

## LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

The Legislative Committee discussed current legislative matters and heard a presentation from Dr. Steve Freese (NMFS-NWR) on aspects and implementation of the West Coast groundfish buyback program. The buyback program was passed by Congress in January 2003. In May 2003, NMFS intends to publish for public review and comment in the *Federal Register* specific aspects of the buyback program, including implementation steps. Dr. Freese characterized the workload burden for the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), in the near term, as modest. For the time being, Council involvement would be limited to commenting on the proposed implementation process.

Relative to congressional activity on fishery-related legislation, no new legislation has been introduced, and it appears congressional activity on fishery-related matters has slowed for the time being. Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act on guidelines for individual fishing quota (IFQ) programs could be delayed due to competing legislative activity and changes to the chairs of Senate Appropriations and Commerce committees. The net effect may be no new restrictions on development and implementation of IFQ programs for up to two years. The Council may want to consider this opportunity relative to groundfish fleet rationalization and capacity reduction.

Per Council guidance, Council staff sent a letter to NMFS-Office of Sustainable Fisheries with comments on the need for revision to National Standard-1 guidelines. The letter stressed the strong desire for full and formal Council participation in the review.

Finally, legislative staff from the offices of Senator Murray, Senator Cantwell, and Congressman Baird attended the Legislative Committee meeting. The committee appreciates congressional interest in the Council process and recommends Council staff continue to invite congressional representatives and staff to attend Legislative Committee and Council meetings.

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