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North Pacific Fishery Management Council

605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, Alaska 99501 - (907) 271-2809 - Fax (907) 271-2817

December 1997 Newsletter - Published 12/19/97

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Council Meeting in Anchorage - 130th Plenary Session

The December Council meeting was a short one, with the Council completing its business by the end of the day on Friday. In addition to setting groundfish quotas (TACs) for the 1998 fisheries, the Council also discussed amendments to the IFQ program, potential amendments to the License Limitation Program (LLP), the observer program, and scallop management, and announced SSC, AP, PNCIAC, and plan team appointments. These and other issues are detailed inside. The Council's next meeting will be held the week of February 2 in Anchorage. Note also that beginning in 1998, the Council will be meeting in early October instead of late September (refer to meeting schedule on page 11).

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Scientific and Statistical Committee Appointments

The following twelve members of the SSC were reappointed for 1998. Marc Miller resigned due to the press of other duties:

Jim Balsiger Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NMFS
Keith Criddle UAF, Dept of Economics (Chair)
Douglas Eggers ADF&G, Juneau
Susan Hills UAF, School of Fisheries & Science
Steve Klosiewski U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Anchorage
Douglas Larson UC Davis, Dept Agricultural Economics
Seth Macinko ADF&G, Juneau
Richard Marasco Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NMFS
Terrence Quinn II UA, Juneau Center for Ocean Sciences
Jack Tagart Washington DFW, Fish Mgmt., Marine Resources Division
Albert Tyler UAF, School of Fisheries & Ocean Sciences
Hal Weeks Oregon, Dept of Fish & Wildlife

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1998 Advisory Panel Appointments

Two new members have been appointed to the Council's Advisory Panel for 1998, bringing the total membership to 23:

Tim Blott Cook Inlet Processing, Kodiak
John Henderschedt Golden Age Fisheries, Seattle

The following twenty-one Advisory Panel members were reappointed for the coming year:

Ragnar Alstrom Commercial Fisherman
Dave Benson Tyson Seafoods Group
John Bruce Deep Sea Fishermen's Union
Al Burch Alaska Dragger's Association
Craig Cross Commercial Fisherman
Dan Falvey Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association
Kris Fanning Commercial Crab Fisherman
David Fraser Commercial Fisherman
Arne Fuglvog Commercial Fisherman
Steve Ganey Alaska Marine Conservation Council
Justine Gundersen Commercial/Subsistence Fisher
Spike Jones Commercial Fisherman
John Lewis Sportfishing Representative
Stephanie Madsen Aleutian Seafood Processors Association
Hazel Nelson Bristol Bay Economic Development Corp.
Dean Paddock Bristol Bay Driftnetter's Association
Jeff Stephan United Fishermen's Marketing Association
Teresa Turk Association of Professional Observers
Robert Ward A-Ward Charters
Lyle Yeck Commercial Fisherman
Grant Yutzenka UNISEA

The Council will consider reducing the Advisory Panel to twenty members for 1999 to conform with its formal AP policy adopted in December 1986.

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Plan Team Appointments

The Council is pleased to announce the addition of *Al Spalinger* to the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands crab plan team. Mr. Spalinger is the Regional Shellfish and Groundfish Management Biologist for the Westward Region for ADF&G and brings 18 years of fishery management experience to the team. The Council also appointed *Jeff Barnhart* to the scallop plan team. Mr. Barnhart is a fishery biologist for ADF&G, Commercial Fisheries Management and Development Division in Kodiak, and also heads their scallop observer program.

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Council Announces New Appointment to the Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee

The Council appointed *Lance Farr*, a commercial crab fisherman, to the PNCIAC for the 1998-1999 term. The Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee (PNCIAC) was formed by the Council to provide the Bering Sea crab industry from the Pacific Northwest access to the Alaska regulatory process, similar to that of Alaskan residents. The committee meets several times a year to review proposed changes in crab fishery regulations.

Other PNCIAC committee members reappointed to 2-year terms include:

Dave Benson Tyson Seafoods Group
Phil Hanson UniSea, Inc.
Kevin Kaldestad Kaldestad Fisheries
Garry M. Loncon Royal Aleutian Seafoods, Inc.
Gary Painter Commercial crab fisherman
Rob Rogers Icicle Seafoods
Clyde Sterling Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc.
Gary Stewart Commercial crab fisherman
Joseph Wabey Commercial crab fisherman
Arni Thomson Alaska Crab Coalition (non-voting Secretary)

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Groundfish Amendments

The Council approved two groundfish analyses for public review. Plan Amendments 52/52 address two separate actions: (1) 48-hour, 72-hour, or 96-hour stand-down period for all fisheries for vessels switching between the BSAI and GOA and vice versa in the pollock and Pacific cod trawl fisheries, and (2) a requirement that vessels register in western and central GOA fisheries before they are allowed to participate. Final action is scheduled for February 1998. If approved, implementation would be planned for the pollock B season in September 1998. The Council has also scheduled a discussion of GOA management measures for pollock and Pacific cod in the western and central GOA for its February 1998 meeting. At that time, the Council intends to develop a problem statement and identify other potential management actions, with the intent of implementing those measures by January 1, 1999.

BSAI Plan Amendment 53 would allocate shorttraker/rougheye rockfish in the Aleutian Islands

subarea between fixed gear and trawl fisheries. Options being considered include fixed gear/trawl gear allocations of 30% (fixed)/70% (trawl) and 20% (fixed)/80% (trawl). Final action is scheduled for February 1998. If approved, this action would be effective by July 1, 1998.

NMFS will initiate another analysis to address the large increase in GOA pollock ABC and TAC in 1998 due to an above-average 1994 year class. NMFS staff will draft an EA/RIR for a regulatory amendment to reapportion TAC in the Western and Central areas of the Gulf from fall months to summer months, perhaps with seasonal apportionments of 25, 35, and 40 percent of TAC for the trimester apportionments. Concern expressed by scientists, industry, and the public over pollock availability for endangered Steller sea lions in the GOA has led the Council to request this action. Final action will be taken in February 1998 for implementation by September 1.

These documents will be available to the public in early January. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

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IFQ Amendments

Phil Smith, Chief of the NMFS Restricted Access Management Division, provided a season wrap-up report of the 1997 halibut and sablefish IFQ fisheries. His report is available from the Council office and the NMFS bulletin board. NMFS also commissioned the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission to provide two updated reports of the 1996 halibut and sablefish IFQ fisheries. These are entitled, "Changes Under Alaska's Halibut IFQ Program, 1996" and "Changes Under Alaska's Sablefish IFQ Program, 1996." These updates will be available from the Council office and the CFEC bulletin board in early January.

The Council approved developing four IFQ proposals for analysis for the April 1998 Council meeting. Final action would be taken in June, with implementation of approved measures scheduled for the 1999 IFQ season. Plan Amendments 54/54 would address: (1) changing sablefish ownership caps from percentages to QS units; (2) adding a leasing provision to allow initial QS recipients to lease 10% of their pooled QS across all areas, with an option to restrict this allowance to the Bering Sea only; and (3) modify plan language to allow QS held by an individual and a corporation in which the same individual is a corporation member to be fished on the same vessel and to hire a skipper, where already allowed. The fourth proposed management action would redefine regulatory language describing "a change in the corporation or partnership." The latter action would be included in an omnibus IFQ regulatory amendment that includes other technical changes to the IFQ regulations.

The Council also approved calling for IFQ proposals from the public on a 2-year cycle. The next call

for proposals will be in the summer of 1999. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

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Observer Program

At this meeting, the Council reviewed the analysis for the "third party" modified pay-as-you-go observer program, based on a joint partnership agreement (JPA) between NMFS and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC). Under this arrangement, PSMFC would contract with the existing observer contracting companies for observer services, and industry would go to the PSMFC for all observer coverage needs, thereby establishing PSMFC as an interface between the observer contracting companies and the vessels and plants which carry those observers. The Council approved the document for public review and comment, with the intent of taking final action at the February 1998 meeting in Anchorage. Copies are available from the Council office. If approved, the program would go into effect in time for the 1999 fisheries. For 1998, the existing program will remain in place with industry contracting directly with the observer companies for their coverage.

As most in the industry are aware, the observers have recently unionized and are in the process of collective bargaining with the contracting companies, with at least one of those companies reaching a settlement with the Alaska Fishermen's Union (AFU) and the Association of Professional Observers (APO). Increased costs for observer coverage in 1998 and beyond will be one result of this effort, primarily due to higher wages for observers. Renewed interest in a fee-based funding mechanism, from industry in general and from the Council's Observer Advisory Committee (OAC), prompted the Council to also approve redevelopment of such a fee-based system, patterned after the old Research Plan. It is expected that the new fee-based mechanism would address and resolve the issues which caused a repeal of the Research Plan two years ago. This program will take considerable time to develop over 1998 and 1999, such that the year 2000 is the target date for implementation. Direct, pay-as-you-go funding would continue under the JPA arrangement through at least 1999. Staff contact for this issue is Chris Oliver.

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License Limitation Program

Two issues related to the license limitation program (LLP) were specifically discussed by the Council at this meeting, while additional issues were raised and are now scheduled for a broader LLP discussion in February 1998. One issue was the trawl closure in the Southeast Outside area of the

Eastern Gulf of Alaska, a provision of the LLP which NMFS intends to implement in 1998. Once implemented, the issue is the disposition of the 5% trawl set-aside for sablefish bycatch. The Council agreed with NMFS that the appropriate disposition of that sablefish is to simply make that amount available to trawlers in the West Yakutat area, which remains open to trawling. No adjustments to the fixed gear IFQs will result in either area.

The second issue had to do with the ownership of vessels on June 17, 1995, and whether transfers of catch history, and subsequent application for a license by the owner of the catch history, would circumvent the Council's intent that vessel capacity which was fishing outside U.S. waters off Alaska on June 17, 1995 not be allowed to re-enter the fisheries. In order to prevent that capacity from re-entering the fishery under LLP, and close the apparent "loophole," it may be necessary to amend the plan and regulations to clarify that transfers of catch history would be recognized, except those occurring after June 17, 1995, and where the owner at that time was unable to document a vessel under Chapter 121, Title 46, U.S. Code.

The Council has requested that information be provided in February 1998 which defines the potential extent of this loophole. Further, the Council requested information in February regarding a possible recent participation requirement for LLP qualification. Specifically, the Council would like to examine the impacts of a landing requirement in 1995 and 1996, in terms of the numbers of impacted vessels under LLP. Such a requirement would likely take care of the loophole described above. Other potential LLP amendments were recommended by the Council's Advisory Panel (AP), and may be discussed at the February 1998 meeting as well. These include: (1) a recent participation requirement for the crab fisheries under LLP; (2) gear limitations which would prevent a fixed gear license from being transferred to a trawl vessel; (3) prevention of the transfer of licenses by vessels which qualified, but never held a federal fisheries permit; and, (4) adjustment of the landing requirements for area endorsements for vessels in the BSAI and the Western Gulf of Alaska (require one landing in each of two of the endorsement years).

Extension of the current vessel moratorium may also be required, under the expectation that the LLP program will not be implemented until the year 2000 (the current moratorium expires at the end of 1998). All in all, LLP promises to be a major agenda item for the Council's February 1998 meeting in Anchorage. Council staff contact is Chris Oliver or Darrell Brannan.

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Miscellaneous Groundfish Issues

Among other issues discussed at this meeting was the opening date for the BSAI pollock B' season, and whether to consider moving that date back to August 15 (beginning in 1996, the opening date

was moved to September 1). Information to date indicates that there is a trade-off between chinook and chum salmon bycatch, with the September 1 opening date resulting in higher overall bycatch of chinook salmon, but lower overall bycatch of chums. Noting the salmon processing opportunities associated with the September 1 date, along with higher yields and flesh quality of pollock, the Council took no action, thereby retaining the September 1 opening date.

The Council did approve further development of an amendment to allow limited processing for catcher vessels under the LLP program. The provisions of the LLP disallow catcher vessels (who did not process prior to June 17, 1995) from processing activities in the future, once the LLP is implemented. Later in 1998, staff will begin work on an analysis of limited processing alternatives, based on recommendations from the AP, with a document scheduled for review at either the September or December 1998 meeting. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

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Scallop Fishery Management

The Council approved Amendment 3 to the Scallop FMP. Since 1996, the Scallop fishery off Alaska has been managed under a State-Federal management regime. This regime is cumbersome in that each State regulation and management action must be duplicated by a parallel Federal action. Amendments to Magnuson-Stevens Act enabled the Council to delegate to the State the authority to manage some or all aspects of the scallop fishery in Federal waters off Alaska.

Amendment 3 will delegate to the State authority to manage all aspects of the scallop fishery in Federal waters off Alaska except limited access (moratorium, licenses, etc.). Under this Amendment, limited access management will remain a Federal responsibility under the FMP, and will require an FMP amendment to change. All other Federal scallop regulations will be repealed and the authority to manage all other aspects of the scallop fishery will be delegated to the State under the FMP. In February, the Council will review alternatives for development of a license limitation system for the scallop fishery. Staff contact is David Witherell.

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Inshore/Offshore 3 (I/O 3)

An update on the status of the I/O 3 analysis was presented to the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The presentation focused on analytical assumptions, approaches, and data sources

that will be used by the analysts. A discussion document which laid out those assumptions was made available to the general public at the meeting. Copies of that paper may be requested from the Council office.

Inshore/offshore will be a major agenda item for the SSC, Advisory Panel (AP), and Council during the February meeting. At that time, staff plans to present the completed sector profiles and the "base case" scenario to be used in the analysis. An explicit description of the parameters, and the assumptions that will be used in the analysis, will also be presented. This report will build upon the information presented to the SSC in December, by providing the actual parameter values to be used in the analysis, as well as a thorough description of the sources of the data and their weaknesses.

The draft sector profiles were initially reviewed by the Council at the September meeting in Seattle. Several pieces of the data puzzle were identified as missing (or unavailable) at that time, for example, at-sea employment and wholesale price data. By February, those "holes" should be filled. If those data cannot be obtained, members of the Council family and industry need to be alerted to the problem. Decisions regarding alternative methods to procure those missing data must be made at the February meeting.

Because of the tight schedule under which the I/O 3 analysis is operating, February will be the final opportunity for the Council and industry to comment on the analysis before it is presented for initial review in April. According to the current schedule, the document must be released for public review after the April meeting. Then a final Council decision on I/O 3 will be scheduled for June. There is no time for slippage built into this schedule, since the current allocation expires at the end of 1998.

Therefore, in an effort to reduce the chance of surprising people in April, staff feels that it is critical to provide as much insight into the progress and direction of the analysis as possible in February. Staff contacts are Darrell Brannan and Chris Oliver.

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Ecosystem Committee

The Council's Ecosystem Committee met for a full day on Sunday, December 7 in Anchorage. Committee members Dave Fluharty, Linda Behnken, Kevin O'Leary, Chris Blackburn, and Kristen Stahl-Johnson were present, along with approximately 25 others. The Committee spent most of the day reviewing ongoing ecosystem research and making recommendations to the Council on ecosystem issues. A summary report of the meeting is available from the Council office.

The Committee recommended that the Council send a request to the Council family to provide observations on marine ecosystem changes noted during 1997 and in other years. Additionally, the

Committee recommended that the Council clarify its instructions to plan teams and stock assessment authors regarding the use of ecosystem considerations with respect to setting ABC and TACs. During Council discussions about potential pollock fishery and sea lion interactions, the Ecosystem Committee chair offered to use the committee as a forum to explore how time/area fisheries management could be implemented by the Council. Starting in February, the Ecosystem Committee will begin to gather information on use of time/area as a fishery management tool. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

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Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Groundfish Specifications

The Council adopted final groundfish specifications for the 1998 Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish fisheries, including Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), Total Allowable Catch (TAC), and Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits and apportionments. Groundfish abundance in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands area remains relatively stable for most species.

The status of pollock in the Eastern Bering Sea remains relatively stable at the biomass level that produces maximum sustainable yield. Projected 1998 biomass of pollock in the Eastern Bering Sea stock was estimated at 5.82 million mt. The stock was estimated to have been 6.1 million mt in 1997. A strong 1996 year-class was observed in both the bottom trawl and hydroacoustic surveys.

For 1998, the Council recommended a 1,110,000 mt TAC for Eastern Bering Sea pollock, a decrease of 2% (20,000 mt) from 1997. Of the TAC, 45% is allocated to the roe season ("A") and 55% to the non-roe season ("B"). As with last year, the "A" season will begin on January 20 for the inshore fleet and January 26 for the offshore fleet. The "B" season will begin on September 1 for both onshore and offshore sectors, with a 7-day stand down provision for vessels fishing other groundfish seven days prior to September 1. The pollock TAC for the Aleutian Islands area was set at 23,800 mt, and 1,000 mt for the Bogoslof district (Area 518). The Council continues to recommend no directed fishing for pollock in the Bogoslof district. Based on a 7.5% allocation, the 1998 Community Development Quotas will be 83,250 mt for the Eastern Bering Sea and 1,785 mt for the Aleutian Islands areas.

The Council recommended a 210,000 mt TAC for Pacific cod, which was much lower than last year. This reduction was based on an observed biomass decline and a risk minimization analysis. Under the allocations of Amendment 46, 2% of the TAC will be reserved for jig gear, 51% for fixed gear (longline and pot gear), and 47% for trawl gear. The trawl apportionment will be split between catcher vessels and catcher-processors 50/50. For the fixed gear seasonal apportionment of Pacific

cod, the Council recommends that 70,735 mt be released the first trimester (January 1 - April 30), 15,000 mt for the second trimester (May 1 - September 14), and 13,332 mt for the third trimester.

The total PSC limit for herring (1,714 mt) is 1% of the estimated herring biomass in the eastern Bering Sea. Total PSC limits for other species are specified in regulations, but are seasonally apportioned among fisheries during the annual specification process. PSC limits for red king crab were 100,000 crab, and PSC limits for Tanner crab were 750,000 crab in Zone 1 and 2,100,000 crab in Zone 2. The Council again recommended that no PSC be apportioned to directed trawl fisheries for turbot, sablefish, or arrowtooth flounder. This recommendation essentially prohibits directed fishing for these species with trawl gear. The Council again recommended that pot gear, jig gear, and sablefish hook-and-line fisheries be exempt from the non-trawl PSC program for 1998. Staff contact is David Witherell.

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Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Specifications for 1998

The Council approved Gulf of Alaska (GOA) overall ABC for 1998 of 549,030 mt, an increase of nearly 56,000 mt (roughly 11%) from the total 1997 ABCs of 493,050 mt. The TACs total 324,726 mt, an increase of nearly 15% over the 1997 TACs. Overall, the status of the stocks in the Gulf of Alaska continues to appear relatively favorable. ABC and TAC recommendations remain essentially unchanged from 1997 for flatfish and rockfish. Pollock increased from 79,980 mt to 124,730 mt (+56%) for 1998. An associated regulatory amendment was initiated to reapportion pollock in the Western and Central areas from the third to second trimester to address concerns for decreased availability of pollock for Steller sea lions. Sablefish declined by about 6% from 14,520 mt to 14,120 mt in 1998. The Council combined the sablefish ABCs for the West Yakutat and East Yakutat/Southeast Outside (EY/SEO) areas to allow for a reallocation of the 5% trawl allocation to West Yakutat due to the planned implementation of the trawl prohibition east of 140 W longitude approved under Amendments 39/41 (License Limitation). The fixed gear apportionment is 90% of the adjusted West Yakutat TAC and 100% of the adjusted EY/SEO TAC. The demersal shelf rockfish ABC declined from 960 mt to 560 mt due to new stock assessment methodology. The Atka mackerel ABC declined from 1,000 mt to 600 mt to better match bycatch needs.

The Pacific cod ABC dropped from 81,500 to 77,900 mt (-4%), while the TAC decreased from 69,115 mt to 63,470 mt due to the expanding state fishery. The Board of Fisheries (BOF) initiated a state water Pacific cod fisheries in the GOA at its October 1996 meeting. The BOF action set the 1997 state Pacific cod fishery at 15% of the federal TAC for the Western and Central Gulf and 25% of the Eastern Gulf TAC. The Central Gulf fishery was apportioned: Cook Inlet 15%, Kodiak 50%, and Chignik 35%. The State Western and Central Gulf fisheries will increase to 20% in 1998 and

25% in 1999, without further BOF action, as state landings meet the harvest guidelines.

ADF&G reported that the Kodiak subarea of the Central GOA and the Alaska Peninsula subarea (Western GOA) will reach their respective guideline harvest level in 1997. As a result, the Kodiak subarea increases from 7.5% to 10% in 1998 (the Kodiak subarea apportionment increases from 15 to 20%). The Western area increases from 15% to 20%. The 1997 and 1998 apportionments and tonnages (rounded to the nearest 10 mt) are shown below.

1997 Gulf Pacific cod ABC, TAC and State guideline harvest level (mt).

<u>Quota</u>	<u>Western</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Eastern</u>	<u>Total</u>
*ABC/TAC	28,500	51,400	1,600	81,500
BOF GHL	4,275	7,710	400	12,385
%	15%	15%	25%	15.2%
Remaining TAC	24,225	43,690	1,200	69,115

Central
area:

Cook Inlet	1,157	2.25%
Kodiak	3,855	7.50%
Chignik	2,699	5.25%
Total	7,710	15%

1998 Gulf Pacific cod ABC, TAC and State guideline harvest level (mt).

<u>Quota</u>	<u>Western</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>Eastern</u>	<u>Total</u>
*ABC/TAC	27,260	49,080	1,560	77,900
BOF GHL	5,450	8,590	390	14,430
%	20%	17.5%	25%	18.5%
Remaining TAC	21,810	40,490	1,170	63,470

Central
area:

Cook Inlet	1,100	2.25%
Kodiak	4,910	10%
Chignik	2,580	5.25%

Total 8,590 17.5%

The federal fishery for the inshore component in the Central Regulatory area was closed on October 27, 1997. On November 1, 1997, the State of Alaska released 400 mt (900,000 lb) of the Cook Inlet P. cod GHL and 180 mt (400,000 lb) of the Prince William Sound GHL to the federal fishery. NMFS did not reopen the directed fisheries because of the relatively small size of the releases, the lateness of the fishing year, and the capacity of the fleet to harvest these amounts in about one day. NMFS has requested ADF&G to release unused GHLS by October 1 next year to allow for a federal reopening.

The final Prohibited Species Caps (PSC) limits for halibut in the Gulf of Alaska are set by gear type and may be apportioned seasonally over the fishing year. Since 1995, the combined halibut PSC limit for all fisheries and gear types has been 2,300 mt.

Trawl Gear		Hook and Line	
1st quarter	600 mt (30%)	1st trimester	250 mt (86%)
2nd quarter	400 mt (20%)	2nd trimester	15 mt (5%)
3rd quarter	600 mt (30%)	3rd trimester	25 mt (9%)
4th quarter	400 mt (20%)	DSR	10 mt
	2,000 mt		300 mt

Beginning in 1994, PSC limits for trawl gear were further apportioned by specific fishery. Apportionments of the overall cap may be made to a "shallow water complex" and a "deep water complex." Species in the shallow water complex are: pollock, Pacific cod, shallow water flatfish, Atka mackerel, and other species. Deep water complex species include: deep water flatfish, rockfish, flathead sole, sablefish, and arrowtooth flounder. The Council also approved halibut discard mortality rates for the BSAI and GOA recommended by IPHC staff for 1998.

<u>Quarter</u>	<u>Shallow water complex</u>	<u>Deep water complex</u>	<u>Total</u>
1	500 mt	100 mt	600 mt
2	100 mt	300 mt	400 mt
3	200 mt	400 mt	600 mt
4	No	apportionment	400 mt

Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

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Halibut Management

The NMFS Alaska Region Administrator informed the Council that the guideline harvest level (GHL) for the halibut guided sport (charterboat) fleet for Areas 2C and 3A approved by the Council in September, will not be published as a regulation. Further, since the Council has not yet articulated the specific management measures NMFS should implement if the GHL were reached, no formal decision by the Secretary is required for the GHL. The Council's intent will be met by publishing the GHL as a notice in the Federal Register. It would have no restrictive or constraining effect on the guided sport fishery, but would formally announce the Council's intent to establish measures to maintain the guided sport fleet at or below the GHL.

To that end, the Council announced the formation of a halibut charterboat committee. The committee will be comprised of three representatives of the guided fleet, three representatives of the non-guided sector, one Council member, and one Board of Fisheries member, with Council member Dave Hanson as the chairman. The Council chairman will appoint the committee in early January. The committee is tasked to report to the Council at the April meeting on management measures to keep the charter fleet under the GHL. The Council is calling for individuals representing Southeastern (Area 2C) and Southcentral (Area 3A) Alaska to send a letter of interest for an appointment to the committee to the Council office.

Note on Halibut Subsistence: Also, the Council decided to reschedule final action on creating a halibut subsistence or personal use definition to the Council's December 1998 meeting. The Council's decision was based on continuing discussions between the federal and state governments and the public on subsistence harvests for all fish and wildlife. There will be no discussion of this issue at the Council's February 1998 meeting. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

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Documents Available to the Public

1. The BSAI and GOA Final 1998 Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFEs), the preliminary 1998 Economic SAFE, and Ecosystem Considerations for 1998 are currently available from the Council office.
2. The EA/RIR for registration and stand-down provisions for GOA/BSAI cod and pollock fisheries will be available in early January. Final action is scheduled for February 1998.

3. The EA/RIR for BSAI Shortraker/Rougheye will be available in early January (pg 3). Final action is scheduled for February 1998.
4. The EA/RIR for GOA Pollock Trimester Reapportionment will be available in early January. Final action is scheduled for February 1998.
5. An updated GOA FMP Summary will be available in early January.
6. The EA/RIR to implement a third party observer procurement program for the North Pacific Groundfish Observer Program is currently available from the Council office. Final action is scheduled for February 1998.
7. The Ecosystem Committee meeting minutes are currently available from the Council office.
8. The Vessel Bycatch Accountability (VBA) meeting minutes are currently available from the Council office.

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