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North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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December Council Meeting in Anchorage - 125th Plenary Session

The Council's December meeting focused on setting the 1997 Total Allowable Catches (TACs) and Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits for groundfish fisheries in both the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and the Gulf of Alaska. The Council also reviewed recent action by the Alaska Board of Fisheries to establish State water Pacific cod fisheries in the Gulf and reviewed the provisions of the recent Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization.

20th Anniversary - A Momentous Occasion

A real highlight of the week was the Council's 20th Anniversary Celebration featuring Chairman Rick Lauber as Master of Ceremonies and Senator Ted Stevens as the keynote speaker. Senator Stevens was lauded for his many years of contributions to conservation and management of the nation's fisheries and in particular those of the North Pacific. Also lauded was Trevor McCabe, the hard working principal Senate staffer on recent revisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Alaska Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer provided a warm welcome to the celebration, and three ex-Chairmen of the Council, Elmer Rasmuson, Clem Tillion, and Jim Campbell, reflected on their experiences. All-in-all, it was a wonderful evening, and we're looking forward to the 30th anniversary celebration in 2006.

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Scientific and Statistical Committee Appointments

One new appointment to the SSC was confirmed at the December meeting. Appointed to his first term on the SSC is Dr. Steve Klosiewski with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Anchorage, which brings the total SSC membership to thirteen. In addition, Seth Macinko will assume a full time position on the SSC while Phil Rigby will serve as an alternate to Dr. Doug Eggers. The following eleven members of the SSC were reappointed for 1997:

- Jim Balsiger Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NMFS
- Keith Criddle UAF, Dept of Economics
- Douglas Eggers ADF&G, Juneau
- Susan Hills UAF, School of Fisheries & Science
- Douglas Larson UC Davis, Dept Agricultural Economics
- Richard Marasco Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NMFS

- Marc Miller UW, School of Marine Affairs
- Terrence Quinn II UA, Juneau Center for Ocean Sciences
- Jack Tagart DFW, Fish Mgmt., Marine Resources Div.
- Albert Tyler UAF, School of Fisheries & Ocean Sciences
- Hal Weeks Oregon, Dept of Fish & Wildlife

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1997 Advisory Panel Appointments Announced

Three new members have been appointed to the Council's Advisory Panel for 1997, which brings the total membership to 23:

- Steve Ganey - Alaska Marine Conservation Council
- Jeff Stephan - United Fishermen's Marketing Association
- Teresa Turk - Association of Professional Observers

The following twenty 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
- Bruce Cotton - Long John Silvers, Inc.
- Craig Cross - Commercial Fisherman
- Dan Falvey - Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association
- Kris Fanning - Commercial Crab Fisherman
- David Fraser - Commercial Fisherman
- Arne Fuglvog - Commercial Fisherman
- Justine Gundersen - Commercial/Subsistence Fisher
- Spike Jones - Commercial Fisherman
- John Lewis - Sportfishing Representative
- Stephanie Madsen - Aleutian Seafood Processor's Assn.
- Hazel Nelson - Bristol Bay Economic Development Corp.
- Dean Paddock - Bristol Bay Driftnetter's Association
- John Roos - Pacific Seafood Processors Association

- Robert Wurm - Kodiak Vessel Owners Association
- Lyle Yeck - Commercial Fisherman
- Grant Yutzenka - UNISEA

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Halibut and Sablefish IFQs

The Council approved a regulatory amendment to create standard deductions for ice and slime for halibut and sablefish to improve accurate accounting of harvests. The Council's recommended standard deduction for halibut and sablefish is based on industry standards of 0% (washed) or 2% (for ice and slime). The IFQ regulations currently require that the initial accurate scale weight at the time of landing should be reported. Numerous reports from the fishing industry had pointed to widespread violations of this provision, primarily under the guise of deductions for ice and slime. The amendment will likely be in effect shortly after the start of the 1997 IFQ season.

The Council also approved development of four new IFQ program changes. The Council has requested that staff provide a discussion paper of requiring weighmasters to monitor IFQ offloadings to enhance accountability. The Council has requested a discussion of projected costs and enforcement needs for the program. Under the proposal, weighmasters would be paid by the buyers. Class A frozen deliveries would be exempt. After reviewing the report, the Council may initiate an analysis for a program change for 1998. The Council requested that staff provide analysis of the effects of three management actions for initial review in April 1997: (1) amending the regulatory language that allows emergency transfers of QS to "surviving spouses" to "heirs" to include immediate family members; (2) defining the corporate ownership of a vessel at 1%, 20%, or 51% for the purpose of hiring a skipper to fish QS owned by the corporation; and (3) instituting rolling closures for trawl and longline vessels during the sablefish longline survey to minimize the impacts of fishing on the survey's biomass estimates.

Three past actions by the Council are working their way through the system for implementation for the 1997 IFQ season. Amendment 42/42 became effective on August 16, 1996 and allows the use of larger vessel QS on smaller vessels. The Secretary approved Amendment 43/43 on December 10, 1996 to increase the "sweep-up" levels for small blocked QS from 1,000 to 3,000 lb for halibut and from 3,000 to 5,000 lb for sablefish (in QS equivalents). Also, a

regulatory amendment to increase the halibut "use caps" in the Bering Sea from ½ percent to 1½ percent was submitted to the Secretary on November 18, 1996. The latter two amendments will be effective for the 1997 IFQ season. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

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Halibut Subsistence

The Council appointed a Halibut Subsistence Committee to meet in 1997 to discuss potential regulatory changes affecting halibut subsistence. The Council received requests from a number of native Alaska groups in western and southeast Alaska to address the current inconsistency between federal regulations for commercial and personal use harvests of halibut and current halibut subsistence harvests in coastal communities. Council member Robin Samuelsen will chair the committee. Other committee members include Jude Henzler (Bering Sea Fishermen's Association), Robert Sundown (Association of Village Council Presidents), Harold Martin and Matt Kookesh (Southeast Native Subsistence Commission), Flore Lekanoff (Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association), Theodore Borbridge (Sitka Tribe of Alaska), and David Bill (Coastal Villages Fishing Cooperative). NPFMC, ADF&G, IPHC, NMFS, and NOAA staff will also be participating in the meetings. The first meeting is scheduled for mid-January 1997 in Anchorage. Contact Jane DiCosimo for more information.

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Electronic Reporting

The Council approved a regulatory amendment to require groundfish processors in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska to utilize an electronic record keeping and reporting system for NMFS-required documents. The proposed changes would replace conventional logbooks and associated NMFS reports with electronic versions. At-sea processors would be required to transmit in-season NMFS reports using Inmarsat satellite equipment and shore-based processors would be required to use modems and phone systems. The electronic reporting system would be implemented in two stages. Phase 1 would consist of electronic versions of the daily production, weekly production, and check-in/check-out reports and would be distributed to the groundfish processing industry for voluntary use in early 1997.

Legal implementation of Phase 1 would take place in 1998. Phase 2 would consist of electronic logbooks, vessel activity reports, and product transfer reports. These will be developed in 1997 and 1998 with full legal implementation in 1999.

The Council appointed a committee composed of industry representatives and agency staff to work out the remaining software and hardware requirements of the program. That committee will meet in early February 1997 at the Alaska Fisheries Science Center in Seattle. Contact Nick Hindman at the NMFS Regional Office (907-586-7228) for more information.

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Scallop Management

In June 1995, the Council approved an amendment package that established management measures to replace an interim closure of Federal waters off Alaska to scallop fishing. Amendment 1 allowed scallop fishing to resume in most registration areas on August 1, 1996, and about 750,000 pounds have been landed to date by nine vessels. Amendment 2 proposes a 3-year vessel moratorium on additional vessels entering the scallop fishery. To qualify, vessels had to have made at least one landing in any year from 1991 through 1993, or during any four years from 1980 through 1990. A notice of availability for the moratorium (Amendment 2) was recently published in the Federal Register; comment deadline is February 3, 1997.

Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the State of Alaska may now regulate vessels not registered with the State if they are operating in the EEZ. As such, one option the Council may consider is to delegate management authority of the scallop fishery to the State. At its December meeting, the Council recommended analysis of a proposal by NMFS to examine impacts of this option. The Council also initiated analysis of a proposal for a license limitation system for the scallop fishery. The Council is tentatively scheduled to review progress on the analyses in September. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

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Snow Crab Bycatch Limits

The Council approved the agreement negotiated by affected industry groups regarding PSC limits for *C. opilio* snow crab taken in BSAI trawl fisheries. Under proposed Amendment 40, PSC limits for snow crab will be based on total abundance of *opilio* crab as indicated by the NMFS standard trawl survey. For 1998 and thereafter, the snow crab PSC cap will be set at 0.1133% of the Bering Sea snow crab abundance index, with a minimum PSC of 4.5 million snow crab and a maximum of 13 million snow crab. Snow crab taken within the "Snow Crab Bycatch Limitation Zone" (SCBLZ) would accrue towards the PSC limits established for individual trawl fisheries. Upon attainment of a snow crab PSC limit apportioned to a particular trawl target fishery, that fishery would be prohibited from fishing within the SCBLZ.

For 1997 only, all snow crab bycatch in areas 513, 514, 521, 523, and 524 will accrue to the PSC limit, and the PSC limit will be increased by 10%. Based on 1996 survey abundance (5,425 million crabs), the 1997 snow crab PSC limit will be 6,760,000 crabs. Snow crab bycatch accrued from January 1 until publication of the final rule (expected by July) will apply to all fisheries that take snow crab in 1997. Staff contact is David Witherell.

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Forage Fish

The Council reviewed an analysis that examined potential impacts of prohibiting a directed fishery on forage fish. Forage fish identified in this analysis include Osmeridae (capelin, smelt), Myctophidae (lanternfish), Bathylagidae (deep-sea smelts), Amodytes (sandlance), Gonostomatidae (bristlemouths), Stichaedae (pricklebacks), and Pholidae (gunnels), Pacific sandfish, and euphausiids. Forage fish are an important ecosystem component, and are prey for marine mammals, seabirds, and commercially important fish species. Recent changes in predator abundance have raised concerns that forage fish may require additional protection. Under current regulations, catch of forage fish could be retained under either the "other species" category TAC or as a "non-specified species." Under the proposed amendment, several options are examined to provide additional measures to control catch of these species within the EEZ. Regulations would not affect state managed fisheries for capelin within state waters. The Council recommended releasing the document for public review and scheduled final action for the April meeting. Copies of the revised analysis should be ready in March, and will be available by contacting the Council office. Staff contact is Dave Witherell.

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Seabird Protection



At their December meeting, the Council responded to an industry request for regulations requiring various avoidance measures by the longline fleet to avoid the capture of seabirds. The Council approved gear modifications, seabird avoidance devices, or changes in fishing methods designed to reduce the incidental mortality of seabirds in the directed groundfish and halibut fisheries of the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands. Short-tailed albatross are on the endangered species list, and their incidental take in groundfish fisheries is strictly limited. The allowable take is set at two albatrosses. NMFS confirmed that two short-tailed albatross were taken in the 1995 IFQ sablefish fishery. One was taken in 1996.

The proposed rule for the groundfish hook-and-line fisheries will be published in early January 1997. The final rule is expected to be published in mid-March. Halibut regulations will be implemented separately by NMFS after review by the IPHC at their January 1997 meeting. Approved measures to reduce seabird bycatch in hook-and-line fisheries include the following:

- Baited hooks must sink as soon as possible after they are put in the water. This could be accomplished by the use of weighted groundlines or thawed bait.
- The dumping of offal shall be avoided to the extent practicable while gear is being set or hauled; if discharge of offal is unavoidable, the discharge must take place aft of the hauling station or on the opposite side of the vessel to that where gear is set or hauled.
- Every effort shall be made to ensure that birds brought aboard alive are released alive and that wherever possible, hooks are removed without jeopardizing the life of the bird.

One or more of the following measures shall be employed at all times when baited hooks are being set:

- A buoy, board, stick, broom, or other like device shall be towed behind the vessel at a distance appropriate to prevent birds from taking baited hooks. Multiple devices may be employed, or;
- A streamer line designed to effectively discourage birds from settling on baits during deployment of gear, shall be towed, or;
- Gear shall be set only at night (between the times of nautical twilight), and only the

- minimum vessel's lights necessary for safety shall be used; or
- Baited hooks shall be deployed under water using a lining tube designed and manufactured for such a purpose, or;
- With the approval of the Regional Administrator, other experimental seabird avoidance devices may be substituted for those listed above.

Small skiffs used on inside waters may be exempted from these provisions. Staff contact is Jane DiCosimo.

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Gulf of Alaska Final Groundfish Specifications

The Council approved final 1997 Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish quota specifications, including Acceptable Biological Catches (ABCs), Total Allowable Catches (TACs) (Table 1), and Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limits. The specifications are based on the current stock assessments contained in the final 1997 Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE), as well as recommendations by the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Plan Team, Advisory Panel, and Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC). The final specifications will replace the interim 1997 TACs upon publication in the Federal Register.

The results of the 1996 NMFS trawl survey were incorporated into all stock assessments, except for sablefish and demersal shelf rockfish (DSR) which are assessed from longline surveys. The 1996 assessments indicated significant increases in ABCs since last year for walleye pollock, Pacific cod, and Pacific ocean perch (POP). The 1996 assessment indicated slight to moderate declines for all species of flatfish and other rockfish species.

The Council increased the ABC and TAC for walleye pollock from 54,810 mt to 79,980 mt for 1997 though the distribution between GOA subareas is changed from 1996. Length frequency data from the 1990 through 1996 hydroacoustic surveys and the 1996 bottom trawl survey showed the progression of the strong 1988 year class through the population. Age composition data from the 1993 bottom trawl survey and the 1995 fishery also revealed strong 1988 and 1989 year classes. The 1989 year class in the Bering Sea has also been shown to be strong. The 1995 and 1996 hydroacoustic surveys also revealed a strong 1994 GOA year class.

The 1996 survey suggesting an increase in biomass over the 1993 estimate, led to an increase in the Pacific cod ABC from 65,000 mt to 81,500 mt. Preliminary indications are that the 1995 year class may be above average. The Council also reviewed the October 1996 Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) action that initiated a state water fishery for Pacific cod. The Council recommended that Pacific cod harvests from the state managed fisheries in coastal and internal Prince William Sound waters should be counted against the federal TACs since cod is a single stock in the GOA. Accordingly, they reduced the TAC by 15% of the ABC for the Western and Central areas and 25%, for the Eastern area. The total Gulf TAC was set at 69,115 mt for the federal fishery, still a 6% increase from the 1996 TAC. The Council expressed concern over the lack of coordinated management between the state and federal agencies on Pacific cod. The Council and BOF met briefly via telephone during the Council meeting and agreed to appoint a joint committee to discuss the recent BOF action. Council members Robin Samuelsen, Kevin O'Leary, and Morris Barker, and Board members Larry Engel, John White, and Dan Coffey will meet in mid-January in Anchorage. Contact Jane DiCosimo for more information on this meeting.

The 1997 sablefish ABC and TAC declined to 14,625 mt from 17,080 mt, reflecting the continued decline in the stock. Revisions to the stock assessment model resulted in an increase in the final ABC from the preliminary ABC of 11,620 mt announced in September. Area apportionments are 1,860 mt for the Western area, 6,410 mt for the Central area, 2,410 mt for West Yakutat, and 3,840 mt for East Yakutat/Southeast Outside. The Council requested that staff analyze the effects of rolling closures for trawl and longline vessels to avoid sablefish longline survey areas during sampling. Industry has raised repeated concerns that the decline in sablefish abundance may be related to impacts of fishing on survey stations prior to sampling, despite repeated requests for voluntary avoidance of survey areas.

Arrowtooth flounder, shallow water flatfish, and flathead sole ABCs were rolled over from 1996, except for the flathead Eastern area TAC which dropped by 700 mt. The rex sole ABC dropped by 540 mt, while the deep water flatfish TAC dropped from 11,080 mt to 7,170 mt.

The POP stock appears to be rebuilt according to the Council's rebuilding plan, but the Council set a TAC equal to 80% of the Western and Central Gulf ABC and rolled over the 1996 Eastern Gulf TAC for a total TAC of 9,190 mt. The Council's conservative approach was to ensure that the stock is fully recovered. Remaining rockfish ABCs did not vary greatly from 1996. Other slope rockfish was set for bycatch only.

For 1997, black and blue rockfishes were separated into a nearshore component and dusky,

widow, and yellowtail rockfishes were separated into an offshore component of pelagic shelf rockfish for the Central Gulf only. The PSR assemblage remained intact for the Western and Eastern areas, awaiting better information upon which to calculate nearshore ABCs for those areas. Final action on a plan amendment to revise management authority of black and blue rockfishes is scheduled for the February 1997 Council meeting.

Demersal shelf rockfish were unassessed in 1996, and ABC and TAC were rolled over. In addition, Atka mackerel biomass estimates from the survey were determined to be unreliable, so ABC and TAC were set equal to bycatch needs.

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 1997, the Council recommended PSC apportionments shown below for the GOA groundfish fisheries and are unchanged from 1996. Pot gear and the sablefish fixed gear IFQ fishery continue to be exempt from the halibut PSC limits.

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

The trawl gear PSC cap is further apportioned between "shallow" and "deep" water species complexes as follows:

Quarter	Shallow water Complex	Deep water Complex	Total
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

Species in the shallow water complex are pollock, Pacific cod, shallow water flatfish, Atka mackerel, and other species, while the deep water complex includes deep water flatfish, rockfish, flathead sole, sablefish and arrowtooth flounder. Halibut discard mortalities

recommended by International Pacific Halibut Commission staff were also approved (Table 5). The Council modified the recommendation for the BSAI Pacific cod longline fishery to 11.5% for the first trimester of 1997. The rate for the remainder of the year will be revised in 1997 based on observer rates in 1996.

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Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Groundfish Specifications

The Council adopted final groundfish specifications for the 1997 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. The Council recommendations for ABCs, TACs, and apportionments are listed in Table 2. Groundfish abundance in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands area remains relatively stable for most species. Abundance of Pacific ocean perch in the Aleutian Islands has increased, whereas pollock and Atka mackerel have declined.

The Council, Advisory Panel, and the Scientific and Statistical Committee spent considerable time reviewing the status of pollock in the Eastern Bering Sea. Projected 1997 biomass of pollock in the Eastern Bering Sea stock was estimated at 6.1 million mt, and is effectively at the level that produces MSY. The stock was estimated to have been 6.2 million mt in 1996. The current fishery is dependent on the strong 1989 year-class (which is expected to become insignificant by 1998), and to a lesser extent, the 1992 year-class. As a result, but not unexpectedly, the future fishery will be increasingly dependent on incoming year-classes. Recruitment has been difficult to predict, however.

A special report on hydroacoustic and bottom trawl surveys conducted in the western Bering Sea was provided by Dr. Mikhail Stepanenko, TINRO Centre, Russia. Russian data indicate the presence of a large 1992 year-class and a strong 1995 year-class, which appears similar in magnitude to the exceptional 1989 year-class. The 1994 year class appears to be below average according to Russian data.

Although two environmental groups proposed harvest reductions of 25-40% to promote improved future recruitment, the SSC noted that because pollock suffer a high natural mortality rate, a large fraction of any foregone catch would die before it could contribute to the next

spawning cycle. The SSC also noted that recruitment is highly variable at all levels of spawning stock size, so the addition of small increments in spawning biomass may have no discernible impact.

The Council remains concerned about the status of the Eastern Bering Sea pollock stock. If pollock biomass continues to decline, allowable catches may be much reduced. The harvest policy adopted under Amendment 44 will increasingly adjust fishing mortality downward in the spirit of conservative management. Fortunately, the combined hydroacoustic trawl survey that will take place in 1997 will strengthen next year's stock assessment and provide a critical watch point in the status of this population.

For 1997, the Council recommended a 1,130,000 mt TAC for Eastern Bering Sea pollock, a decrease of 5% (60,000 mt) from 1996. 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 28,000 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 1997 Community Development Quotas will be 84,750 mt for the Eastern Bering Sea and 2,100 mt for the Aleutian Islands areas.

The Council recommended a 270,000 mt TAC for Pacific cod, the same as last year. 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 85,000 mt be released the first trimester (January 1 - April 30), 26,500 mt for the second trimester (May 1 - August 31), and 5,545 mt for the third trimester. Reserves of 20,655 mt will be apportioned with 77% to the first and third trimester, and 23% to the second trimester.

Recommended apportionments of prohibited species catch limits for 1997 are listed in Table 3 (trawl fisheries) and Table 4 (non-trawl fisheries). The total PSC limit for herring (1,579 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 (Table 3). Bycatch limits for red king crab and Tanner crab were reduced this year under Amendments 37 and 41. PSC limits for red king crab were reduced to

100,000 crab, and PSC limits for Tanner crab were reduced to 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. For the non-trawl halibut PSC apportionment, the Council recommended allocating more halibut to the Pacific cod fishery, particularly in the first trimester (Table 4). The Council again recommended that pot gear, jig gear, and sablefish hook-and-line fisheries be exempt from the non-trawl PSC program for 1997. Staff contact is David Witherell.

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Improved Retention and Utilization (IR/IU)

At this meeting, the Council received a report from their industry IR/IU Committee and approved the Committee's recommendations for further work on this initiative. More specifically, the Council approved a Problem Statement for work on the Gulf of Alaska IR/IU program, as well as parameters for a GOA program. Basically, the GOA program will mirror the BSAI program with pollock and Pacific cod targeted for immediate (1998) implementation and the shallow-water flatfish species complex targeted for a delayed implementation (5 years after pollock and Pacific cod). Their adopted Problem Statement is contained below:

The objective of the Council in undertaking improved retention and utilization regulations for Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries centers on the same basic concern that motivated an IR/IU program in the BSAI groundfish fisheries - that is, economic discards of groundfish catch at unacceptably high levels. An IR/IU program for the GOA would be expected to "provide incentives for fishermen to avoid unwanted catch, increase utilization of fish that are taken, and reduce overall discards of whole fish," consistent with current Magnuson-Stevens Act provisions.

In addition, the Council recognizes the potential risk of preemption of certain existing GOA groundfish fisheries which could occur in response to economic incentives displacing capacity and effort from BSAI IR/IU fisheries. This risk can be minimized if substantially equivalent IR/IU regulations are simultaneously implemented for the GOA.

In a related agenda item, the Council reviewed a discussion paper on the issue of allowing limited processing for catcher vessels. Under the Council's license limitation program, catcher

vessels will not be allowed to operate as processors unless they receive a catcher/processor designation based on activity in the year prior to June 17, 1995. At the June 1995 meeting, the Council requested staff to examine a potential, limited allowance for processing by those vessels within the IR/IU initiative. After reviewing the discussion paper, and taking into account other staffing priorities, the Council postponed any further analyses of this proposal until the September 1997 meeting, at which time they will review this issue again and provide direction to staff. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

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Observer Program

The Council received a brief staff report on this issue and acknowledged that NMFS is working to resolve several issues surrounding further development of the groundfish observer program. While the Council's latest focus was on a modified pay-as-you-go program (third party contractor alternative), the information being developed by staff will not restrict the Council to that particular program structure. A fee-based program will be examined as well. A full report and further Council direction are scheduled for the April 1997 meeting, and the Observer Advisory Committee will meet in March. The crab observer program also will be discussed at the joint Council/Board of Fish meeting in February 1997. Staff contact is Chris Oliver.

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Staff Tasking

The Council devoted several hours of their meeting to a review of current, ongoing management measures, a review and discussion of recent Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements, and review and discussion of groundfish and IFQ program amendments proposed in the 1996 annual cycle. Due to existing Council projects and to immediate actions required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Council initiated few new amendment analyses at this time, but did schedule further discussions of several issues as described below:

- Vessel Bycatch Accounts (VBAs) - the Council has scheduled this issue for discussion at the February 1997 meeting in Anchorage.

- Bycatch reduction measures - though no specific actions were initiated at this meeting, the Council will schedule this issue for the June 1997 meeting, at which time they will discuss the need for additional bycatch measures, in response to either Magnuson-Stevens Act requirements or Council initiative.
- Inshore/Offshore and pollock CDQ programs - with these programs to expire at the end of 1998, the Council has scheduled discussions of potential follow-up amendments for the April 1997 meeting.
- Skipper Licensing program - the Council did not task staff to proceed with an analysis of a skipper licensing program at this time, noting that a proposed skipper reporting system would provide much of the information which is currently lacking or inaccessible. NMFS, ADF&G, and Council staff will be coordinating to develop a reporting system which would provide necessary information for future consideration of this proposal. A progress report is scheduled for April 1997.
- BSAI pollock B season - the Council indicated their intent to re-examine the pollock B season opening date, and have scheduled that issue for discussion at the December 1997 meeting. Any change in the opening date would be in 1998 - the 1997 opening date is still set for September 1.
- Gear conflict issues - no specific proposals were forwarded by the Council, but they did request that the general issue be scheduled for further discussions at the June 1997 meeting. NMFS and ADF&G will be developing a discussion paper which documents existing gear storage areas and known instances of gear conflict or gear losses, and assesses whether further Council actions are necessary.
- GOA pollock and Pacific cod fisheries - though the Council took no specific actions, they did discuss proposals for gear restrictions and trip limits for western GOA pollock, and also discussed proposals for seasonal and gear allocations of GOA Pacific cod. In February staff will provide the Council with additional information on numbers and sizes of vessels, and average deliveries for the western GOA pollock fisheries. The Council refrained from any actions on GOA Pacific cod allocations, pending a joint meeting with the Board of Fisheries which is scheduled for February.
- Directed fishing standards - proposals for generic changes in directed fishing standards were not forwarded, but the Council has scheduled further discussion of this issue for the September 1997 meeting.
- Vessel buyback programs - the new Magnuson-Stevens Act allows the Council to establish capacity reduction (vessel buyback) programs. Before the Council initiates any action on such a program, they are requesting the groundfish and crab industry to work out the fundamentals for such a program, and report back to the Council, hopefully at

the April 1997 meeting.

- Crab bycatch in pot cod fisheries - no formal analysis was initiated, with the understanding that more information is necessary to determine whether to pursue specific management restrictions.
- Observer coverage requirements - proposed changes will be evaluated in the future when the Council takes a broader look at the overall groundfish Observer Program.

One specific proposal which was approved for analysis by the Council was to look at an allocation of 2% of the Atka mackerel quota for use by jig gear in the BSAI. Analysis of this proposal is tentatively scheduled for Council review in April. Proposals were also forwarded to allow NMFS to require pre-registration for vessels to participate in certain fisheries, and to allow for adjustments in maximum retainable bycatch amounts (MRBs). These proposals will be developed as staff time allows.

Though the Magnuson-Stevens Act specifies several requirements of the Council, one major item which will require immediate development is the fee program for IFQ/CDQ fisheries, and the attendant North Pacific Loan Program. These are scheduled for Council review in June of 1997, with staff work starting in early 1997. An update and further Council discussion of this issue are scheduled for the February 1997 meeting in Anchorage. Development of this fee program will be a major item for the Council and industry over the next 6 months. Also scheduled for February is a discussion of how the Council will fit into the overall National Academy of Science's study of the IFQ and CDQ programs.

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Upcoming Meetings

Halibut Subsistence Committee	Jan 15-17, 1997 (tentative)	Anchorage
Joint BOF/NPFMC Groundfish Committee	Jan 9-11, 1997 (tentative)	Anchorage
Central Lien Registry	January 1997	Juneau
Electronic Reporting Committee	February 1997	AFSC/Seattle
PNCIAC	January 6, 1997	Seattle
Ecosystems Committee	Jan 23-24, 1997	AFSC/Seattle

IPHC Annual Meeting Jan 27-30, 1997 Victoria, B.C.
Observer Advisory Committee March 1997 Seattle

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Any comments, suggestions or "whatever" are welcome and appreciated regarding your thoughts on home page improvements. This home page is not intended to be used for "public comment" on any issues before the Council. All public comment with regard to specific fishery management issues will continue to be mailed or faxed to the Council office by the deadline date set for that item. Any email comments should be related to [Linda_Roberts](#)

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