

AKSC Proposal 6 to SSL Committee to Return to pre- 2011 measures for Pacific Cod in the Aleutian Islands with small adjustments to further reduce potential for effects on SSL

- 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)

Revert to Aleutian Island trawl cod RPAs in place before the 2011 RPAs with one change, removal of the 178 degrees West “no concurrent cod/mackerel fishing” measures that were in place prior to 2011 under the HLA regulations.

- 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).

The 2011 RPAs are not based on the best available data and have essentially compressed Aleutian Islands cod trawling into a relatively small area from 10-20 nm of SSL sites in AI 541 during the first half of the year. Those measures are not benefitting SSL in the area where fishing occurs. The measures proposed here provide adequate protection to SSL and greatly reduce impacts on fishermen and communities dependent on the AI cod fishery.

The Bi-op asserted that SSL were being impacted by cod trawling in areas 543 and 542, and argued that restrictions were needed in 541 due to concerns that effort displaced from 543 and 542 would shift to 541. Likewise, the 2010 Bi-op argued that cod was an important prey item for SSL based on their interpretation of cod diet from SSL scat data. The CIE review, the States’ Independent Review, and key pieces of public comment on the 2010 Bi-op examined the Bi-op’s case that trawl cod fishing (and other fisheries) was competing with SSL in the Aleutians. Specifically the CIE and other reviews found significant flaws in the 2010 Bi-op’s case that cod is an important prey item for SSL. Those reviews also found deficiencies with NMFS’ argument that fishing was having a negative effect on the cod available to SSL, and that SSL were showing signs of negative effects of fishing.

The measures in place prior to the 2010 Bi-op for trawl cod adequately addressed the potential for Pacific cod trawling to affect SSL foraging. Accordingly, those pre-2011 RPAs are used as a foundation for this proposal. One small change to them in this proposal is that the “no concurrent cod/Atka mackerel trawling”, which were part of the pre-2011 RPAs are not included here. Prior to 2011, cod trawling could not occur concurrently with fishing for mackerel inside the HLA (SSL critical habitat), aka, 178 degrees West longitude regulations. Returning to the pre-2011 measures for cod and removal of the “no concurrent” regulations in this proposal are intended to further reduce potential for competition with SSL relative to the measures in place before the 2011 RPAs. This is done by allowing cod trawl effort to spread over the expanse of the Aleutians instead of concentrating cod fishing east of 178 degrees West longitude. Since the implementation of cooperative management governing most mackerel/cod participation west of 178 degrees W, effort would be more effectively spread over time and areas. The 178 degrees west longitude measures are no longer needed.

- 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).

When implemented, cod trawl measures in the proposals will be based on the best available data and will once again provide adequate protections to prevent competition between cod trawling and SSL foraging. The removal of the 178 degrees west non concurrent cod/mackerel trawling will also prevent cod trawl effort from being concentrated east of 178 degrees.

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

CIE review, States Independent Review, comments on 2010 Bi-op by Aleut Corp/Adak (specifically their detailed examination of spatial overlap and differences in size of cod targeted by SSL versus commercial fishery, SSL diet data in Sinclair and Zeppelin 2002 and Zeppelin et al. 2010 poster available at: http://www.marinemammal.org/steller_sea_lion/diet.php)

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

We have submitted another cod proposal that addresses our inability to retain all cod bycatch in fisheries targeting other species occurring in November and December. Implementing that proposal addresses a different problem and would not address the more fundamental issue of adequate protections for SSL with regard to the specifics of the cod trawl fishery that are the subject of this proposal. We understand that the NPFMC's proposed RPAs from the August draft Bi-op in 2010 (Alt 4) will be put forward to the SSL Committee so that is one potential alternative to this proposal.

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

In the absence of any action by the Council, NMFS will likely keep the current measures in place. This would continue the high degree of impacts on fishing communities and would fail to take into account the information provided by the States Independent Review, the CIE review, and the public comment provided on the 2010 Bi-op which questioned the need for and expected benefit from the 2011 RPAs for cod. Regarding the request to explain 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.