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North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Council Meeting in Seattle - 129th Plenary Session

The Council's September meeting in Seattle was highlighted by action on the halibut charterboat

management issue and Council direction on alternatives to be analyzed for the inshore/offshore pollock allocations. These and other issues are detailed inside. The Council's next meeting will be held the week of December 8-14 in Anchorage. Major issues will include setting the annual groundfish quota and bycatch apportionments, scallop management and the observer program. Note also that beginning in 1998, the Council will be meeting in early October instead of late September (see updated Meeting Schedule on home page).

Council Appointments and Election of Officers

In August, the Secretary of Commerce announced the reappointments of *Richard Lauber* and *Dr. David Fluharty*, and the new appointment of *Joe Kyle* to the Council. NMFS Regional Administrator, Steve Pennoyer, administered the Oath of Office and presented certificates of appointment to all three. Mr. Lauber represents the Pacific Seafood Processors Association and has been on the Council since 1991. Dr. Fluharty, a Research Associate Professor at the University of Washington, is beginning his second three-year term on the Council, and serves as the chairman of the Council's Ecosystem Committee. *Joe Kyle* previously served three years on the Council as the U.S. Coast Guard representative. He is now a partner in Pacific Associates, Inc., Juneau, Alaska.

Mr. Lauber, elected Chairman shortly after his appointment to the Council in 1991, was unanimously approved to serve in that position for another year. *Wally Pereyra* also was unanimously elected to serve his fourth term as Vice Chairman. Dr. Pereyra, of ProFish International, was first appointed to the Council in 1990.

Nominations Due for Advisory Panel, Scientific and Statistical Committee and Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee

One-year terms of the Council's Advisory Panel (AP) and Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) members expire in December. The SSC advises the Council on scientific and other technical matters relating to Council functions and the AP is composed of representatives of the major segments of the fishing industry and other interested parties including recreational fisheries. Members of these panels are expected to attend up to five meetings, three to five days in length, per year.

The Pacific Northwest Crab Industry Advisory Committee (PNCIAC) was formed in 1989 to provide the Bering Sea crab industry from the Pacific Northwest access to the Alaska regulatory process, similar to that of Alaskan residents. Appointments to this committee are for two years. The committee typically meets a few times a year to review proposed changes in crab fishery regulations.

Resumes for persons who wish to be considered for these committees should be sent to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, 605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306, Anchorage, Alaska, 99501,

to arrive no later than 5:00 p.m., November 21, 1997. Appointments will be announced at the Council's December meeting at the Hilton Hotel in Anchorage, Alaska, and will become effective in January 1998. For more information, contact the Council office.

Halibut and Sablefish IFQs

The Council revised regulations to require a 20% minimum interest in vessels for quota share (QS) holders wishing to hire skippers. The Council also grandfathered QS holders who had employed a hired skipper on or before April 17, 1997 to continue to use a hired skipper at the ownership level they had used prior to April 17, 1997. Any QS holder grandfathered under this provision will lose those grandfather rights if they purchase or otherwise acquire ownership or control of additional QS after September 23, 1997. Upon approval by the Secretary of Commerce, this change would be implemented for the 1998 IFQ season.

The Council received a discussion paper prepared by the IPHC staff on a possible IFQ weighmaster program for monitoring IFQ offloadings. NMFS will prepare an implementation plan for a weighmaster program that would ensure accurate monitoring of IFQ species landings for review at the February or April 1998 Council meeting.

The Council approved releasing to the public the analysis for setting rolling area closures in the groundfish fisheries during the sablefish longline survey. The Council scheduled final action in September 1998 so it may receive a report from NMFS on the success of the reordered survey sequence and the additional year of voluntary compliance by the fishing industry.

The IFQ Industry Implementation Team met on Sunday, September 21, 1997, to review the above mentioned documents and IFQ proposals. The team will report its recommendations on developing IFQ proposals to the Council at its December 1997 meeting. The team's report is available upon request. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Halibut Management Issues

The Council did not take up the issues of halibut local area management plans or take final action on the Sitka Sound plan, though local area plans may be relevant to future management of the halibut charter fleet. The Sitka Task Force will reconsider its recommendation to limit access for non-guided recreational fishing, personal use, and subsistence fishing in Sitka Sound to Sitka residents only. Reconsideration may also depend on final action on the halibut subsistence/personal use analysis currently scheduled for February 1998. The Council also decided to not proceed with proposed revisions to halibut recreational possession limits. In the future, the Council will work closely with the

Alaska Board of Fisheries in development of local management plans and any revisions of halibut possession limits. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Halibut Charterboat Management

At recent meetings, the Scientific and Statistical Committee, Advisory Panel, and the Council have reviewed an analysis conducted by the University of Alaska Anchorage and Council staff. Based on those studies and extensive public testimony, two actions were taken by the Council which will impact the halibut charterboat fishery.

1. Recordkeeping and reporting requirements. Participants in the halibut charterboat industry will be required to fill out performance reports in the future. Information collected by ADF&G on these reports will include catch figures, location of catch, number of clients, residence information, ownership of the vessel, and the identity of the operator. Additional information may also be collected. This recordkeeping and reporting process will be developed through the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) and ADF&G, and may be implemented as early as 1998.
2. Guideline Harvest Levels (GHL) in IPHC Areas 2C and 3A. Guided sport will be allocated 12.76% of the combined commercial and guided sport halibut TAC in area 2C, and 15.61% of the 3A TAC. A GHL was not set in any IPHC area west of 3A. The GHL rate was based on the guided sport fleet receiving 125% of their 1995 catch. Guideline harvest levels will not shut the fishery down, but will be used as a gauge to trigger other measures, such as reduced bag limits.

The halibut charterboat industry will be managed to maintain a stable charter season of historic length, using statewide and zone specific measures. These measures will be developed in cooperation with the Alaska Board of Fisheries and the regional charter industry representatives and submitted to the Council for review and approval. When end-of-season catch data indicate that the guided sport industry may reach or exceed the GHL in the following season, NMFS would implement the pre-approved measures to slow down guided sport harvest. Based on the analysis provided to the Council, this approach is not expected to come into play for several years. A review of these halibut charterboat regulations shall be considered by the Council in October of the year 2000.

In addition to the specific actions outlined above, the Council adopted a framework for developing local area management plans using the joint Council/BOF protocols. Local area plans could be developed through local BOF advisory groups and submitted to the BOF for review, but would ultimately require Council approval for implementation. A variety of management measures, up to and including moratoriums on participation, could be implemented through the local plans. Staff contact is Chris Oliver or Darrell Brannan.

Gulf of Alaska (GOA) Trip Limits

The Council received a report from the Trip Limit Committee and set short and long term goals to address the conservation (TAC overruns) and preemption problems in the GOA pollock and Pacific cod fisheries. Two meetings have been held by the trip limit committee since it was formed after the June 1997 Council meeting. The first meeting was held via teleconference on August 27, 1997. At that meeting all participants were given an opportunity to state their concerns and present views on the issue; however, no consensus on resolving the problem was reached. The second meeting was held on Wednesday, September 26, 1997, and focused on several methods which may potentially resolve the problem. Results of that meeting were presented to the Council by the committee. Copies of the committee's report are available from the Council office.

Based on committee input, the Council feels that short-term measures are needed and has tasked staff with analyzing two options for review at the Council's December meeting:

- A 48-hour stand down period when a vessel switches between the BSAI and GOA. The 48-hour stand down applies to vessels moving from the BSAI into the GOA and vice versa.
- Require vessels to pre-register in an area before they are allowed to participate. The intent of this option is to give NMFS more information on the effort in a fishery which would reduce the chance of TAC overages in an area.

If these management measures are approved, the intent of the Council is to have them in place as soon in 1998 as is practicable, at least in time for the pollock B season.

In the longer term, the Council has scheduled a discussion of GOA management measures for pollock and Pacific cod in the western and central GOA for the February 1998, Council meeting. Gulf of Alaska management measures discussed so far include:

- Trip limits
- Exclusive registration for the GOA or BSAI
- Moving the western GOA boundary from 170°W. latitude eastward to the Scotch Cap Light on the west end of Unimak Island
- Eliminating the June pollock fishery in the GOA, and reallocating its TAC among the other Gulf pollock openings
- Dropping the requirements that NMFS publish fishery closures in the Federal Register in advance.

At that time, the Council intends to develop a problem statement and identify the specific alternatives to be analyzed further, with the intent of implementing the measures by January 1, 1999. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Scallop Management

The scallop fishery off Alaska is currently managed under a State-Federal management regime as specified in the FMP. This regime is cumbersome in that each State regulation and management action must be duplicated by a parallel Federal action. The Magnuson-Stevens Act now enables the Council to delegate to the State the authority to manage some or all aspects of the scallop fishery in Federal waters off Alaska. As such, an analysis of Amendment 3 was prepared to examine the impacts of delegating this authority. Alternatives considered in the analysis include status quo, delegation of all aspects of scallop fishery management except limited access, and delegation of all management measures for this fishery. The Council released the document for public review, and is scheduled to take final action on this issue at its December meeting. A discussion of scallop limited entry is scheduled for February 1998. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Retainable Bycatch of Shortraker/Rougheye

Shortraker/rougheye rockfish in the Aleutian Islands subarea typically are closed to directed fishing at the beginning of the fishing year because the full TAC amount is needed as bycatch in other fisheries. Unfortunately, the rate of bycatch was higher than anticipated in 1997 and fisheries that took these species as bycatch were closed to prevent reaching the overfishing level. That closure resulted in foregone opportunity to harvest available groundfish TACs and the threat of closure of the sablefish IFQ fishery. This series of events prompted the Council to request staff to develop an analysis of reduced maximum retainable bycatch (MRB) percentages for shortraker/rougheye rockfish as the first step in addressing the constraints that the relatively low TAC and overfishing level specified for those species pose to other fisheries.

In September, the Council reviewed an analysis of modifying the maximum retainable bycatch (MRB) percentages for shortraker/rougheye rockfish. Currently, these species are included in the aggregated rockfish complex for purposes of determining MRB amounts. The current MRB for the rockfish complex is 15% relative to deepwater species (primarily Pacific ocean perch) and 5% relative to shallow water species (primarily Atka mackerel). Based on recommendations from its Advisory Panel and public, the Council adopted the Alternative 2 option of separating out shortraker/rougheye from the rockfish complex for purposes of determining MRB amounts and recommended a reduced MRB for these species equal to 7% relative to deepwater species and 2% relative to shallow water species. The MRB percentage for the remaining species in the aggregated rockfish complex will remain unchanged. Further, the Council tasked staff with analyzing potential impacts of setting aside 30% of the Aleutian Islands shortraker/rougheye quota for fixed gear fisheries. Analysis of this plan amendment is expected to be ready for initial review at the December meeting. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

BSAI Crab Management

Staff from ADF&G and NMFS reported on the status of BSAI crab stocks, and recent changes to the fishery management regime. The Bristol Bay red king crab stock is showing good signs of rebuilding. Although biomass of legal males is about the same as last year, large increases were observed in all other size groups. An above average 1990 year-class was nearly fully recruited to the survey, and will begin to recruit to commercial fisheries beginning next year. This is the largest year-class observed since 1975. Increased harvests over the next few years are likely.

Guideline harvest levels established for the 1997-98 BSAI king and Tanner crab fisheries (millions of pounds).		
<u>Fishery</u>	<u>Opening</u>	<u>GHL</u>
Norton Sound red king	July 1	0.08
Aleutians brown king	Sept 1	5.9
St. Matthew blue king	Sept 15	5.0
Pribilof blue and red king	Sept 15	1.5
Bristol Bay red king	Nov 1	7.0
Bering Sea <i>C. bairdi</i>	none	0.0
Bering Sea <i>C. opilio</i>	Jan 15	225.9

The NMFS bottom trawl survey showed a high abundance of large snow crab (*C. opilio*) in the Eastern Bering Sea. As such, the guideline harvest level (GHL) was doubled from last year. The survey encountered very few opilio less than 50 mm, indicating that recruitment may decline in coming years. The survey also found relatively few Tanner crab (*C. bairdi*). Abundance of legal males and large females declined to very low levels, and no signs of improved recruitment were observed.

ADF&G staff reviewed management changes implemented by the Alaska Board of Fisheries at its August meeting. The Board made several changes to enhance inseason management of Bristol Bay red king crab: a vessel registration deadline was set as the first Friday in October; the fishing season was set to open at 4 p.m. on November 1; a 30-hour tank inspection and delivery time was adopted; and baited gear will be allowed to remain on the grounds for up to 10 days following season closure if less than a 24-hour notice was given prior to closure time. Most significantly, the Board adopted tiered pot limits

Pot limits established for the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery.

<u>GHL</u>	<u># of vessels</u>	<u>Pot Limit</u>
<4 million	no fishery	no fishery
4-5.9 million	<200	80/100
	200-250	60/75
	>250	60/75
6-8.9 million	<200	120/150
	200-250	100/125
	>250	10/125

linked to GHUs and the number of registered vessels. Pot limits based on vessel size (<125' / >125') are shown in the adjacent table. Note that in all cases when pre-registration exceeds 250 vessels, the fishery will be managed by a pre-announced season closure instead of inseason. The Board also instructed the Department to establish a maximum of a 12-hour inseason reporting schedule with the fleet to facilitate management. These regulatory provisions will expire on December 31, 1998. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

9-12 million	<200	200/250
	200-250	160/200
	>250	160/200
>12 million	any no.	200/25

Steller Sea Lion Update

The western stock of Steller sea lions was listed as an endangered species on June 4, 1997. Further declines of this stock were observed in a recent survey. The NMFS aerial survey of Steller sea lions, conducted during June 1997, found a 10.3% decrease in adults and juveniles at trend sites from 1996 to 1997, based on preliminary analysis. Since 1996, numbers have decreased in the central Gulf of Alaska and eastern Aleutian Islands, but have remained relatively stable in the western Gulf of Alaska. The decrease in numbers at eastern Aleutian Islands trend sites reverses a general pattern of increases observed in this area since 1989. Additional information will be included in the Ecosystem Considerations chapter of the SAFE in December. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

Ecosystem Committee Update

The Council's Ecosystem Committee met briefly on Thursday, September 24. The committee discussed progress on the essential fish habitat amendment, NMFS ecosystem principles advisory panel, Department of Interior Bering Sea initiative, Ecosystem Considerations chapter of the SAFE report, and other matters. A full-day meeting of the committee is scheduled for Sunday, December 7, in Anchorage (just prior to the Council meeting) to further discuss these matters. Contact Dave Witherell for more information.

Inshore/Offshore 3 (I/O-3)

After receiving input from staff, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), the Advisory Panel (AP), and the public, the Council developed a separate problem statement for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and the Gulf of Alaska. They then turned their attention to the suite of alternatives to be analyzed. Their list of alternatives includes no action (inshore/offshore would expire at the end of

1998), status quo (this is a rollover of the current regime), and changes to the current percentage allocations, as well as possible sub-allocation within sectors, and changes to the Catcher Vessel Operational Area (CVOA). A detailed list of the alternatives selected by the Council is provided later in this newsletter item.

Timelines:

The Council is on a short timeline for completion of the I/O-3 analysis. As currently envisioned, the analysis will proceed as follows:

October 1997: Form the analytical team and consult with the SSC on the scope of the analysis.

December 1997: Update the SSC at the December Council meeting on the progress of the analysis.

February 1998: At the February Council meeting, update the Council, SSC, and AP on the team's progress and provide for a preliminary review if the analysis is sufficiently developed.

April 1998: Initial review of the analytical package (the Council will decide if the package is adequate to release for public review).

June 1998: Final action (final action will be required at this meeting for the program to be in place when inshore/offshore 2 expires at the end of 1998).

GOA Problem Statement:

Allowing the current Gulf of Alaska Inshore/Offshore allocative regime to expire December 31, 1998, would allow the same preemption of resident fleets by factory trawlers in the pollock and Pacific cod fisheries which occurred in 1989. It was this dramatic preemption which triggered the original proposal for an inshore/offshore allocation. In 1989, there was still pollock available in the Bering Sea when the preemption occurred when vessels moved into the Gulf to take advantage of fish with high roe content.

A rollover of the current Gulf of Alaska inshore/offshore program which allocates 100% of the pollock and 90% of the Pacific cod to shore-based operations is a proactive action to prevent the reoccurrence of the original problem.

BSAI Problem Statement:

The current inshore/offshore allocation expires at the end of 1998. The Council thus faces an

inevitable allocation decision regarding the best use of the pollock resource. Many of the issues that originally prompted the Council to adopt an inshore/offshore allocation (e.g., concerns for preemption, coastal community dependency, and stability), resurface with the specter of expiration of the current allocation.

The current allocation was made on the basis of several critical assumptions including utilization rates, foreign ownership, the balance between social gains and assumed economic losses to the nation, and the nature of progress on the Council's Comprehensive Rationalization Program (CRP) initiative. Many of these assumptions have not been revisited since approval of the original amendment. It is not clear that these assumptions hold or that the Council and the nation are well-served by continuing to manage the pollock fishery without a reexamination of allocation options. The Magnuson-Stevens Act presents the Council with a new source of guidance to evaluate national benefits. In the context of Council deliberations over Inshore-Offshore 3, this includes enhanced statutory emphasis on increased utilization, reduction of waste, and fishing communities.

There have also been substantial changes in the structure and characteristics of the affected industry sectors including number of operations, comparative utilization rates, and outmigration and concentration of capital. These changes are associated with issues, including: optimization of food production resulting from wide differences in pollock utilization; shares of pollock harvesting and processing; discards of usable pollock protein, reliance on pollock by fishing communities; and decreases in the total allowable catch of pollock. In addition, changes in fishing patterns could lead to local depletion of pollock stocks or other behavioral impacts to stocks which may negatively impact Steller sea lions and other ecosystem components dependent upon stock availability during critical seasons.

Therefore, the problem facing the Council is to identify what allocation would best serve to ensure compliance with the new Act and address the issues identified above.

Alternatives for Analysis:

Alternative 1: No action.

Alternative 2: Rollover existing inshore/offshore program, including:

GOA pollock (100% inshore) and Pacific cod (90% inshore) allocations

BSAI pollock (35% inshore, 65% offshore) allocation

suboption a: 1-year rollover

suboption b: 3-year rollover

Alternative 3: Allocation range (BSAI only) of following percentages:

<u>Option:</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>D</u>
Inshore sector	25	30	40	45
True Motherships	05	10	10	15
Offshore sector	70	60	50	40

Staff intends to look at these ranges as four separate allocation alternatives. However, it is the Council's intent that these be considered as bounds for the allocation, and that the Council may select any allocation that falls within the bounds of the study. Therefore, the Council may select as its preferred alternative any allocation that issues the Inshore sector 25-45%, True Motherships 5-15%, and the Offshore sector 40-70% of the BSAI pollock quota. The Council wants to emphasize to the public that this wide range of allocations is for analysis and does not necessarily signal that the Council will choose such a wide divergence from status quo when the final decision is made next June.

Option: Establish a reserve set aside for catcher vessels less than 125 feet. The range considered for this set aside is 40-65% of the inshore and true mothership" sector quotas. This range is based on the percentage of harvest that these smaller catcher vessels accounted for between 1991 and 1996.

Allocations would be analyzed such that the True Motherships (which could operate in the BSAI only) would be looked at as a sub-component of either the inshore or offshore component or as a separate component.

Option: Nine to 15% of the offshore quota shall be reserved for catcher vessels delivering to catcher processors. This is in addition to the allocation that catcher vessels may receive under the True Motherships" and Inshore sectors.

The definitions provided by staff for the Inshore, Offshore, Catcher Vessel, and True Mothership sectors will be used in this analysis. These same definitions were used in the sector profiles developed for the Council, and presented at the September meeting. Those breakdowns include:

Catcher Vessels:

- < 125' Length Overall (LOA)
- 125' through 155' LOA
- > 155' LOA

Inshore Processors:

- Surimi Capability
- No Surimi Capability

Catcher Processors:

- Surimi Capability
- No Surimi Capability

True Motherships:

A vessel that has processed, but never caught, pollock in a pollock target fishery in the BSAI EEZ.

Also included as options under Alternative 2 and Alternative 3:

1. Catcher vessel operational area (CVOA) Issues:

- a. Keep the CVOA as currently defined.
- b. Restrict catcher/processors from operation in the CVOA during both the A & B season with an examination of allowing motherships to operate in the CVOA exclusively as well as excluding them from CVOA.
- c. Repeal the CVOA.

2. Sunset Issues:

- a. No sunset date, but intended to serve as an interim measure until the Comprehensive Rationalization Program has been completed.
- b. 3-year sunset.

3. The analysis will identify and examine potential conservation impacts on fish stocks, marine mammals and other marine resources that may result from status quo, or any changes in the structure of the fishery as well as other recommendations made by the SSC in their June 1997 meeting.

CDQ Program:

A separate amendment to the Bering Sea groundfish fishery management plan that will incorporate Bering Sea pollock into the multi-species Western Alaska Community Development Program will be analyzed outside of the inshore/offshore analysis. This separates the CDQ allocation from I/O-3, as

recommended in a letter from NMFS.

Alternatives for CDQ analysis shall include:

Alternative 1: Status quo. (Existing pollock CDQ program expires at the end of 1998)

Alternative 2: 7.5% of the Total Allowable Catch of the Bering Sea pollock fishery is allocated to the program.

American Fisheries Act:

The Council also requested that staff keep them apprised of the status of the "American Fisheries Act" bill introduced by Senator Stevens. This bill, if made law, could substantially reduce the harvesting power of the offshore catcher/processor fleet, and may also reduce the number of large catcher vessels operating in the EEZ. To comply with the Council's request, staff will provide updates on the bill at each of the upcoming Council meetings. Staff contact is Darrell Brannan or Chris Oliver.

Observer Program

The Council was scheduled to receive a progress report from NMFS and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) on development of the third-party observer program structure, the details of which will be established under a joint partnership agreement (JPA). This agenda item was postponed until December, allowing resolution of some of the outstanding details. The Council's Observer Advisory Committee did meet and discuss this issue in early September, prior to the Council meeting, and their report is available from the Council office upon request. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

North Pacific Loan Program

Of the numerous Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements for the North Pacific, the North Pacific Loan Program was scheduled to be submitted to the Secretary of Commerce by October 1, 1997. The loan program will use funds generated from the IFQ fee program (being developed separately as a plan amendment) to underwrite federal loan obligations for entry level and small boat fishermen wishing to purchase IFQs for the sablefish and halibut fisheries. At this meeting, the Council reviewed a draft analysis of the loan program components, many of which are prescribed by the Act. They provided direction on the unspecified aspects, and the package is being finalized for submittal to the Secretary.

Even assuming approval by the Secretary, actual implementation of the loan program may be a ways

off. The underlying fee program, which is the source of funding for the loan program, will not be implemented until 1999 according to NMFS. Therefore, unless a separate Congressional appropriation in FY 1998 occurs, the loan program would not become operational until primed by the fee program on IFQs. Copies of the loan program package for Secretarial review will be available from the Council office by the end of October. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

License Limitation and Multispecies CDQ Program

The Council's license limitation and multi-species CDQ program, approved by the Council in June 1995, was approved by the Secretary of Commerce on September 12, 1997. The Council received an update from NMFS which indicates that the crab CDQ program could be implemented in early 1998, the multi-species groundfish CDQ program by mid-1998, and the license limitation program by January 1999 at the earliest. The Council received several comments regarding specifics of the CDQ program, but took no action other than to request NMFS to take into account the problems posed by the scale (weighing) requirements for some vessels participating in the CDQ fisheries (particularly the smaller head and gut at-sea processors), and to perhaps allow for field testing to work out those problems.

Regarding the license limitation program, the Council received several comments expressing concern with the exemption of CDQ vessels from needing a permit for the license fisheries, and the potential for those exemptions to create a 'loop-hole' for bringing additional vessels into the non-CDQ fisheries. While it does not appear that this exemption is currently being abused, the Council scheduled a discussion of this specific issue for the February 1998 meeting in Anchorage.

The Council also received another update from Gordon Blue and Arni Thomson on the Crab Reduction and Buyback (CRAB) Group's efforts to develop a license buyback program for the BSAI crab fisheries. The Council endorsed the efforts of this group and passed a motion to request the Secretary of Commerce to exercise the Secretarial authority in the Magnuson-Stevens Act to develop and implement this buyback program.

Related to the overall CDQ program, the Council approved the State of Alaska recommendations for multi-species CDQ apportionments for 1998. These are contained in Attachment 1 to this newsletter. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Initial Groundfish Specifications

The Council adopted for public review the preliminary Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) document for the 1998 Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) groundfish fisheries. This document contains information on the current status of stocks for each groundfish species, including

biomass estimates and recommended Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) levels. Based on this information, and input from its advisory bodies and the public, the Council recommended preliminary levels of ABC and Total Allowable Catch (TAC). Twenty-five percent of the initial specifications will go forward as interim specifications for management of the 1998 groundfish fisheries until superseded by publication of final specifications. Because current stock assessments do not include information from this past summer's trawl and hydroacoustic surveys, biomass estimates and subsequent catch specifications are subject to revision when the 1997 survey data are incorporated. These assessments will be finalized by the groundfish plan team in November. On the basis of comments and new information, the Council will adopt final recommendations for the 1998 fishing year at its December meeting.

The Council also recommended preliminary bycatch allowances for Pacific halibut, herring, red king crab, and Tanner crab for 1998. These apportionments will only be in place until the final recommendations of the Council in December are adopted by the Secretary of Commerce. Note that PSC limits for *C. opilio* snow crab (if approved) will need to be apportioned among fisheries at the December meeting. Lastly, the Council recommended that standards for the Vessel Incentive Program (VIP) for the first two quarters of the 1998 Gulf and BSAI trawl fisheries be the same as last year's standards. Staff contact is David Witherell.

Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Specifications

The Council approved for public review the preliminary 1998 Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE), and interim Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs), Total Allowable Catches (TACs), and Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits. The specifications are based on the current stock assessments, as well as recommendations by the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Plan Team, Advisory Panel (AP), and Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). One-fourth of the interim 1997 TACs will be released for the first quarter of the 1998 fishing year. The Council approved ABC recommendations by the SSC and recommendations by the AP to rollover all 1997 TACs, except for walleye pollock, for interim 1998 TACs. The pollock TAC was set equal to the 1998 ABC level to account for halibut discard mortality. Revised ABCs and TACs will be considered by the Council at its December meeting for setting final 1998 specifications.

The Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits for halibut in the GOA are set by gear type and may be apportioned seasonally over the fishing year. For preliminary 1998 specifications, the Council recommended PSC apportionments based on 1997 rates for the GOA groundfish fisheries. Trawl gear and hook-and-line gear were apportioned 2,000 mt and 300 mt, respectively, without seasonal apportionments. Pot gear and the sablefish fixed gear IFQ fishery continues to be exempt from the halibut PSC limits.

Tom Pearson, a fishery biologist with NMFS/Kodiak, was appointed to the GOA Groundfish Plan

Team by the Council. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

Application for Transshipment Permit

Recent amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Act included a process for allowing the Secretary of Commerce to grant foreign vessel transshipment permits, for areas outside traditional ports and roadsteads. For example, a vessel could apply for a permit to make transshipments in all areas of the EEZ, or in other areas within State waters. The Secretarial review process includes consultation with the appropriate regional Council, and concurrence of the appropriate state, if within State waters. At this meeting, the Council reviewed an application from A.N.P. shipping, on behalf of Boyang Ltd. of Seoul, South Korea, for the M/V JOCHOH. Numerous concerns over enforcement and monitoring transshipments of product to foreign vessels prompted the Council to recommend denial of this permit application, and any other permit applications submitted under this section of the Act. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

New Amendments Initiated by the Council

In this past summer's annual call for proposals, we emphasized the need for additional bycatch management measures to comply with the provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. At the September meeting, the Council initiated development of several of the proposals received. These include:

- a plan amendment to eliminate non-pelagic trawling for pollock in the BSAI, and to explore other options for the GOA.
- create an individual checklist program, similar to harvest priority, where participating vessels would have access to special harvest amounts.
- create a halibut mortality avoidance program through trawl towing protocols and regulated deck sorting, and re-evaluate methods for estimating halibut mortality including development of regulations for quick release of halibut to reduce mortality.

These potential amendments, along with ongoing efforts on the Vessel Bycatch Account (VBA) initiative, will be developed for review by the Council in April 1998. Other selected amendments initiated by the Council include: (1) an analysis of the maximum retainable bycatch (MRB) of Pacific cod in the shallow water flatfish fishery in the GOA, and increasing the MRB of arrowtooth flounder in the GOA; and, (2) two ADF&G proposals, one to require full retention of demersal shelf rockfish (DSR) and the other to prohibit fishing on the Cape Edgecomb pinnacles. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

Upcoming Committee Meetings

Essential Fish Habitat core team will meet Tuesday, October 21 through Thursday October 23, 1997, at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Building 4, Room 2079, Seattle, Washington. The team will meet 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday and from 8:00 a.m. until noon on Thursday. The core team plans to discuss the following items:

- development of FY 98 spending plan
- review of preliminary EFH habitat assessment reports, public distribution of EFH habitat assessments
- planning for a process for public involvement and incorporation of traditional knowledge
- update tasking plan
- complementary criteria paper
- fishing and non-fishing threats section
- consultation procedures
- coordinate with Pacific Council on the salmon FMP and other topics

Ecosystem Committee: A full-day meeting of the committee is scheduled for Sunday, December 7, in Anchorage (just prior to the Council meeting).

BSAI & GOA Groundfish Plan Teams will meet the week of November 14, 1997 at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center, 7600 Sand Point Way NE, Room 2079, Seattle, Washington.

Documents Available to the Public

1. Rolling Closure EA/RIR was released for public review and is currently available from the Council office. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this issue in September 1998.
2. Scallop Amendment 3 has been released for public review and is now available from the Council office. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this issue at the December 1997 meeting.
3. BSAI and GOA preliminary 1998 Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFEs) and the preliminary 1998 Economic SAFE are currently available from the Council office.

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