

DRAFT

Evolutionary history of the existing PFMC open-access fishery for groundfish

At the request of members of the GAP, the Council appointed a diverse committee to begin studying options for limited entry in the Spring of 1987. By that summer, the Council had adopted a July 11, 1987 cut-off date, with the intention that landings made after that date would not be used in evaluating qualification for a limited-entry program. Because this cut-off date was not published in the Federal Register, a subsequent control date of August 1, 1988 was adopted by the Council and published along with a date of July 11, 1984, which would serve as the beginning of the qualifying window.

Early plans for limiting entry included gear endorsements for groundfish trawl, longline and pot gears within the limited-entry fishery, with a remaining open-access fishery only for what were termed "exempted" gears--consisting primarily of gill net, shrimp trawl, salmon troll, and other line gears not meeting the longline definition. This collection of open-access gears included some for which groundfish was caught as bycatch while targeting other species, and some for which groundfish was often the target species.

Following the public comment period for the draft SEIS, concerns arose regarding the potential impact of this structure on small line and pot vessels, many of whom had only recently shifted much of their effort to groundfish as a result of the depressed fishery for salmon. To address this concern, the list of gears available for use in the open-access fishery was expanded to include the use of the non-trawl gears included in limited entry--pot and longline. However, an additional stipulation was added, whereby only landings of more than 500 lb of groundfish would count towards meeting the minimum landing requirement for a permit. This transformation increased the opportunities for open-access vessels to target sablefish, and some rockfish species, for which longline/pot gears were more effective than exempted gears. Although enlarging the suite of gears available for targeting groundfish--relative to the original plan--addressed many of the concerns of small-boat fishers interested in targeting groundfish, it also eventually brought traditional bycatch users into greater conflict with those targeting groundfish under the same open-access allocations.

While the Council approved the limited entry program (Amendment 6 to the Groundfish Plan) in 1991, it was not implemented until the 1994 fishing season. During the interim, participation in some segments of the groundfish fishery increased considerably. Some of those who expanded their ability to harvest groundfish during this period, but did not initially qualify for permits, purchased permits following the program's implementation. The vast majority did not, and either continued as part of the open-access fishery, or discontinued fishing groundfish.