

SUMMARY MINUTES

Ad Hoc Groundfish Management Process Committee

Pacific Fishery Management Council
Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
Large Conference Room
45 SE 82nd Drive, Suite 100
Gladstone, OR 97027
(503) 650-5400
January 11-12, 2001

Call to Order

The Ad Hoc Groundfish Management Process Committee (GMPC) meeting was called to order by Dr. Donald McIsaac, Council Executive Director.

After introductions, Dr. McIsaac outlined the meeting goals, which entailed reviewing problems with the current annual management process and developing recommended improvements for Council consideration. The goal is to implement a revised management schedule by the 2002/2003 cycle.

The agenda was reviewed and approved.

Members in Attendance

Mr. Phil Anderson, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Mr. LB Boydstun, California Department of Fish and Game
Mr. Ralph Brown, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Ms. Eileen Cooney, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration - General Counsel
Mr. Bob Eaton, Pacific Marine Conservation Council
Dr. Jim Hastie, National Marine Fisheries Service
Mr. Jim Lone, Chair, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Dr. Donald McIsaac, Executive Director, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Mr. Rod Moore, West Coast Seafood Processors Association
Mr. Bill Robinson, National Marine Fisheries Service

Others in Attendance

Mr. Steve Bodnar, Coos Bay Trawler's Association
Dr. John Coon, staff, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Mr. Brian Culver, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Mr. Joe Easley, Oregon Trawl Commission
Mr. Jim Glock, staff, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Mr. Jim Golden, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, designee for Mr. Burnell Bohn
Dr. Richard Methot, National Marine Fisheries Service
Dr. Steve Ralston, National Marine Fisheries Service
Mr. Jim Seger, staff, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Ms. Cyreis Schmitt, National Marine Fisheries Service
Mr. Dan Waldeck, staff, Pacific Fishery Management Council

Meeting Summary

Dr. McIsaac started off the meeting and reviewed the materials that were distributed prior to the meeting.

Ms. Cooney (NOAA-GC) provided a description of the current management process. She noted that the federal regulatory process was not designed to respond quickly to major issues. Therefore, the Council developed the framework process for the groundfish fishery management plan (FMP). However, the annual management process was designed to set annual harvest levels in response to new stock assessment information, and to adjust commercial trip limits and recreational bag limits to meet, but not exceed, the annual harvest target. Other management measures were to be established through framework processes that called for more complex rulemaking.

Operationally, major changes were not dealt with during the annual management process. Ms. Cooney noted that current problems with the management process arose when trip limit and/or bag limit adjustments could no longer provide enough flexibility to respond to the lower OYs. This results in annual management being eclipsed by the necessity to make major management decisions at the November Council meeting without adequate analysis or public review.

General Discussion

It might be possible to design a framework process for dealing with major issues, but this would require developing adequate framework policies, procedures, and standards.

It was noted that rebuilding plans further complicate annual management, not only increasing workload (i.e., development and monitoring of rebuilding plans), but by also creating a need for allocation decisions.

Currently, there is a compelling need for short-term fixes to the annual management process. Over the long-term, after capacity reduction, marine reserves, and rebuilding problems are dealt with, the management process should stabilize.

Problems with the Current Management Process

Prior to the GMPC meeting, Council staff developed an outline of problems in the current management process, the committee reviewed this list (Attachment 1).

Ms. Schmitt briefed the GMPC on West Coast groundfish research initiatives conducted by NMFS. NMFS has received increased funding for annual resource surveys, which is a change from the three-year survey cycle. The slope and shelf surveys will now be conducted annually, NMFS also plans to annually perform the hydro-acoustic survey (or, at least, more frequently).

The committee discussed problems that could arise when surveys are conducted more frequently, that is, there could be increased pressure on the Council to use the newest information, and result in requests for annual assessment of a greater number of species or more frequent assessments. Ms. Schmitt stated that, for the near-term, the annual assessment cycle will be retained, and the Council will continue to annually determine which species will be assessed. Long-term, NMFS is hoping to hire more assessment scientists, which could provide for more frequent or a greater number of assessments.

The committee discussed the time required for (1) compiling assessment data, (2) performing assessments, and (3) developing annual management measures, and whether the annual process used for salmon management would be a suitable model for groundfish.

It was noted that, in the groundfish management process, at times, significant assessment information comes into the process for developing annual management measures very late. It was suggested that it could be helpful to establish a date-certain for ending input of assessment information. An improved timeline for decision making could resemble the following:

- June – preliminary acceptable biological catches (ABCs) and optimum yields (OYs); scope management measures
- September – ABCs and OYs set – management measures drafted
- October – management measures reviewed/analyzed
- November – final decision

The need for a three-meeting process to make allocation decisions was discussed, it was noted this creates an overlap with annual management process.

It was stressed that stakeholders do not have adequate time to review preliminary ABC/OY designations and alternative management measures. This tends to hinder public input and public understanding/acceptance of management measures.

It was also noted that questions arising from the stock assessment and review (STAR) process complicate management decisions, especially if these questions linger into the process for setting annual management measures, for example, darkblotched in 2000.

It was suggested that there is a need for a public hearing process to air proposed management measures. Currently, Council meetings provide the only opportunity for public hearings, but these may not be adequate in terms of public involvement. The result is very little opportunity for public comment on ABC/OY and management measures.

Ms. Cooney restated the nature of the annual groundfish management process, noting that historically, public hearings have not been used, as management decisions were generally limited to trip limit and/or bag limit changes, rather than major adjustments.

Stock Assessment Information

If STAR panels were held earlier in the year, it could result in some of the most recent data not being used to develop OYs and craft management measures, because holding STAR panels earlier would necessitate stock assessments being completed earlier. Hence, some data might not be included in the assessment.

Under rebuilding plans, if new information indicates a significant change (positive or negative) in the health of the stock, the Council should not have to wait for a new rebuilding analysis and amendment/approval of a new rebuilding plan before taking action. Therefore, for species under a rebuilding plan, there is a need for mechanisms to quickly adapt management measures in response to changes in abundance.

In response to a request for more specificity in ABC and OY information coming out of the stock assessment and STAR process, it was stressed that uncertainty is a part of the scientific method. Management has to come to terms with and account for uncertainty in decision-making. Stock assessments will always provide a range of ABC. Moreover, point estimates are less statistically valid. There is a need for "decision rules" to account for uncertainty and variability. That is, rules based on the acceptable level of risk and prevailing trends in abundance – if level of risk = v , uncertainty = x , and abundance = y ; then decision = z . However, the Groundfish Advisory Panel needs less uncertainty and more specificity. It is difficult to craft management measures if there are a variety of likely scenarios. The problem is exacerbated when the information changes at the last minute.

The group agreed that stock assessments and STAR panels should provide ranges rather than point estimates (when appropriate), and that the Council is the appropriate body for making policy decisions based on a range for ABC.

Alternative Annual Management Scenarios

Dr. McIsaac described a suite of annual management scenarios (Attachment 1). Alternative 3 was refined by the committee (Table 1. Timeline). The timeline is premised on the assumption that the fishing year will continue to start January 1, the timeline could be modified if the fishing year were started later in the calendar year. This adjustment would necessitate modification of the assessment and STAR processes.

It was suggested the STAR process could be scheduled for off-years, which could prevent strain on the process for developing management measures. Other non-annual management activities could also be restricted to off-years, but it was noted this is not realistic, as the management cycle needs to accommodate work on all facets of management.

Monitoring of rebuilding plans also needs to be factored into the annual management process. The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires two-year monitoring of rebuilding plans, a "monitoring report" should suffice in lieu of a comprehensive assessment.

Ms. Schmitt provided an overview of the next ten years in terms of surveys and assessments. She discussed the Magnuson-Stevens Act requirement to monitor rebuilding plans, noting NMFS is prepared to perform "monitoring reports" to satisfy the requirement. That is a review of the status of a rebuilding species rather than a full assessment. A full assessment would be done if information indicated it was warranted.

It was noted that while FMP calls for ABC/OY to be set annually, this could be done with the assumption that change could occur in year two if warranted by new information (e.g., a new stock assessment). That is, set a two-year OY, which could be revisited and modified OY, if necessary, prior to start of second year.

The committee discussed how to proceed with drafting alternative management scenarios.

It was emphasized that it would be critical to provide adequate time between each of these processes:

- (1) setting ABC and developing management measures;
- (2) draft and final management alternatives; and
- (3) final decision on management measures and publication of regulations.

If management measures developed during early September the GAP and public would have opportunity to comment.

There will be an inherent tradeoff between using most recent data and having adequate time to do effective management.

To remove the workload required to formulate annual allocations, it was suggested that a framework for annual allocation could be incorporated into the FMP.

Under the groundfish FMP, two Council meetings are required (1) to develop preliminary ABC/OY and (2) adopt final ABC/OY. If the Council adopted preliminary ABC/OY in June, time could be dedicated to drafting management options between June and September. At the September meeting, final ABC/OY could be adopted, and draft management measures could be refined and adopted as preliminary management measures. Draft regulatory analyses could be performed between September and November. Final adoption of management measures would occur at the November meeting.

It was also suggested that another way to deal with overlap of non-annual management measures would be to modify the two meeting process such that decisions are not made at subsequent meeting (June and September). For example, preliminary decisions on non-annual management matters could occur in April, with final decisions in November.

This schedule would require a dedicated effort to work on management measures between June and September, especially developing management measures that encompass the range of ABCs and Oys. It was suggested that if the September meeting were moved to late August, and November meeting to mid-November there would be enough time to refine prospective management measures between August/September and November Council meetings. Also, if fishing year started later than January 1 there would be more time to work on regulatory package between the November Council meeting and start of fishing year.

It was reiterated that if there was a framework for annual allocations there would be more time for management decision-making.

The committee discussed whether inseason management could be delegated to NMFS rather than performed with the Council process. However, it was stated that problems may arise if major adjustments are needed, that is, a public review process and Council involvement would be required.

Transition Strategy – interim measures for the near-term

The committee discussed components of a revised management process that could be implemented in the current year. Revisions to the process will be constrained by need to complete rebuilding plans in 2001. By the June Council meeting, the “remaining rockfish” STAR panel will have been completed. This information could be brought into year 2002 management. The other new assessments will not be reviewed until July; therefore, this information will not be available. By June, there should be enough preliminary assessment information to initiate scoping out management measures for 2002. For example, in June, the GAP could begin roughing-out sideboards for management measures. It could be helpful for the June GAP meeting to start earlier.

Steps Prior to September 2001 Council Meeting

- Allocation committee meets in August.
- Industry/GAP/public forum before/after allocation committee meeting.
- These meetings feed information into September Council meeting and development of management measures.

The next GMPC meeting was scheduled for: February 14, 2001 at the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. Agenda topics include: develop two-year management cycle scenario; refine modified 5-meeting scenario; discuss alternative funding sources for staff and resources.

Groundfish Management Process Committee (GMPC)

Current Problems

Timing and schedule

- Information flow into September meeting is rushed (Stock Assessments – STAR – rebuilding plans – GMT – September options). Does not provide enough time to develop both ABC/OY and management alternatives.
- Too much expected of GMT to be able to meld ABC/OYs into management alternatives by the September meeting.
- Current process for developing ABCs/OYs is long and burdensome. Also, because ranges (rather than point estimates) are, typically, provided many policy decisions must be made to choose which end of the range of ABC/OY to use.
- Generally, no draft management options available at the September meeting. Makes it difficult to do required analyses (EA/RIR, NEPA) prior to November meeting (final adoption).
- September to November crunch: not enough time for EA/RIR, etc. preparation.
- Development of management measures delayed because states' need time to develop and consider their own management initiatives; GMT cannot move forward in developing management options for the Council until states have determined their management measures.
- Proposed management measures provided to public with short-notice (i.e., little time to digest) between September and November Council meetings.
- Insufficient time and resources to analyze and implement measures between November meeting and January 1.
- Three meeting process needed for allocation, and other major management actions (required under FMP). Creates overlap with process for setting annual management measures, which increases workload and dilutes staff efforts.
- Overlap of "non-annual" management measures issues (e.g., sablefish permit stacking, allocation) with development of annual management measures.

Staff and resources

- Shortfalls in data availability and analytical resources for inseason adjustment, especially in the Fall.
- Increasing volume of federal requirements (Magnuson-Stevens Act, National Standards) requiring more from Council and management agencies.
- Must be able to balance groundfish management workload with other Council workload; must prevent build-up/add-on of workload (without taking off other tasks).
- Council is short staffed.
- Analytical requirements (EA/RIR, NEPA, RFA, Magnuson-Stevens Act) have outpaced staffing levels.
- GMT needs increase in members and support; including SWR, NWFSC, SWFSC, NWR and states, involving economists, biologists, and statisticians.

STAR related

- Stakeholders demand the use of most recent assessment information.
- STAR process is very costly in time (Council, staff, agencies) for what it produces. Might be better to have a process that results in point estimates or narrower ranges of ABC. Wide ranges make it harder to develop options.

Others

- FMP requires annual approval of harvest specifications.
- Currently, two-meeting process required to develop Groundfish ABC/OY and management options.
- Increasing scrutiny by stakeholders of analysis of the impacts management actions.

Groundfish Management Process Committee (GMPC)

Possible Solutions

- NMFS provides point estimates of ABC, Council (GMT/GAP) develops OYs and management alternatives. STAR becomes strictly a NMFS process.
- Two-year cycle for setting all ABCs and OYs. **Would require an FMP amendment.**
- Do inseason adjustments outside of Council meetings, e.g., delegated to NMFS (as in salmon).
- Increased funding for Council staff.
- Develop outside forums (similar to North of Falcon/KFMC process used in salmon management), for developing management alternatives. That is, these forums are used under salmon management plan to develop management alternatives.
- Set allocations in FMP, rather than using the current framework process, which requires three meetings (required by FMP). This might prevent having to address allocation issues concurrent to setting annual management measures; alternatively, could change schedule to prevent conflict. **Would require FMP amendments.**
- Earlier development/finalization of ABCs and OYs. Could entail such things as revamping STAR process/schedule, restricting formal assessment reviews to only when models or methods change, incorporating economic information into stock assessments (e.g., value of historic landings).
- To prevent overlap and overload, do not consider plan amendments and/or other non-annual management items concurrent to annual specification setting process. For example, do non-spec items in April/June, leave June/September/November dedicated to annual management.
- Begin fishing year sometime other than January 1.

Alternative Groundfish Management Scenarios

- I. Status Quo
- II. Two-year Cycle
- III. June - November (5 Council meeting schedule)
- IV. June - October (4 Council meeting schedule)

OPTIONS				
Council Mtg	I. Status Quo	II. 2-Year Cycle	III. Altered 5-Yr Schd	IV. Altered 4-Yr Schd
March				
April				
June		• ABC/OY	• ABC/OY	• ABC/OY • Draft Mgt Options
September	• ABC/OY • Draft Mgt Options	• Draft Mgt Options	• Draft Mgt Options	Initialize Analysis • No September Mtg • No F/KFMC-type Forums
October	Initiate Analysis			• Final Decision
November	• Final Decision Finalize Analysis of Mgt Alternatives	• Final Decision Finalize Analysis of Mgt Alternatives	• Final Decision Finalize Analysis of Mgt Alternatives	Finalize Analysis of Mgt Alternatives
Features	Use Current STAR	Off Years: STAR, Allocation, Str Plan, FMP Amdts, Rebuilding Plans, Other Non-Annual Mgt Measures	Staged or Accelerated (or Postponed) STAR	• NMFS-Only STAR Process (due by June) • Outside Forum to Dev Mgt Options

Year 0	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
SCIENCE	Resource assessment surveys											
Year 1	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Council			Groundfish focus on larger FMP issues			Prelim. ABCs/OYs		Final ABC/OY - Prelim. mgmt measures			Final mgmt. measures - Other FMP issues	
MANAGEMENT					Alloc. Comm.	Alloc. Comm.		Alloc. Comm.				
GMT					Review ABCs/OYs/Rbid. Plans		Analysis of mgmt. measures / NEPA / IRFA			Analysis of mgmt. measures / NEPA / IRFA		
SCIENCE	Resource assessment surveys											
REBUILDING				STAR Panels		Resource preliminary "overfished" indication		Develop and refine rebuilding analyses (targets, timelines)				
PUBLIC		GMT meeting		Council meeting	GMT meeting	Council meeting	review	review - GMT mtg.	Council meeting	hearing - GMT mtg.	Council meeting	
Year 2	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Council				Groundfish focus on larger FMP issues		Preliminary normal & rebuilding ABCs/OYs / allocations		Final ABC/OY/ rbid. plans - Prelim. Mgmt. measures			Final mgmt. measures - Other FMP issues	
MANAGEMENT					Alloc. Comm.	Alloc. Comm.		Alloc. Comm.				
GMT					Review ABCs/OYs/Rbid. Plans		Analysis of ABCs/OYs/allocations - Scoping of mgmt. measures			Analysis of mgmt. measures / NEPA / IRFA		
SCIENCE	Resource assessment surveys											
Cont. from year 1				STAR Panels		Resource Designation as overfished (NMFS)		Final rbid. plans				
REBUILDING						Develop rebuilding plans (mgmt measures)		Develop and refine rebuilding analyses				
New in year 2						X - SSC review of rebuilding plans - X		X - SSC review of rebuilding analyses				
PUBLIC		GMT meeting		Council meeting	GMT meeting	Council meeting	review	review - GMT mtg.	Council meeting	hearing - GMT mtg.	Council meeting	

