



## Pacific Fishery Management Council

7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 101, Portland, OR 97220-1384  
Phone 503-820-2280 | Toll free 866-806-7204 | Fax 503-820-2299 | [www.pcouncil.org](http://www.pcouncil.org)  
Donald K. Hansen, Chairman | Donald O. McIsaac, Executive Director

March 12, 2008

Mr. D. Robert Lohn, Regional Administrator  
National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwest Region  
7600 Sand Point Way NE, BIN C15700  
Seattle, WA 98115-0070

Re: Pacific Fishery Management Council Recommendations on Amendment 15 to the Pacific Groundfish Fishery Management Plan

Dear Mr. Lohn:

The Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) met September 10 - 14, 2007, in Portland, Oregon to consider, among other matters, Amendment 15 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). This letter transmits the specific recommendations adopted by the Council for the approval consideration process. If approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce (Secretary), Amendment 15 would develop a limited entry program for the three non-tribal sectors of the Pacific whiting fishery (shore-based, catcher/processor, mothership) off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California.

In developing its recommendations, the Council reviewed analyses and public comments presented at the September 2007<sup>1</sup> Council meeting including a draft Environmental Assessment (EA), Regulatory Impact Review, and Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis entitled, *A Limited Entry Program for the Non-Tribal Sectors of the Pacific Whiting Fishery*. Specific Council recommendations and supporting analyses are included in the EA as Alternative 4, Preferred Alternative.

The Council believes that new entry into the Pacific whiting fishery is likely, given the increased whiting exvessel prices, declining limited West Coast trawl opportunities due to overfished species rebuilding measures, and declining pollock quotas in Alaska. The Council continues to be concerned about the conservation of overfished groundfish species and salmon stocks listed under the Endangered Species Act and believes increased effort in the Pacific whiting fishery could exacerbate a race for fish and increased bycatch of these species of concern. Additionally, if fishing capacity increases, it is likely to increase the cost to manage the fishery as it becomes faster paced, and it will likely decrease the economic returns to the historical harvesters.

The Council's preferred action alternative is a blend of Alternative 2A and Alternative 3 and would prohibit sector-specific participation in the shoreside, catcher/processor, and mothership sectors of the Pacific whiting fishery in each sector for which a vessel does not have a historic participation record during specific qualifying periods.

The Council intends Amendment 15 to serve as an interim measure with the proposed provisions sunseting at such time the Council adopts and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implements a trawl rationalization program under Amendment 20.

At its September meeting the Council passed the following motion.

*Until the implementation of a trawl individual quota or cooperative management program in the Pacific whiting fishery, no vessel may participate in the shoreside, mothership, or catcher-processor sector of the Pacific Whiting Fishery unless that vessel meets the following criteria for such vessel in such sector:*

- *For catcher vessels participating in the shoreside sector, any vessel that participated in this sector in at least one primary whiting season between January 1, 1994 through January 1, 2007 (Alternative 2A).*
- *For catcher vessels participating in the mothership sector, vessels in the catcher/processor sector, and motherships, any vessel that participated in a particular sector in at least one primary whiting season between January 1, 1997 through January 1, 2007 (Alternative 3).*

*Vessels that qualify under Amendment 15 are not guaranteed future participation and/or inclusion in the Pacific whiting fishery under Amendment 20.*

The Council understands that today's transmittal of the proposed action and the enclosed amendatory language to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan will allow adequate time for the NMFS approval and implementation process to be completed in advance of the 2008 primary Pacific whiting fishery that is anticipated to begin in April 2008.

Finally, the Council approved additional housekeeping amendatory FMP language as recommended by NMFS at the September Council meeting under the enclosed Agenda Item G.5.b, Supplemental Attachment 3. The recommended FMP change would better align the permit renewal process with the Federal fiscal calendar and the fisheries' two-month cumulative limit periods by changing the date NMFS sends out limited entry permit renewal applications from September 1 to September 15.

Should you or your staff have any questions regarding the Council's recommendations, please have them contact Mr. Mike Burner at the Council office.

Sincerely,



D.O. McIsaac, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

Enclosures

MDB:rdd

c: Council Members

Mr. Alan Risenhoover, NMFS, Director, Office Sustainable Fisheries

Mr. Rod McInnis, NMFS, Southwest Regional Administrator

Ms. Eileen Cooney

Dr. John Coon

Mr. Jim Seger

Mr. Merrick Burden

Mr. John DeVore

Ms. Heather Brandon

Dr. Kit Dahl

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