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North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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June Council Meeting in Kodiak - 128th Plenary Session

Once again the Council meeting in Kodiak was greeted with warm, sunny weather which lasted, for the most part, the entire week of the meeting. We extend our gratitude to all the people that arranged for that weather, and to all of the people and businesses in Kodiak that made for a pleasant and comfortable stay. We particularly wish to recognize Kevin O'Leary, Jeff Stephan, and Chris Blackburn for their efforts in coordinating the community reception held at the Industrial Technology Center. There were numerous industry sponsors for that reception and we extend our thanks to them as well. During that reception, attended by former Governor Jay Hammond and former Council Executive Director Jim Branson, we recognized fisheries icon Clem Tillion for his many years of service in management of the fisheries off Alaska. This was Clem's last meeting as a Council member and his forthright perspectives will be missed, though we certainly don't expect him to fade completely from the fisheries arena

Secretary of Commerce Announces Council Appointments

Word was received on Monday, June 30, that Chairman Rick Lauber and Council member Dave Fluharty have both been reappointed to another three-year term on the Council. Joe Kyle of Pacific Associates, Inc. in Juneau, Alaska, was also appointed to a three-year term.

Chairman Lauber has been on the Council since January 1990 when he was appointed to fill an unexpired term, and has served as Chairman since 1991. Prior to that Mr. Lauber had served on the Advisory Panel since the inception of the Council in 1976. This will be the second three-year term for Dr. Fluharty, a Research Associate Professor in the School of Marine Affairs at the University of Washington. Dr. Fluharty heads up the Council's Ecosystem Committee and has taken the lead in working with staff to develop the essential fish habitat amendments required by recent amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Joe Kyle, no stranger to the Council system, served as the Coast Guard's Council representative between 1989 and 1992. He currently is the co-owner of Pacific Associates, Inc., providing consulting services to the commercial fishing and marine transportation industries.

Council Loses Long-time Staff Member

Some big shoes will need to be filled on the Council staff with the departure of Senior Economist Marcus Hartley, who is leaving the Council to go to work for Northern Economics, Inc., a private consulting firm in Anchorage. Marcus has been with the Council for nearly nine years, through a

variety of major issues including inshore/offshore I and II, the halibut/sablefish IFQ program, license limitation, Pacific cod allocations, CRP related studies, and most recently, the halibut charterboat analyses. He has been instrumental in nearly every major Council management program during his tenure here. His general knowledge of the databases and fisheries of the North Pacific will be sorely missed, but we wish him well in his new endeavor.

Shortraker/Rougheye Rockfish Bycatch

On May 10, 1997, NMFS prohibited retention of Pacific cod and Greenland turbot by hook-and-line vessels in the Aleutian Islands (the regulations were modified to allow retention of turbot after May 12). Although this action was taken to prevent overfishing of shortraker/rougheye rockfish, the longline fishery for Pacific cod was shut down prematurely.

The Council initiated analysis of several measures to keep this situation from recurring in future years. A regulatory amendment to change the maximum retainable bycatch amounts of shortraker/rougheye in Pacific ocean perch trawl fisheries to 5, 7, or 9% will be analyzed for final action in September. If approved, regulations could be in place for 1998 fisheries. It was felt that the existing 15% maximum was higher than incidental levels, and allowed for topping off of these valuable rockfish species. The Council also initiated analysis of a plan amendment to allocate shortraker/rougheye rockfish among gear types (70% to trawl gear, 30% to fixed gear). Any quota that remains unharvested by one gear group would be open to harvesting by other gear types after November 1. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Halibut Discard Mortality Rates for the BSAI Pacific Cod Fishery

Halibut discard mortality rates (DMRs) are used to monitor the halibut mortality PSC limits for individual fisheries. These DMRs are estimated from viability data collected by NMFS observers. DMRs for individual groundfish fisheries are generally established pre-season during the annual specification process. In December 1996, the Council recommended a DMR of 11.5% for the Pacific cod hook-and-line fishery until more recent observer data became available, such that changes could be made within the 1997 season. An analysis provided by the International Pacific Halibut Commission indicates a DMR of 12% may be more appropriate for the Pacific cod hook-and-line fishery. The Council concurred, and NMFS agreed to use a 12% rate for the 1997 fishery, retroactive to the first of the year. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Atka Mackerel Jig Gear Allocation

In December 1996, the Council adopted for analysis a proposal from the Unalaska Native Fishermen's Association for a 2% allocation of Atka mackerel to jig gear. Such an allocation would provide more opportunity to the local small vessel jig gear fleet. Under the existing management program, directed fishing for Atka mackerel closes to all vessels, including those that fish with jig gear, when the overall quota is reached.

At its June meeting, the Council reviewed the analysis and adopted a gear allocation of Atka mackerel as Amendment 34. The recommended alternative will allocate 1% of the Atka mackerel TAC in the Eastern Aleutian Islands/Bering Sea sub area. Once the jig gear fleet takes its 1% allocation, their allocation will increase to 2% for future years. If approved by the Secretary, the jig gear allocation will be in place for 1998. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Non-Pelagic Trawling in Pollock Fisheries

In February 1997, the Council directed staff to prepare a discussion paper on the pollock fisheries and some potential effects of prohibiting non-pelagic trawling for pollock in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) and BeringSea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) fisheries. It was felt that such a regulation could reduce bycatch of halibut and other prohibited species.

At its June meeting, the Council reviewed a draft discussion paper containing a preliminary analysis of 1996 pollock fishery data. Based on these data and public testimony, the Council determined that such a regulation was probably not necessary for Gulf of Alaska pollock fisheries. The Council also noted that it already has authority in the BSAI groundfish specifications process to limit the amount of pollock that may be taken in the bottom trawl pollock fishery. A ban on the use of non-pelagic nets in pollock trawl fisheries could be further considered when the Council addresses bycatch reduction measures as mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Groundfish Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS)

In March 1997, NMFS announced its intention to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on Alaska groundfish management to provide full disclosure of available information on environmental impacts of fishery regulations. Specifically, they intend to examine the Federal action by which total allowable catch (TAC) specifications and prohibited species catch limits are established and apportioned in the BSAI and GOA groundfish fisheries. Scoping meetings have been scheduled to provide for public input into the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts that the SEIS should consider. It is expected that the SEIS will take at least one year to prepare. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Essential Fish Habitat

The Magnuson-Stevens Act amendments call for the Secretary to make recommendations to the Council on the description and identification of essential fish habitat (EFH), for the Councils to amend their fishery management plans accordingly, and for the Councils to add provisions to the plans that will minimize to the extent practicable the impacts of fishing on the habitat. The Councils have until October 1998 to submit their EFH amendments. The NMFS recently extended the comment period on the Proposed Rule for EFH guidelines until July 8.

The Alaska Region's essential fish habitat Core Team met in May to discuss how to prepare the EFH amendment and establish a plan to accomplish this objective. The EFH Core Team is proposing that the work be accomplished in two phases, with the initial phase to describe and identify EFH, and a later phase to amend the plans as necessary to minimize to the extent practicable any fishing impacts on EFH. To accomplish phase one, technical teams were established to prepare an essential fish habitat assessment for each fishery management plan. EFH assessments will be similar in structure to the stock assessment and fishery evaluation reports in that there would be a separate chapter, drafted by assessment authors, for each target species complete with text, tables, and maps. The EFH assessments will be available to the public and form the scientific basis for EFH recommendations by the EFH Core Team.

Two meetings have been scheduled to compile and review the preliminary EFH assessments. On July 8 and 9, the technical teams for groundfish will meet in Seattle at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center. On July 15 - 17, the NMFS Core Team will meet in Juneau to review the preliminary work done by the technical teams for groundfish, salmon, crab, and scallops. A preliminary EFH assessment should be available in September for SSC and Ecosystem Committee review. A draft final EFH assessment and amendment package will be available for initial Council review in April and final action in June 1998. At the June meeting, the Council approved the Tasking Plan. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Halibut and Sablefish IFQs

The Council reviewed two IFQ analyses at the June 1997 meeting. The Council took final action on making a regulatory change to allow the transfer of quota shares (QS) upon the death of the QS owner to any heir (i.e., person) of the deceased's estate under a 3-year emergency provision. Currently, only a spouse may receive transferred QS under that provision. If approved by the Secretary, this change will be in effect for the 1998 IFQ season.

Final action on a second regulatory change is rescheduled for the September Council meeting. The Council is attempting to address the de facto leasing arrangements made by QS owners who buy

nominal ownership of a vessel in order to hire the skipper to fish his or her QS. The Council is concerned that absentee owners conflict with its stated goal of having an owner-operated fleet for the IFQ fisheries. However, legitimate partnership arrangements have been made since implementation of the program such that individuals may not be fishing on board the vessel but may be actively involved in its management. The Council requested that certain aspects of the analysis be expanded to better identify 'leasing' and legitimate hired skipper situations. It is the Council's strong intent to grandfather levels of ownership of a vessel for hiring a skipper to existing partnership arrangements as of April 17, 1997, the date of Council initial review of the analysis. The Council may require 5%, 20%, 49%, 51% or the percentage of the vessel cap as an ownership requirement for hiring a skipper after the April date. The public review draft will be available by August 15. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Halibut Seabird Avoidance

The Council approved requiring gear modifications, seabird avoidance devices, or changes in fishing methods designed to reduce the incidental mortality of seabirds while fishing for Pacific halibut with hook-and-line gear in U.S. Convention waters off Alaska. The following measures would apply to all vessels using hook-and-line gear.



1. All applicable hook-and-line fishing operations would be conducted in the following manner:

- a. Use hooks that when baited, sink as soon as they are put in the water. This could be accomplished by the use of weighted groundlines and/or thawed bait.
- b. Any discharge of offal from a vessel must occur in a manner that distracts seabirds, to the extent practicable, from baited hooks while gear is being set or hauled. The discharge site onboard a vessel must either be aft of the hauling station or on the opposite side of the vessel from the hauling station.
- c. Make every reasonable effort to ensure that birds brought aboard alive are released alive and that wherever possible, hooks are removed without jeopardizing the life of the bird.

Vessels less than 26 ft LOA using hook-and-line gear in the Pacific halibut fishery and the GOA and BSAI groundfish fisheries would be exempt from the following measures:

2. All applicable hook-and-line fishing operations would be required to employ one or more of the following seabird avoidance measures:

- a. Set gear between hours of nautical twilight (as specified in regulation) using only the

minimum vessel lights necessary for safety;

b. Tow a streamer line or lines during deployment of gear to prevent birds from taking hooks;

c. Tow a buoy, board, stick or other device during deployment of gear at a distance appropriate to prevent birds from taking hooks. Multiple devices may be employed; or

d. Deploy hooks underwater through a lining tube at a depth sufficient to prevent birds from settling on hooks during deployment of gear.

If approved by the Secretary, this change may be in effect by the latter part of the 1997 IFQ season. Rulemaking to allow for the small vessel exemption in the groundfish fisheries will be initiated separately. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Sitka Sound Halibut Management Plan

The Council approved releasing the analysis of the Sitka Sound local area halibut management plan for public review. The analysis examines the Sitka Sound Halibut Task Force proposal referred to the Council by the Alaska Board of Fisheries. The proposed action would create a local area management plan for Sitka Sound with the following provisions:

(1) Halibut longliners larger than category D⁺ (> 35 ft LOA) would be prohibited from harvesting halibut in the Sitka Sound area, defined as a line across Kakul Narrows at the Green Buoy and from a point on Chichagof Island to Kruzof Island adjacent to Sinitsin Island, on the North to the Sitka Salmon Derby Boundary on the South.

(2) Halibut longliners in the category D⁺ would be prohibited from harvesting halibut in the Sitka Sound area, same boundaries for larger vessels in the North, and inside of a line from Sitka Pt. to Hanus Pt. (14450 Loran Line) and from Hanus Pt. to the Green Marker in Dorothy Narrows and Across to Baranof Islands in the South (Biorca Island Line) in June, July, and August. A 1,000-pound trip limit would be in effect in this area during the time it is open. Halibut catch in Sitka Sound will be monitored for growth rate.

(3) Inside the same areas defined for the category D⁺ longliners during the months of June, July, and August, fishing for halibut would be allowed only for a: (a) personal use fishery; (b) subsistence fishery; and/or (c) non-guided sport fishery. Guided halibut fishery (charterboats, etc.) would not be allowed to bottom-fish in this area in June, July or August but could have halibut on board while fishing for salmon.

Suboption: Allow personal use, subsistence, or non-guided sport fishery during June, July, and August for Sitka residents only.

The analysis will be available to the public by July 15. Final action is scheduled for September. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Halibut Area 4 Catch Sharing Plan

The Council approved a regulatory change to remove Area 4A and 4B from its catch sharing plan which apportions the total Area 4 quota. In January 1997, the International Pacific Halibut Commission informed the Council that it would be setting Area 4A, 4B, and combined Area 4C-E subarea quotas based on a revised biomass method. The Council will continue to apportion the IPHC's Area 4C-E quota into individual subarea apportionments (4C: 46.42%; 4D: 46.42%; and 4E: 7.14%). If approved by the Secretary, this change will be in effect for the 1998 IFQ season. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

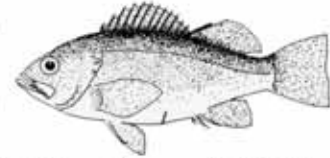
Halibut Subsistence

The Council rescheduled final action on creating a subsistence or personal use category for halibut for the February 1998 meeting. This will allow the State and Federal agencies to address subsistence for all fish and game in Alaska except for Pacific halibut, prior to Council action. Pacific halibut is managed jointly by the Council, IPHC, and NMFS. The Council felt that many in the public were confused about management jurisdiction over halibut and delaying action until after the October 1997 deadline for federal take-over of subsistence in Alaska was the best course of action.

The Council did take final action on one aspect of the analysis that affected the commercial Community Development Quota halibut fishery. The Council approved changing the commercial fishing regulations to allow CDQ fishermen to retain undersized halibut (<32 inches) to take home as food fish while commercially fishing their CDQ halibut QS in Western Alaska (Area 4E only, which is 100% CDQ) (Alternative 2, Option 4, Suboption B and Alternative 3, Option 3, Suboption B). That change will be in effect for the 1998 fishing season if approved by the Secretary. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Pelagic Shelf Rockfish

The Council decided to recommend removal of black and blue rockfishes from the Gulf of Alaska fishery management plan. Upon approval of this plan amendment, the State of Alaska would assume management of those two species. The Plan Team and Alaska Department of Fish and Game had recommended this action to better manage these nearshore species. The Council requested that updates of State management and research efforts for these rockfish be provided to the Council during the annual joint meeting of the Council and Board of Fisheries. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.



Sablefish Rolling Closures

The Council requested that staff further develop the analysis for a regulatory change to close designated areas around sablefish survey stations to longline and trawl vessels for short periods to allow those stations to 'rest' prior to surveying for stock assessment purposes. Voluntary efforts to keep fishing vessels off survey stations during the survey have been mostly successful; however, interactions between fishing vessels and the survey have continued in 1997. The objective of area closures is to minimize the short-term depletion of sablefish abundance due to fishing in the survey area. Between-area and between-year differences should reflect true abundance changes, not the effect of short-term depletion. Minimizing short-term depletion should preserve the survey time series and, as much as possible, ensure that future surveys reflect true changes in abundance. The analysis examines the possible effects of rolling closures in areas preceding survey sampling on the fishing fleet, the survey, and the sablefish stock assessment. A discussion of alternative survey designs and dates, use of multiple survey vessels, and a combination logbook/survey assessment will be added to the EA/RIR.

NMFS survey scientists have reported to the Council that they will be reordering the sablefish survey beginning in 1998 to minimize interactions with the trawl fishery. NMFS staff will consult with the longline industry on June 27 to determine the appropriate survey sequence to minimize longline fishery interactions. Staff will then consult again with the trawl fleet to review any changes recommended by the longline fleet. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Inshore/Offshore #3 & Pollock CDQ Programs

The Inshore/Offshore allocations of pollock in the BSAI and pollock and Pacific Cod in the GOA, as well as pollock CDQs in the BSAI, are due to sunset on December 31, 1998. The Council had intended to develop a problem statement and a suite of alternatives at this meeting. To that end, the Council received a discussion paper prepared by Council staff, as well as a draft paper developed by staff of the NMFS Alaska Fishery Science Center examining the Economic Status of the Pollock

Trawl Fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands." The Council also received reports from their Scientific and Statistical Committee, and Advisory Panel, and listened to several hours of testimony from the public. The input from the various groups covered a wide range of sentiment and made it clear to the Council that they would need additional information before they would be able to adequately assess the current status of the fisheries and develop alternatives for a potential reauthorization.

Therefore, the Council voted to postpone the discussion of the problem statement and the range of appropriate alternatives until the Council's September meeting. In preparation for discussions in September, the Council staff is directed to develop a profile of the relevant fishery sectors using the available fishery data. In September, the Council will consider these profiles and, on the basis of this information, (1) specify a problem statement, and (2) identify a range of alternatives to address those problems."

The Council staff with the help of NMFS and ADF&G will be developing these profiles over the summer, and should have them completed and available prior to the September Council meeting. The following items were requested by the Council. To the extent that data and staff are available, the profiles will include the following for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands pollock fishery:

- Number of operations, by type, size, capacity and configuration.
- Relative operational dependence on pollock in terms of gross revenue.
- Season length and duration of operations by target fishery.
- Product mix and total output for pollock.
- Price by product form and market distribution of pollock.
- Bycatch, discards, and utilization of all allocated species including PSC.
- Employment patterns with an emphasis on coastal-Alaskan residents.
- Linkages to CDQs.
- Ownership interests and patterns, including lien holders.
- Pollock catch, PSC bycatch, CPUE, discards, fish size, and marine mammal implications inside and outside the Catcher Vessel Operational Area (CVOA).

Staff contact is Chris Oliver or Darrell Brannan.

Observer Program

The Council received a report from NMFS, and its industry Observer Advisory Committee (OAC), supporting development of a replacement structure for the existing groundfish observer program. The modified pay-as-you-go program will be developed under a joint project agreement (JPA) between NMFS and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC), who will act as an interface between vessels and plants carrying observers and the private contracting companies who provide observers. Under this arrangement, vessels/plants would go to the PSMFC for their groundfish observers and observer deployments would be assigned by the PSMFC, thereby establishing the arms length relationship which was one of the underlying goals in restructuring the program. It is also expected that the issue of observer compensation will be addressed within this JPA structure. The NMFS and the PSMFC will be working on the details of the JPA over the summer and will provide a report to the Council in September.

Other issues discussed by the Council, which are not directly addressed by the JPA arrangement, include cost equalization (some vessels pay a proportionally higher cost for observers, relative to their catch and gross revenues from groundfish) and the flexibility to place observers most efficiently. Once the basic structure of the JPA is in place, options for addressing these concerns will be developed by NMFS, the PSMFC, and the Council's OAC. At the June meeting, the Council also took final action to approve a rollover of the existing program through 1998. Council contact is Chris Oliver.

Trip Limits for the Gulf of Alaska

The Council reviewed a discussion paper and preliminary analysis of proposed trip limits for western and central Gulf pollock and Pacific cod fisheries. That paper is available from the Council office upon request. Rather than take action at this time to develop further analyses (a plan amendment), the Council will appoint a committee of affected industry/community sectors to develop alternatives, and hopefully consensus, to resolve this issue. Interested persons should submit their nomination to the Council offices by July 20. This committee would meet sometime prior to the September meeting and report to the Council at the September meeting in Seattle, Washington.

Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions

The Sustainable Fisheries Act added many new requirements to the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Fishery management plans (FMPs) must be amended to identify essential fish habitat, and take actions to minimize the impacts of fishing on the habitat (see related newsletter item on page 3). FMPs must also include provisions to report bycatch and develop management measures to minimize bycatch and

reduce economic discards. Toward this end, the Council has issued a call for proposals for ways to address this requirement (see Call for Proposals, page 10). FMPs may need to be further amended to meet new criteria for overfishing definitions and stock rebuilding. The Council may be required to prepare additional regulations for catch measurement, that may include weighing of catch. Numerous other requirements of the Act (SOPPS, Russian fishing report, loan program, full retention, CDQs, etc.) are also being addressed. Staff contact is Clarence Pautzke.

Improved Retention and Utilization (IR/IU)

The Council took final action to approve plan amendments for an improved retention and utilization program for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. The program essentially mirrors the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands program already approved by the Council - retention and utilization of pollock and Pacific cod will begin immediately, with a target implementation of January 1998, concurrent with the BSAI program. Requirements for flatfish species (the shallow water flatfish complex in the GOA) will come on line in five years. One of the issues discussed regarding the IR/IU programs is the ability to determine whether such requirements will actually result in avoidance of "bycatch" species. The Council will be forming a committee of industry and agency representatives to monitor the development of the IR/IU program and to attempt such assessments. Interested parties should submit their nominations to the Council office by the end of July. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

License Limitation/Multi-species CDQ Program

The Council received an update on the status of this amendment package and reviewed provisions of the proposed rulemaking which is expected to be published in the FEDERAL REGISTER on July 9. Under this schedule, the Secretarial review period would occur over the summer, with the public comment period ending in late August. A Secretarial decision would have to be made by mid-September. If approved, the license limitation (LLP) portion of this package would not be implemented until 1999, with the application and appeals process occurring in 1998. The crab CDQ portion of the program is still on schedule for early 1998 implementation, and the groundfish multi-species program would likely be implemented in mid-1998.

The Council reviewed two letters relevant to the moratorium/LLP programs: one request to lengthen a vessel beyond the "upgrade restrictions" and another to relax the replacement provisions for vessels lost during the endorsement period for groundfish. The Council took no action on these requests. The Council did receive a report from a group of crab industry members who are developing a potential buyback program for vessels in the LLP crab fisheries. The Council endorsed the efforts of this group and will receive an update in September. They also discussed the issue of severability of the crab

license(s) from the groundfish license(s) as it relates to the buyback program. Staff will be consulting with the Pacific Fishery Management Council to tap their experience and further explore this issue.

Finally, the Council reviewed and approved the skipper reporting system suggested by NMFS in April as the preferred method to begin recording the fishing activities for individual skippers. This will be based on the fish tickets submitted (both required and voluntary), with the fishing permit being the basis for attributing catch. Fine tuning of this basic information gathering program may occur in the future, perhaps through the electronic reporting system being developed by NMFS. Council contact is Chris Oliver.

Steller Sea Lions

The U.S. population of Steller sea lions, which was estimated at 190,000 adults and juveniles 30 years ago, declined by 64% to less than 69,100 by 1989. The majority of this decline occurred in Alaska between the Kenai Peninsula and Kiska Island in the Aleutians. As a result of this precipitous decline, the species was listed as threatened in 1990, pursuant to the Endangered Species Act (ESA). More recent information suggests that the population has continued to decline about 8% annually. Population modeling has predicted that the Kenai-Kiska population will be extinct within 100 years if the trend continues. As a result of this continuing decline, the Kenai-Kiska population (west of Cape Suckling, 144ø) was reclassified as endangered effective June 4, 1997. A threatened listing is being maintained for the remainder of the U.S. population.

This reclassification is not expected to have immediate impacts on fisheries management. However, the recovery factor used in calculating the Potential Biological Removal (PBR) for this species is being reevaluated. The current PBR is 766 Steller sea lions based on a recovery factor of 0.3. Annual takes of Steller sea lions between 1991 and 1995 have averaged 35 sea lions in all fisheries combined. Groundfish fisheries have been responsible for an annual average of 14 incidental takes over that same period. Annual subsistence takes have averaged 412 animals between 1993 and 1995. If the PBR recovery factor is reduced to 0.1, incidental takes in fisheries may be significant and trigger management actions under Sections 101(a)(5)(E) and 118(c)(1)(A) of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Reporting Requirements

The Council took final action to approve technical changes to the recordkeeping and reporting requirements for the groundfish fisheries off Alaska. The proposed rule may be published by mid-August on the following changes:

- (1) all motherships would be required to submit State of Alaska fish tickets;
- (2) a figure depicting Pacific halibut IFQ regulatory areas;
- (3) formalize a policy into regulations affecting an exemption from recordkeeping and reporting requirements for catcher vessels that catch groundfish in a crab pot that will be used as bait;
- (4) revise the term "reporting area" to include EEZ, state, and international (donut hole) waters;
- (5) remove the requirement to record the start date, end date, and trip number of a fishing trip from catcher/vessel weekly production log (WPL) catcher/processor daily cumulative production logs (DCPL), and instruction manuals;
- (6) add option to mothership and shoreside processor DCPL and WPR to facilitate the reporting of product transferred for reprocessing, and;
- (7) move maintenance and storage of logbook sheets from the Observer Program office in Seattle to NOAA Enforcement Division in Juneau.

Call for Proposals

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council invites proposals to amend the IFQ program and its crab and groundfish fishery management plans (FMPs) to address pertinent fishery management problems and concerns. Attached is a blank form for submitting regulatory and plan amendment proposals (Attachment 1).

Bycatch Reduction Proposal: The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires the Council to develop management measures to minimize bycatch and reduce economic discards. The Council has enacted numerous management measures during its twenty-year history to reduce prohibited species bycatch as described in a recent paper available from the Council office and recent amendments (IR/IU) are targeted to reducing economic discards. However, additional measures may be required to reduce bycatch of regulatory and economic discards. As such, the Council will give serious consideration to proposals that satisfy Section 303(a) bycatch requirements of the Act. In September, the Council will prioritize the proposals and task staff with an amendment package for initial review in April 1998 and final action in June 1998. Proposals are due by August 15.

IFQ Proposals: The Council also has developed a specific (and slightly different) cycle for

amendments to the sablefish/halibut IFQ program. Again, the deadline is Friday, August 15. This cycle calls for proposals over the summer which will be forwarded to the IFQ Industry Implementation Team in September or October for review. Their recommendations will be reviewed by the Council at the December meeting. The analysis of IFQ proposals identified for further development by the Council will be presented the following April with final action at the June meeting. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Groundfish and BSAI Crab Proposals: Proposals for amending the groundfish and BSAI crab FMPs are due by Friday, August 15 and will be reviewed by the Council at the September meeting.

Upcoming Committee Meetings

Essential Fish Habitat: Two meetings have been scheduled in July to begin preparation of an essential fish habitat (EFH) assessment document for the fisheries off Alaska, as mandated by the recent amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

July 8-9, 1997: the groundfish technical teams will begin at 8:00 a.m. on July 8 at Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Building 4, Room 2079, Seattle, Washington. The groundfish technical teams for the BSAI and GOA groundfish will prepare a preliminary EFH assessment document.

July 15-17, 1997: the EFH Core Team will begin at 1:00 p.m. on July 15 at the NMFS Alaska Regional Office, 709 W. 9th Street, Room 142A-B, Juneau, Alaska. The EFH Core Team will review the preliminary EFH assessment document and discuss preparation of EFH amendments for the fishery management plans (FMPs) for BSAI and GOA groundfish, BSAI crab, and the FMPs for scallops and salmon.

Joint Council/Board of Fisheries will be meeting July 21-22 in the Old Federal Building, 605 West 4th Avenue, Room 219 (2nd floor - use "G" Street entrance), Anchorage, Alaska. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 1 p.m. on July 21.

Groundfish Plan Teams are scheduled to meet September 2-5 at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Building 4, Seattle, Washington.

Observer Advisory Committee is tentatively scheduled to meet the week of September 9 in Seattle.

Vessel Bycatch Accountability (VBA) Committee is also tentatively scheduled for the week of September 9 in Seattle.

Socio-Economic Data Committee (not yet appointed) will likely meet during the September Council meeting in Seattle.

IFQ Implementation Team may be meeting on Sunday, September 21 (prior to the start of the Council meeting) to review proposals submitted and IFQ ownership issues.

GOA Trip Limits Committee (not yet appointed) will meet sometime prior to the September Council meeting.

Documents Available to the Public

IFQ Revised Amendment for Hired Skipper EA/RIR will be available from the Council office by August 15, 1997.

Sitka Sound Halibut Management Plan: the analysis will be available from the Council office by July 15, 1997. Final action is scheduled for September.

Halibut Charterboat Management EA/RIR: the condensed version of the analysis has been delayed and will now be available by late July or early August for public review. This issue is scheduled for final action in September. You may have your name added to the mailing list for this document by contacting the Council office.

A Brief History of Bycatch Management Measures for Eastern Bering Sea Groundfish Fisheries: A draft version of this paper (June 1997) written by David Witherell and Clarence Pautzke is currently available from the Council office.

Summary of the BSAI Groundfish Fishery Management Plan dated March 31, 1997 (15 pgs) is available from the Council office. Amendments implemented to date are incorporated in this summary to reflect North Pacific Fishery Management Council's most current management of the groundfish fisheries in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands.

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