



Conserving Ocean Fish and Their Environment
☆ *Celebrating 30 Years in 2003* ☆

March 4, 2003

Dr. Donald McIsaac, Executive Director
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, #200
Portland, OR 97220-1384

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Dear Dr. McIsaac:

PFMC

The National Coalition for Marine Conservation (NCMC) has been closely following the development of the Council's Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan. We are highly supportive of the Council's efforts to implement a plan to manage these species off the west coast.

It has come to our attention that NOAA Fisheries has identified a potential problem with the plan as finalized by the Council at its meeting last October, specifically regarding the measures pertaining to pelagic longline fishing outside the west coast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The NCMC strongly believes this matter can and should be resolved at the next Council meeting, thereby preventing any delay in submitting this plan to the Secretary of Commerce for approval.

NOAA Fisheries has indicated that, based on initial analysis of observer reports, there may be a high rate of interaction between pelagic longline gear and endangered sea turtles east of 150°W. The Council originally proposed making the management measures applicable to pelagic longline vessels fishing in this area consistent with measures imposed on vessels fishing out of Hawaii, yet the Council changed these requirements when finalizing the plan, against advice from the agency. Now that NOAA Fisheries has indicated it may not be able to approve that portion of the plan, the Council must decide whether to submit the plan as-is, with the potential of having a portion of it rejected by the Secretary, or whether to modify the plan to make it consistent with guidance from NOAA Fisheries.

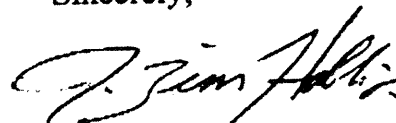
The NCMC's foremost recommendation is not to delay submission of the plan for Secretarial approval. If the choice is between submitting the plan as-is or beginning a lengthy, months-long process to deliberate how to modify the plan, we strongly urge the Council to choose the former. That being said, we see no reason why the Council must delay submission of the plan to modify it. The Council's original language, applying the

same restrictions placed on Hawaiian-based vessels to those fishing from the west coast, would presumably satisfy the concerns of NOAA Fisheries. The Council can confirm this with NOAA Fisheries before or during the Council meeting. Throughout the HMS FMP development process, NCMC and many other groups urged the Council to make these regulations consistent. This is not a new option and, in fact, the public and the advisory subpanel have already had a chance to view and comment on this very language.

The Council can easily satisfy both its desire to submit the plan for Secretarial approval in a timely manner and NOAA Fisheries' concerns with pelagic longline management measures outside the EEZ. At the upcoming meeting, we therefore urge the Council to adopt the original language pertaining to pelagic longline fishing outside the EEZ and direct the Plan Development Team to make the necessary changes and submit the entire plan for Secretarial review without delay.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

Sincerely,



Tim Hobbs
Fisheries Project Director

cc: Svein Fougner, NOAA Fisheries