

BSAI Salmon bycatch February 2005 Council action

After drafting alternatives in December for managing an increasing problem with Chinook and chum salmon bycatch in the BSAI pollock fishery, the Council moved to bifurcate the alternatives into two separate analyses based upon the relative analytical timing constraints of the draft alternatives.

Immediate Analysis:

Alternative 1: Status quo

Alternative 2: Eliminate the regulatory salmon savings area closures

Alternative 3: Suspend the regulatory salmon savings area closures on a year-by-year basis so long as the pollock cooperatives have in place a salmon bycatch "hot spot" closure system

Problem statement for the first analytical package (for immediate analysis):

In the mid-1990's, the Council and NMFS implemented regulations to control the bycatch of chum salmon and Chinook salmon taken in BSAI trawl fisheries. These regulations established closure areas in areas and at times when salmon bycatch had been highest based on historical observer data. Unfortunately, these regulations did not appear to have been effective in 2003 and 2004, when record amounts of salmon bycatch were taken. Information from the fishing fleet indicates that bycatch was exacerbated by the regulations, as much higher salmon bycatch rates were encountered outside of the closure areas. Some of these bycaught salmon include Chinook and chum stocks of concern in western Alaska. Further, the closure areas impose increased costs on the pollock fleet. To address this immediate problem, the Council will examine and consider other means to control salmon bycatch.

Further clarification on these alternatives:

- AFA co-ops will regulate themselves by rolling hot spot closures.
- There are no hard caps under this system, monitoring will be done by Sea State, understanding that caps may be contemplated under future bycatch accountability programs.
- CDQ groups are to be included in the inter co-op salmon avoidance program.

The Council also moved to require an annual report on the results of the salmon bycatch by the cooperatives should the closures be suspended. The industry was requested to include in their bycatch cooperative agreement a list of considerations by which the annual review of performance will be evaluated. The industry agreement which is to be drafted (or revised from its current state) should include the following in their bycatch reduction criteria:

- Evidence of moving the fleet away from hot spots-this is dependant on trigger rates, the spread of bycatch rates between areas, and the size of area closed.
- Trigger rates-These should recognize abundance, so rates are lower in years of low abundance and higher in years of high abundance. Guidelines for setting initial trigger rates and generally acceptable total catches are probably needed. An annual review of performance will be essential.
- Individual accountability-while there is a certain amount of randomness in salmon bycatch, there are also measures vessels can take to minimize bycatch. The co-ops should be encouraged to continue work on bycatch avoidance and individual accountability and required to report annually on these efforts.
- Review of the reliability of the total bycatch estimates

The first amendment package is prioritized for immediate analysis and contains alternatives to eliminate or suspend the regulatory salmon savings area closures. The Council further requested that discussion at the April meeting be tailored towards providing additional information from the cooperatives on their internal methodology for reducing bycatch in the fleet as well as an update from NMFS on the feasibility of suspending the closures and the regulatory requirements of doing so.

The following are the alternatives (numbered based on initial draft 5 alternatives) for secondary analysis. No problem statement has yet been drafted nor timeline for analysis agreed upon by the Council. The Council revised these alternatives to add two sub-options under Alternative 5. The Council also removed the sub-option under alternative 3 and moved it to the analysis for secondary prioritization (given concerns expressed regarding the difficulty in developing this program immediately).

Secondary priority:

Suboption (formerly under alternative 3): Develop an individual vessel accountability program that may be implemented if, after 3 years, it is determined the pollock cooperatives' "hot zone" closure system has not reduced salmon bycatch.

Alternative 4: Establish new regulatory salmon savings area closures based on current salmon bycatch data

Alternative 5: Develop a regulatory individual vessel salmon bycatch accountability program.

Sub option a: at the individual level

Sub option b: at the co-op level

The second analytical package includes alternatives for establishing new salmon savings area closures as well as the development of a regulatory individual vessel salmon bycatch accountability program at both the individual vessel level as well as at the co-op level. The Council also requested (under alternative 4) the inclusion of an analysis of the confidence intervals on salmon numbers by level of observer coverage and how that affects the reliability of the total bycatch estimate.