

UPDATE ON GROUND FISH FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN PROGRAMMATIC
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Situation: NOAA announced its intention to prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) in 2001. At that time the proposed scope of the PEIS analysis included many issues related to the conduct of the fishery, including the effects of the groundfish fishery on essential fish habitat (EFH). NMFS subsequently decided to prepare a separate EIS to address EFH issues.

Based on this change in scope, the Ad Hoc Groundfish FMP EIS Oversight Committee (Committee) met twice during 2002 to advise the drafting team and help develop a range of alternatives for managing the Pacific Coast groundfish fishery. The Council adopted the alternatives recommended by the Committee in October 2002. The Committee met again on April 22-23, 2003, and reviewed the status of the PEIS and the alternatives under consideration. On the recommendation of NMFS, the consensus of the Committee was to narrow the scope of the PEIS to deal with bycatch issues.

NMFS published a revised Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* on May 16, 2003 (Attachment 1), which summarizes the basis for the Committee's recommendation to focus this PEIS more narrowly on bycatch. Preparation of several other environmental impact analyses is a key consideration in deciding that the scope of the PEIS should be narrowed. These analyses cover some of the issues that would be evaluated in the PEIS including the EFH EIS, mentioned above; an EIS prepared in connection with 2003 groundfish harvest specifications and management measures; and, in preparation, the EIS supporting Amendment 16-2, covering rebuilding plans for four overfished species.

NMFS believes the PEIS should focus solely on issues related to bycatch, incidental catch, and discard issues. This includes improving catch and bycatch reporting and monitoring systems, enhancing individual vessel flexibility and accountability, including opportunities, and developing incentives to improve the selectivity of fishing operations.

The Committee prepared a revised set of alternatives to encompass the range of approaches to resolve bycatch and incidental catch monitoring, reporting and reduction issues (see Attachment 2).

Council Task:

- 1. Consider adopting the change of scope for the Programmatic EIS.**
- 2. Consider approving the revised set of alternatives focusing on bycatch-related issues.**

Reference Materials:

- Attachment 1: 68 FR 26557; notice of intent to revise the scope of the PEIS.
Attachment 2: DRAFT Bycatch Alternatives writeup, Council's Ad Hoc Groundfish FMP EIS Oversight Committee, April 22-23, 2003.

Agenda Order:

- Agendum Overview
- NMFS Report
- Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- Public Comment
- Council Discussion on PEIS Process

Kit Dahl
Jim Glock