

GROUND FISH FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Situation: NMFS, in consultation with the Council, is preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) that will review the current status of the federal groundfish management program and offer a range of alternative management strategies at a broad programmatic or policy level. This PEIS was initiated with a scoping process early in 2001 and is intended in part to provide the opportunity for and implementation of Council's strategic plan for groundfish. Since the strategic plan was adopted, and the EIS scoping period held, groundfish management has changed substantially, with the focus towards how to allow fishing while achieving the stock rebuilding mandate. The Ad Hoc Groundfish FMP EIS Oversight Committee (EIS Oversight Committee) met in May 2002 and developed a set of programmatic alternatives for Council consideration and adoption for analysis. However, but at the June meeting, NMFS recommended the Council delay adoption of the alternatives until it had developed its final management recommendations for the 2003 fishing year; the Council agreed. At the September 2002 meeting, the Council directed the Oversight Committee to reconvene and review its May alternatives to make sure they were still appropriate under the new stock conditions and management program. The committee met on October 8-9 and has revised its previous recommendations.

The EIS Oversight Committee's revisions do not fundamentally change the alternatives, but they do clarify the strategic focus represented by each alternative (except the status quo) and incorporate measurable criteria to compare and evaluate them. Each alternative (except the status quo) would represent a different way to amend the FMP to incorporate different goals, policies, and management frameworks.

NMFS asks the Council to review and endorse the set of alternatives summarized in Attachment 1, along with providing any guidance on the contents of the alternatives. Once the alternatives are endorsed by the Council, the teams preparing the PEIS will begin evaluating their potential environmental effects as part of the PEIS development process.

Attachment 2 presents a revision of the schedule for completion of the PEIS. The schedule is based on Council endorsement of the alternatives at the November Council meeting, thus allowing analysis to proceed. The Council is still scheduled to choose a preferred alternative in early 2003. This will allow completion of the draft PEIS by August 2003, as in the original schedule, subsequent public review, and preparation of the final PEIS. The Council should consider preparing an amendment package in parallel with the final PEIS to implement policies and program elements of the preferred alternative.

The Council may also consider providing guidance on future meetings of the EIS Oversight Committee and its membership.

Council Task:

1. Guidance on Programmatic EIS process.

Reference Materials:

1. Revised Groundfish Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement Alternatives (Exhibit G.7, Attachment 1).
2. Revised Programmatic SEIS Timeline (Exhibit G.7, Attachment 2).

Agenda Order:

- a. Agendum Overview
- b. NMFS Report
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. Council Guidance on Programmatic EIS Process

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Groundfish Fishery Strategic Plan (GFSP) Consistency Analysis

The GFSP broadly supports effective public involvement during and beyond the transition to sustainable groundfish fishery management. The GFSP also specifically seeks to update the goals and objectives in the current groundfish FMP to incorporate GFSP visions and goals (Sec. II.C.(d)3). The Programmatic SEIS will provide a public forum vehicle for assessing and incorporating GFSP visions and goals into the Groundfish FMP.

PFMC
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