

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE REPORT

The Legislative Committee discussed several matters related to congressional legislation and fishing quota programs.

Representative Wayne Gilchrest requested the regional councils delay final action on any new fishing quota programs until after Congress passes legislation for fishing quota program National Standards (Exhibit B.4, Attachment 1). The Legislative Committee recognizes the concerns expressed by Representative Gilchrest and welcomes the opportunity to comment on draft congressional legislation. Currently, there is no moratorium blocking development of fishing quota programs. There is a strong desire within the West Coast groundfish industry to move forward on fishing quota program development, which would address the foremost problem in the groundfish fishery -- excess fishing capacity. The Legislative Committee also notes the September 2002 letter sent by Senators from Oregon, Washington, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida to the Senate Commerce Committee opposing efforts to extend the moratorium nationwide (Exhibit H.1, Attachment 1, September 2002). The Legislative Committee understands and respects the concerns expressed in other regions, notably small boat fishermen on the East Coast, about fishing quota programs. However, given the generally strong support on the West Coast, the Legislative Committee recommends Council staff be directed to draft a letter to Representative Gilchrest expressing the Council's desire and rationale for moving forward on fishing quota program development.

The Legislative Committee also discussed a recent letter from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (Exhibit C.10.a, Supplemental Attachment 3). The committee recognizes the focus of this letter is the crab fishery rationalization program under development in the North Pacific. However, the DOJ conclusions expressed in the letter could have implications for quota programs developed by other regional councils. The Legislative Committee recommends Council staff be directed to draft a letter to NMFS requesting information on how the DOJ conclusions could affect the Pacific Council.

The Legislative Committee reviewed two congressional bills for fishing quota program National Standards. As noted in June 2003, the committee is encouraged by Senate Bill 1106 (Exhibit B.4, Attachment 3). The components of this legislation are in accord with comments made by the Council previously. Conversely, the committee perceives House Bill 2621 (Exhibit B.4, Attachment 2) to be overly restrictive. The committee recommends staff be directed to forward these comments to congressional staff (if requested by congressional representatives).

Comprehensive legislation to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act has not been introduced and is likely to be delayed due to competing legislative activity and changes to the chairs of the Senate Appropriations and Commerce committees. The Committee will continue to monitor congressional activity on this issue.

The committee briefly discussed the Automated Information System (AIS) under development by the U.S. Coast Guard. The committee is interested in receiving more information about the AIS program from the U.S Coast Guard. There was also discussion as to the relationship between AIS and vessel monitoring systems (VMS), and whether VMS might be more cost effective for the fishing industry.

Per Council guidance, Council staff continues to invite congressional representatives and their staff to Legislative Committee meetings and Council meetings. The committee commends staff for their work and recommends the Council direct staff to continue to track fisheries-related legislation and provide input to congressional staff, as appropriate.

PFMC
09/11/03