs in place, but we make this proposal as an intermediate step. Regarding why Council action is required, we could propose this change to NMFS independent of the suite of proposals that the Council is preparing for the SSL EIS. We understand, however, that the Council is in a better position to evaluate and put together a suite of proposals that balances all the different interests looking for changes in the SSL RPAs in the Aleutian Islands.