

# **Pacific Fishery Management Council Scoping:**

## **Dedicated Access Privileges (Including Individual Fishing Quotas) for the West Coast Limited Entry Trawl Groundfish Fishery**

“Scoping” is your opportunity to comment on alternatives you think should be considered, and possible impacts that should be analyzed, as the Pacific Fishery Management Council considers dedicated access privileges.

### **What is being considered?**

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is considering a proposal to create a dedicated access privilege system for the Pacific Coast groundfish limited entry trawl fishery. With dedicated access privileges, individual fishermen, communities, or others are granted the privilege of catching a portion of the total allowable catch.

At present, the main dedicated access privilege alternative being considered is an individual fishing quota (IFQ) program for the Pacific Coast groundfish limited entry trawl fishery off Washington, Oregon, and California. A trawl IFQ program would change harvest management in the trawl fishery from a trip limit system (with cumulative landing limits for every two-month period) to an individual quota system (where each quota share could be harvested

at any time during an open season). A No Action Alternative, and other management measures, will also be considered.

Two separate environmental impact statements (EISs) will be prepared as part of this process. The first looks at program design issues and whether or not to implement a dedicated access program. The second will address allocation issues between trawl and other sectors.

## **Why is this change being considered?**

Despite the recent trawl buyback, management of the groundfish trawl fishery still faces serious biological, social, and economic concerns.

Bycatch, especially bycatch of overfished species, is a major problem. Fishing has been greatly cut back in order to avoid bycatch of overfished species. Because the groundfish fishery is a multispecies fishery in which there is limited control over the mix of species caught, the Council must constrain healthy stocks in order to protect unhealthy stocks. To do this, the Council uses average estimated discard (bycatch) rates to predict bycatch. The harvest is then constrained by these bycatch predictions. The discard rate estimates are fixed for a season and change over time only as new information becomes available from the observer program. This creates a situation where there is little incentive for fishermen to avoid bycatch.

In the current economically stressed environment, the average estimated bycatch rate is very controversial, and managers are pressured to be less conservative in their estimates of bycatch.

In addition, the Council has tried to maintain a year-round groundfish fishery, which works for some sectors of the industry. However, many fishermen have said they would prefer a more seasonal fishery. The current system is not flexible enough to ac-

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Goals**

1. Provide for a well-managed system to protect and conserve groundfish resources.
2. Provide for a stable and efficient groundfish industry.
3. Increase net benefits that arise from the fishery.
4. Provide for a fair and equitable distribution of fishery benefits.
5. Provide for a safe fishery.
6. Rationalize capacity through market forces.

### **Objectives** (to be considered in order to reach the goals)

1. Take into account the structure of the stocks.
2. Minimize ecological impacts while taking the available harvest.
3. Reduce bycatch and discard.
4. Encourage sustainable fishing practices.
5. Account for total groundfish mortality.
6. Promote individual accountability (responsibility for landed catch and bycatch).
7. Avoid provisions where the main intent is to change marketing power balance between harvesting and processing sectors.
8. Avoid excessive quota concentration.
9. Provide stability for economic planning.
10. Provide operational flexibility.
11. Minimize adverse impacts on fishing communities to the extent practical.
12. Promote economic and employment benefits through the seafood catching, processing and distribution elements of the industry.
13. Provide efficient and effective monitoring and enforcement.
14. Design a responsive review and modification mechanism.

commodate both interests or to respond to changes in markets, weather, or harvest conditions. The ability to react to changing conditions is important if we want an efficient fishery that is safe for participants.

In addition, depletion of fish stocks and the economic deterioration of the fishery are important concerns for fishing communities. Communities have a vital interest in the short- and long-term viability of the industry, including the income it provides, the safety of participants, and the sociocultural value of the fishing industry.

So, under the current system, we have the following problems:

- The bycatch rate is uncertain.
- There are limited incentives for fishermen to reduce bycatch.
- Opportunities to harvest target species are lost.
- Managers are pressured to be less conservative in their bycatch estimates.
- The system cannot accommodate the variety of harvest patterns desired by fishermen.
- The system cannot respond quickly to changes in markets, weather, etc.
- Communities are challenged by uncertainty in the industry.

In addition, a draft EIS on bycatch management was recently provided to the Council. The Council adopted a Preferred Alternative from the EIS that included IFQ programs as a way to address bycatch problems.

## **What alternatives are being considered?**

The scoping document contains detailed information about the alternatives being considered at present. Additional alternatives may be identified through the scoping process. In brief, the alternatives are:

**Status Quo Management.** Relies on cumulative landing limits and season closures, used as they are now.

**Trawl Individual Quotas.** Uses IFQs and individual bycatch quotas (IBQs). IBQs are used to control the catch of prohibited species. A list of possible design elements for an IFQ program are provided in the Scoping Summary, pages 2-3, with additional detail provided in Appendix A.

**Cumulative Catch Limits.** These limits apply to the vessel and are like cumulative landing limits, except they apply to catch rather than landings. When the cumulative catch limit is reached, a vessel must cease operations in segments of the fishery where the limiting species is caught. Cumulative catch limits may or may not be transferable between vessels within certain periods.

**Initial Catch Allowance (ICA).** These are sector catch caps

### **How and when do I send comments?**

Comments may be sent by email, fax, or the U.S. Postal Service.

Email: TrawlAccessEIS.nwr@noaa.gov. Enter “scoping comments” in the subject line.

Fax: (503) 820-2299

Mail: Dr. Donald McIsaac  
Executive Director  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 200  
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Comments must be received by August 2, 2004.

that apply to a segment of the fleet. When that segment of the fleet reaches its catch cap for a species, the segment stops fishing. Cumulative limits might still be used to control harvest rates under ICAs.

## **What is the history of this idea?**

The Council has been discussing IFQ programs since before 1987, when efforts to design the current groundfish limited entry program began. Efforts to consider an IFQ program were delayed by a Congressional moratorium that recently ended. In September 2003, the Council created the Ad Hoc Groundfish Trawl Individual Quota Committee (TIQC). In fall 2003 and spring 2004, the TIQC met to begin developing an IFQ alternative to help stimulate discussion during scoping and focus public comment. On May 24, 2004, a notice of intent to develop an EIS and formally initiate scoping was published in the *Federal Register*.

## **What is scoping?**

Scoping is the process of gathering public comment on an action being considered. The public comments will be included in an EIS being prepared for this possible action.

## **What types of comments does the Council want to hear?**

At this time, the Council is interested in hearing comments on:

- What alternatives and design elements should be considered.
- Potential impacts of the alternatives that should be evaluated.

Alternatives should address the problem statement, goals, and

objectives.

In developing alternatives, the Council will consider the following questions.

- What would be the specific design elements for an IFQ program and other possible management tools?
- Which species and species groups would be managed with which types of management tools?
- What would be the initial allocation of whiting fishery bycatch species between whiting sectors and nonwhiting sectors?

For an IFQ program, a limited-entry-trawl/open-access allocation issue may arise if the open access trawl groundfish catch (e.g., pink shrimp) is not covered by the IFQ program. If an option is chosen that affects the open access fleet, the allocation would be addressed in the allocation EIS.

## **What will be done with my comments?**

Your comments will be recorded, summarized, and presented to Council committees and the Council for consideration when it develops alternatives and analyses. Comments will be summarized and presented to the Council along with recommendations developed by Council committees.

## **What is in the scoping document?**

The scoping document includes more details about the scoping process, the purpose and need for the proposed action, background, and a description of the alternatives being proposed and their impacts. It also includes a table that summarizes some preliminary recommendations of the TIQC.

## **What is the next step?**

Dedicated access privilege system alternatives will be considered in two stages: 1) program design and 2) allocation of groundfish between the limited entry trawl and other groundfish fisheries. These two stages will be dealt with in separate environmental impact statements, and there will be another scoping process that focuses on allocation issues.

## **What other hearings are being held?**

Besides this hearing in Foster City, two additional hearings will be held in the latter half of July – one in Oregon and one in Washington.

For more information, contact Jim Seger at (503) 820-2280 or toll-free at (866) 806-7204.

## **How can I stay informed about this process?**

Information about this process is available at the following locations:

—The Council website ([www.pcouncil.org](http://www.pcouncil.org))

—The Council newsletter (available online at the website above, or subscribe to the printed version by calling the Council at (866) 806-7204)

—Groundfish mailing list (call the Council at the number above or email [Kerry.Aden@noaa.gov](mailto:Kerry.Aden@noaa.gov)). If you are already on the groundfish mailing list, you will receive information regarding IQs.

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