

MEMORANDUM



OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Marine Resources Program

2040 SE Marine Science Drive, Newport, OR 97365-5294
PH. 541-867-4741; FAX 541-867-0311

DATE: August 21, 2002

TO: Dr. Donald O. McIsaac
Executive Director
Pacific Fisheries Management Council
770 NE Ambassador Place
Suite 200
Portland, OR 97220

FROM: ODFW Marine Resources Program staff.

SUBJECT: Summary of public comment from community meetings

Introduction

The following is a summary of comments, concerns, and recommendations made at four community meetings held in Newport, Astoria, Brookings, and North Bend. The meetings were held to gather information from community leaders and from sport and commercial fishers regarding the proposed management options for the marine sport and commercial regulations for 2003.

Issues Identified

Many fishers and community members stressed the need for finding the best options required by federal law that meet the biological needs and yet have minimal economic impact on the coastal communities in Oregon. The best available data on fish stocks are insufficient to justify the potential biological and economic impacts.

It was suggested that the council needs to implement allocation strategies that prevent one sector from shutting down another.

NMFS and the states need to assure the consumers that west coast groundfish are sustainably harvested, contrary to what other groups would have the public believe

(regarding boycotts on specific species served in restaurants and sold in public markets).

The proposed closure zones, particularly the outside zone at 250 fathoms, raises serious concern by fishers, local insurance agents and processors, related to the dangers of having to travel further to get to open fishing waters. Also, the increased distance to travel increases operating costs and time at sea and effectively excludes smaller vessels.

Sport fishers are concerned that restricting commercial fishing on the shelf will push effort on to the near shore areas, increase harvest of nearshore stocks and create a nearshore sustainability issue. Increased commercial effort near shore is also perceived by the sport fishers as having the potential to create gear conflicts such as pot gear in place that interferes with the ability to drift fish over a reef.

Salmon trollers expressed concerns that they do not catch the rockfish species that are driving the proposed options and they want the least restrictive management option for their fishery. Salmon trollers also expressed their desire to have observers aboard their boats to document their claims.

Live fish fishers expressed concern over the proposal to increase the minimum length for cabezon to 16 inches. This would, as they claim, reduce their target size for their market by 50%. Live fish fishers also claimed that if a cap was put on live fish landings, then they would have to resort to targeting black rockfish which would put further strain on an already heavily targeted fishery.

The Dungeness crab fishery will become the most valuable fishery in Oregon and more vessels with unused permits would move into the fishery, but diminished processing capacity as a result of cutbacks in groundfish will adversely affect crab fishermen. Has NMFS or the Council anticipated the potential impacts on the flatfish, shrimp and crab fisheries as a result of effort shift?

IFQ's were suggested to be an effective way to provide incentive for trawlers to voluntarily reduce bycatch.

Flatfish trawlers do not want to see a closure inside of 100 fathoms because it would severely reduce their opportunity to catch Dover, petrale, and English sole, as well as other flatfish.

Several fishers raised the question as to why the council is not pursuing the mixed stock exception option.

Another suggestion was to have a group of trawlers develop proposals for area closures that would keep them off overfished stocks.

Another trawler suggested that if they were allowed to use a large footrope outside 250 fathoms, they might be able to remain viable.

Discussion of the darkblotched rockfish problem included talk about the EFP flatfish trawl research, and one fisher thought it would be wise to also investigate the possibility of lower interception of darkblotched at night when they are off the bottom.

Sport fishers wished to see the most conservative option for the nearshore commercial fishery in lieu of the relatively small amount of biological data available for most nearshore species impacted by a growing fishery.

Many attendees called for implementation of a near shore plan. They also stressed that Oregon nearshore management must be independent and managed by Oregon, not by California desires/PFMC "majority".

Sport fishing interests in Winchester bay said that because the nearshore fathom closure lines are so close to shore that they would effectively close some ports to bottom fishing opportunities. Demand for slip space in Winchester bay is already decreasing.

Sport fishers on the south coast say that mooching for salmon there occurs within 10 fathoms, and has no impact on yelloweye rockfish, thus the potential option to ban mooching would be unnecessary.

One sport fisher asked if it made more sense to have a slot limit for cabezon rather than a minimum size limit.

Sport fishers also stressed consideration of options not yet listed in the proposals, such as:

- Give an allowable yelloweye bycatch limit for the sport halibut fishery. It seems a waste to throw back a dead fish.
- Instead of shutting down sportfishing outside of 20-50 fathoms, adopt gear restrictions for drift fishing such as 8-ounce maximum weight and maximum hook size.
- Consider an observer program on participating sportfishing vessels to validate bycatch of yelloweye and canary rockfish, and the effectiveness of gear restrictions.
- Development of educational programs aimed at ways to reduce bycatch mortality.

A trawler Association representative declared that their position for trawl option was the least conservative options listed in the PFMC option matrix.

A gear supplier suggested consideration of tax credits for obsolete gear that had been pre-ordered prior to regulatory changes.

Enforcement of the proposed fathom line closure would be extremely expensive, possibly more than the fishery is worth.

Concerns about closing the halibut fishery outside of 100 or 150 fathoms to fishing between some yet to be determined depth stratum when yelloweye rockfish bycatch appears to occur primarily in isolated areas (i.e. Stonewall banks). Why not just close halibut fishing, both sport and commercial, at Stonewall banks.

Other concerns were voiced by Brookings sport fishers asking why they should be constrained by a fathom closure when they don't catch yelloweye there.

Brookings participants asked if there could be any differential treatment of communities with consideration to existing economic troubles, citing the fire as an example.

Port Orford representatives asked that their port be separately considered due to unique circumstances and economies of scale.

General comments agreed universally at all meetings

- Any regulation changes that supported the full retention program were encouraged.
- The loss of community infrastructure (ice plants, processors, fuel supply, etc.) that would result in the case of the most conservative options would be difficult to re-establish in the future.
- A vessel buyout program is supported.
- There is a need for an economic evaluation for both sport and commercial curtailment related to the trickle down effects to the coastal communities. Also most participants voiced their displeasure with NMFS for not having done this yet.
- Community leaders stated that economic impacts could not be quantified until they occur, and were frustrated at the lack of analysis on ancillary impacts of closures.
- Retraining programs that would help displaced fishers usually provide skills for employment that is not available in small coastal towns, so these people end up moving away, which further exacerbates the stability of the economy.
- Gear suppliers noted that they have ordered supplies that, due to in-season and last minute regulatory changes, become unuseable, causing tens of thousands of dollars in losses. Equipment and nets must be ordered months in advance and

cannot be returned. Suppliers urged for more predictable longer standing regulations or they will not survive.

- Enforcement of the proposed fathom line closure would be extremely expensive, possibly more than the fishery is worth.
- Regulation-induced discards were discussed at all coastal meetings and resulted in strongly held opposition to waste at a time of declining stocks. Options to retain bycatch absent profit were proposed to avoid waste and discard (i.e. donation to charity).
- It was suggested that small amounts of overages be decriminalized to minimize discard.
- Some people in attendance brought up the concern that while we are becoming increasingly more restrictive in our fisheries, Canada may not be, and an international dialogue needs to be established for cooperative management.
- Comments about the fears of having marine reserves, when in fact the fathom curve closure is a defacto reserve.
- Concerns of fishers about the accuracy of stock assessments, trawl survey problems, and scientists not listening to the ideas of fishers to get better data.
- NMFS needs to provide funding for research on unassessed species.
- Federal and state agencies need to address the many aspects of this crisis. Public endorsement is essential for political support for needed programs.
- It is unknown if the regulations will be legally or effectively enforceable. How can the council proceed with regulations without resolving this issue?
- Weekly limits for the fixed gear fleet is more efficient and safer than daily limits.
- Cumulative limits cause problems and waste.
- There was a stated desire to divide the council and not manage the entire West Coast as one unit.

Oregon Sea Grant will provide additional information about community impacts and views presented during the Oregon workshops via written and verbal testimony

