A PEIS is the comprehensive document in which an agency considers a number of related actions or projects being decided within one program. A PEIS looks to the environmental consequences of a program as a whole.

A PEIS "examines an entire policy initiative rather than performing a piecemeal analysis, within the structure of a single agency action."
Why do a Programmatic EIS now?

Depletion of several major groundfish species and overcapacity in the various fishing sectors have combined to create a "fishery disaster."

NOAA Fisheries and the Council are considering several alternatives to the current management program. This EIS will aid the Council, NOAA Fisheries and the public in planning future actions and understanding the environmental impacts.

The primary purpose of the proposed action is to prepare and implement a comprehensive recovery plan for the groundfish resources and the fisheries that depend on them.

Some Key Overfished Groundfish Stocks

- nine species of groundfish have been overfished
- rebuilding plans for overfished groundfish stocks must be prepared, and the stocks rebuilt as required by law
- bycatch, which has occurred and continues to occur in the groundfish fisheries, must be assessed, monitored and reduced to the extent practicable
- fishing effects on essential groundfish habitat must be reduced to the extent practicable; and
- social and economic conditions within various fishing sectors and fishing communities have deteriorated and a fishery disaster has been declared
What's the end result?

- Final adoption of the proposed action (that is, a preferred alternative) will commit the Council and NOAA Fisheries to a specific plan of action.
- An FMP amendment or series of FMP amendments and regulatory amendments would implement the program over the next 5-10 years.
- The Council could begin preparing the first FMP amendment before the PEIS preferred alternative is selected, or immediately after.

Overview of this draft PEIS

- Purpose and need for action
- Alternatives, including the status quo
- Description of the affected environment
- Environmental impacts (the analysis)

Purpose and need for action:

- What is the proposed action?

  The Proposed action is to manage the West Coast groundfish resources and fishery as described and mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).
But we already have a management program...

- Yes, so the question is whether to continue with the same program, or to try a different approach. This could be a different emphasis, a more strategic focus, different (or clearer) goals and standards, or a change in the management tools that are used.

What about the Council’s Strategic Plan for Groundfish?

- The Strategic Plan is the basis for Alternative 1. However, the Strategic Plan does not address all aspects of the fishery management program.

- Conditions have changed since the Strategic Plan was developed and approved.

What is a programmatic alternative?

- Each alternative must include all the required elements of a fishery management program.

- Each alternative must identify goals, objectives, and performance standards, and identify the management tools that will be used to achieve those standards.

- Specific regulations will not be included at this time.
Alternative 1. This is the status quo alternative. The current fishery management program, as laid out in the Fishery Management Plan, is a process-oriented, adaptive management program to achieve broad goals, responsive to issues, with a priority to maximize fishing opportunities within biological constraints. The proposed 2003 annual specifications are an illustration of the types of management measures implemented in accordance with Alternative 1. The primary focus of the status quo is to provide maximum flexibility to respond to changing conditions in the groundfish resources and the groundfish fisheries.

Alternative 2. Alternative 2 is a modification of the status quo with a strategic focus emphasizing capacity reduction, improved bycatch information collection, and resolution of allocation issues. This alternative is based primarily on the Council’s Strategic Plan for Groundfish.

Alternative 3. Alternative 3 is a modification of the status quo with emphasis on obtaining greater short-term social and economic benefits. As with Alternative 2, the primary focus is on reducing overcapacity in order to create opportunities for profitable fishing operations. This alternative is intended to be less restrictive than the status quo and could utilize the mixed stock exception to provide greater access to healthy fish stocks.
How will impacts of the alternatives be analyzed?

- Where possible, differences between alternatives will be quantified. For example, different harvest policies would lead to different catch levels that may be predictable.
- In some cases, geographic analytical techniques will be used. For example, the effects of different closed areas may be predictable and will be quantified and illustrated.

What is "geographic analysis?"

- Geographic Information Systems, or "GIS" for short, are used to place various types of data into a map. Different layers of information can be portrayed in ways that may show patterns we might not recognize otherwise. In addition, various analyses can be performed (such as effects of boundary lines and areas).
What is needed from the Council today?

- The Council will adopt the program alternatives to be evaluated in the PEIS. The choices are:
  - adopt all the alternatives as proposed by the ad hoc EIS Steering Committee
  - delete some or all alternatives first
  - and or delete some alternatives first.
- Consider initiating FMP amendment to begin implementing the preferred alternative/proposed action.

Where do we go from here?

- Distribute final draft PEIS, which has been approved and updated by the PEIS Steering Committee.
- Conduct workshops to review accuracy of descriptions and to develop technical methods to evaluate impacts.
- Complete any draft analyses by February 2003 for final EIS.
- Provide a public hearing by April 2003.
- Distribute preliminary draft PEIS to Council family and interested public before March Council meeting.
- Final Council review in April 2003.
- Council adoption of Draft PEIS in June 2003 for formal public review.
- Formal public review, August-November.