SCOPING INFORMATION DOCUMENT
Acceptable Biological Catch and Optimum Yield Specification and Management Measures for the 2004 Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery
Draft Environmental Impact Statement

This narrative outline provides a basis for public scoping on the Draft EIS. It describes the overall organization of the document and essential elements of the analysis, as proposed by Council staff. Preliminary alternatives will be developed during the June Council meeting, which occurs during the public scoping period. The outline describes the types of potential environmental impacts Council staff have identified for evaluation in the EIS. Comments on the alternatives, as they are developed, and on potential environmental impacts, are especially encouraged.

Front Material:

- **Cover sheet**
- **Reader's Guide**
- **Executive Summary**
- **Table of Contents (and list of tables, figures)**
- **Acronyms and Glossary**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the purpose and need for proposed action, scoping comments, and impacts that will be evaluated based on scoping input.

The proposed action is to implement management measures consistent with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) that constrain total fishing mortality during 2004 within limits that maintain fish stocks at, or rebuild them to, a level capable of producing maximum sustained yield (MSY), or to a stock size less than this if such stock size results in long-term net benefit to the nation.

The purpose of this action is to ensure Pacific Coast groundfish subject to federal management are harvested at OY during 2004 and in a manner consistent with the Groundfish FMP and National Standards Guidelines (50 CFR 600 Subpart D).

The proposed action is needed to constrain commercial and recreational harvests in 2004 to levels that will ensure groundfish stocks are maintained at, or restored to, sizes and structures that will produce the highest net benefit to the nation, while balancing environmental and social values.

Two public scoping meetings will occur at the June 16-20, 2003, Pacific Council meeting as part of the Council's regular agenda. The first public scoping opportunity will occur on Tuesday, June 17, 2003, as part of agendum B.4, Preliminary Range of Harvest Levels for 2004. The second opportunity will occur on Friday, June 20, 2003, as part of agendum B.14, Adoption of Proposed Range for 2004 Groundfish Management Measures. A public comment period is scheduled for each agendum and comments on the scope of the DEIS are encouraged during these comment periods. At the close of the scoping period a scoping summary will be prepared and made available to the public.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter describes the range of alternatives that will be considered to implement the proposed action. The range must encompass all reasonable alternatives. If alternatives are eliminated from detailed study, they should be briefly described along with reasons for eliminating them. The range of alternatives must include the alternative of no action. In this case, the no action alternative would be the re-application of harvest limits and

management measures implemented in 2003. (Management measures proposed at the beginning of the year can be modified through inseason management actions. Because this EIS will be prepared during 2003, management measures proposed at the beginning of the year will be used in the analysis. This also offers a like comparison to the action alternatives, or proposals for 2004, since these are also the unadjusted measures.)

A preliminary set of alternatives will be developed during the June 16-20, 2003 meeting of the Pacific Fishery Management Council. Alternatives will be structured around a range of ABCs/OYs for assessed groundfish species. This range of ABCs/OYs is based on stock assessments, including seven new assessments completed since 2003 harvest specification were established, rebuilding analyses for overfished species based on these assessments, and a stock assessment of cabezon due to be completed before the end of 2003. This last assessment, although it will not be completed and peer-reviewed early in the decision process, will be used to identify different management measures for nearshore fisheries. For some species OY/ABC ranges that would be used to develop alternatives may be based on consultations by the Council with state and federal agencies, Indian tribes, and the affected public on the allocation of harvest opportunity between sectors. Allocation decisions can affect OYs, because different sectors may catch fish of different ages, allowing different sustainable harvest levels

For each set of ABCs/OYs used in a given alternative, a set of management measures will be identified that will constrain total harvest mortality (across all fisheries intercepting groundfish). Restrictive management measures intended to rebuild overfished species have been adopted and implemented over the past several years for most commercial and recreational fishing sectors. Management measures intended to control the rate at which different groundfish species or species groups are taken in the fisheries include trip limits, bag limits, size limits, time/area closures, and gear restrictions. Large area closures, intended to reduce bycatch of overfished species and referred to as Rockfish Conservation Areas were first implemented in late 2002. These closed areas will continue to be a key feature of alternatives considered in the EIS to manage groundfish fisheries in 2004.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT
4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Chapters 3 and 4 have a parallel structure. Both are organized around different components of the human environment that may be significantly affected by the proposed action. Chapter 3 describes the baseline. The baseline describes the affected human environment at a point in time before the proposed action is implemented. Because of the time lag in obtaining and processing stock assessment, harvest, and economic data, the baseline will likely be a time period ending before 2003.

For each human environment component a set of evaluation criteria must be developed to characterize the type and intensity of impacts. Thus the major headings in Chapter 3 and 4 are affected environmental components, while the analysis in Chapter 4 under each of these headings is organized around the kinds of impacts to these components. For the different human environment components direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts will be evaluated. Direct impacts occur at the same time and in the same place as the proposed action. Indirect impacts are reasonably foreseeable effects of the proposed action that occur at a later time or in a place removed from the area where the proposed action occurs. Cumulative impacts result from the incremental impacts of the proposed action when combined with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes them.

Council staff have identified the following human environment components that could be significantly affected by one or more of the alternatives:

- Habitat and ecosystem. There is limited information about habitat and ecosystem impacts. The alternatives will be evaluated based on the inferred level of fishing effort that would occur. Increased effort would correlate with more impacts to habitat. Ecosystem effects result from changes in the relative abundance of species that are either predators or prey of other species.

- Overfished groundfish stocks, target groundfish stocks, and other groundfish stocks. The direct effect of the alternatives can be defined as the total fishing mortality, including bycatch, resulting from a particular

set of harvest specifications and management measures. The degree to which the management measures in an alternative cause fishers to discard fish, producing bycatch, is a particular concern. This concern is due to potentially unaccounted for fishing mortality and the physical waste of resources. Another evaluation criterion with particular relevance to overfished species is the risk and uncertainty of achieving MSY, including the effect of model assumptions used in stock assessments and rebuilding analyses on proposed OYs and stock rebuilding. Effects on biodiversity also may be considered in terms of the extinction risk of overfished species posed by different alternatives.

- Nongroundfish stocks. Vessels targeting groundfish stocks catch nongroundfish species incidentally. If other, directed fisheries for these species are near or at their harvest limits, incidental catches by groundfish vessels could have a significant impact in terms of total fishing mortality.

- Protected species. A range of fish and nonfish species potentially taken by groundfish vessels are protected under the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Aside from ESA-listed salmon stocks, primarily taken in the whiting fishery, there is limited information on the effects of groundfish fisheries on these species. Similar to the approach taken in evaluating habitat and ecosystem impacts, the imputed level of fishing effort will be used to compare the potential effects of the alternatives.

- The public sector: enforcement. The nature and complexity of management measures affects enforcement agencies in terms of the institutional resources needed to effectively monitor fishing activities.

- The public sector: data collection and analysis. Stock assessments rely on *fishery dependent data*, which is derived from the fisheries themselves. Alternatives that sharply curtail fishing or redistribute fishing effort (through the use of closed areas, for example) can reduce the amount of these data available over time, making stock assessments more difficult. As a result, management agencies may have to gather more *fishery independent data*, for example by using submersibles to census fish populations. New, potentially more expensive methods may have to be developed, with impacts to management agency resources.

- Commercial fisheries. Many different types of fisheries are affected by groundfish management measures. Fisheries can be categorized by broad regulatory categories and these form major sub-components that will be analyzed. These are: *limited entry trawl fisheries*, *limited entry fixed gear fisheries* (which includes both longline and pot gear types), *directed open access fisheries*, and *nongroundfish fisheries* (some of which may catch groundfish as bycatch). The last two categories can be difficult to distinguish; the proportions of nongroundfish and groundfish species in landings are used to identify directed open access fisheries. A mix of qualitative and quantitative measures will be used to assess impacts, including exvessel revenue. These regulatory categories will be further subdivided, based on economic data, to probe for differential effects on vessels or fleets. Vessels will be categorized by the species composition of their catches, size, and gross revenue. Vessel dependence on and involvement in groundfish fisheries are additional subcategories that will be used to evaluate differential impacts. Dependence is measured by the percent of revenue a given vessel derives from groundfish. Involvement is measured by the proportion of total groundfish landings made by a given vessel. It is likely some of the categories used in the EIS for 2003 harvest specifications will be used in this EIS.

- Recreational fisheries. Generally, less data are available on recreational fishing activity than for commercial fisheries, making analysis more difficult. Recreational fishing can be subdivided into individuals fishing recreationally (using private vessels or fishing from shore) and commercial ventures that take on recreational fishers (charter vessels). Fish caught in recreational fisheries usually are not marketed; the "product" that may be sold or consumed is the recreational experience. Alternatives can be evaluated in terms of the availability of this product and associated economic activity.

- Tribal fisheries. Northwest Indian Tribes receive allocations of the available groundfish harvest based on treaty rights. Alternatives can be evaluated in terms of the change in the amount of fish allocated to Indian fisheries in comparison to baseline and/or 2003 conditions.

- Adjacent council-managed fisheries. The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires fishery management actions be evaluated in terms of their impacts to fisheries managed by other, adjacent councils. Although there are

linkages between the West Coast and the area covered by the Western Pacific Council (Hawaii and the U.S.-affiliated Pacific Islands), they do not bear directly on groundfish fisheries. In terms of groundfish fisheries, only the North Pacific Council is relevant. Many vessels participate in both West Coast fisheries managed by the Pacific Council and Alaska fisheries managed by the North Pacific Council. Groundfish management measures affecting participation on the West Coast could affect participation rates in Alaska fisheries.

- Buyers and processors. For many buyers and processors impacts correlate with changes in landings and associated exvessel revenue. (Exvessel revenue is derived from purchases by this sector.) Lower harvest limits would reduce the amount of fish that could be purchased relative to higher harvest limits. Impacts of the alternatives on markets, such as retail outlets and restaurants, can be qualitatively evaluated in terms of the substitutability of other fish products for those that might become unavailable as a result of harvest limits. Some groundfish products might be easily substituted while others—such as live fish sales—may not be. It is likely the same buyer/processor categories used in the EIS for 2003 harvest specifications will be used in this EIS.

- Fishing communities. Fishing community impacts represent the aggregate of the socioeconomic impacts described above. Alternatives can be qualitatively evaluated by comparing changes in personal income resulting from changes in groundfish landings. Given the range of these species and how vessels, landings, and processors are distributed by port, there will be geographic differences in community impacts. Fishing communities are identified based on ports and "port groups" for which groundfish landings data are available. It is likely the same groupings used in the EIS for 2003 groundfish harvest specifications will be used in this EIS.

In addition to the evaluation of impacts to the human environment components listed above, Chapter 4 will include a socioeconomic cost-benefit analysis. This analysis will show how producer and consumer surplus may vary under the alternatives. Chapter 4 will also identify measures that could be used to mitigate any unavoidable adverse impacts identified in the impact analysis.

5.0 CONSISTENCY WITH THE GROUNDFISH FMP AND MAGNUSON-STEVENS ACT NATIONAL STANDARDS

This chapter describes how the proposed action (preferred alternative) is consistent with the Groundfish FMP and the ten National Standards for fishery conservation and management listed in the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

6.0 CROSS-CUTTING MANDATES

In addition to being prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, the EIS document must also address requirements of other applicable federal laws and Executive Orders. This chapter describes the following mandates and the way in which their requirements will be met in implementing the proposed action:

- Coastal Zone Management Act
- Endangered Species Act
- Marine Mammal Protection Act
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- Paperwork Reduction Act
- Regulatory Flexibility Act
- EO 12866 (Regulatory Impact Review)
- EO 12898 (Environmental Justice)
- EO 13132 (Federalism)
- EO 13175 (Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Government)
- EO 13186 (Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds)

7.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

8.0 AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND PERSONS TO WHOM COPIES OF THIS STATEMENT WERE SENT

9.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

The final chapters provide required information. With respect to Chapter 8, NMFS distributes copies of the DEIS to federal and state agencies that may be affected by the action. The Council distributes copies to individuals who specifically request a copy of the document and those who submitted substantive comments on the draft environmental impact statement. (The DEIS and FEIS will be made available for download from the Council website or on request from the Council office.)