

## GROUND FISH BYCATCH PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Situation: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the groundfish bycatch management program. The EIS evaluates a variety of management measures to mitigate bycatch and to monitor and report bycatch levels. Draft purpose and need for action, alternatives, and affected environment sections were presented at the September Council meeting. A more complete analysis of the individual mitigation tools and alternative combinations of those tools is now available for Council consideration. A preliminary draft EIS (DEIS) is attached; however, additional economic analysis will be presented as a supplemental attachment at the Council meeting. The Council should review the scope and content of the analysis, provide comments and suggestions to NMFS, and consider approving the DEIS for public review and comment. The authors will make any suggested revisions and prepare the DEIS for publication and broader public distribution.

NMFS intends to provide an extended public comment period on the DEIS from mid-January 2004 through April, overlapping the April Council meeting. The Council's public review process and the public comment period required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) will run concurrently during this time. All public comments during the review period will be provided to both NMFS and the Council. At the April meeting, the Council will identify its preferred alternative, taking into account public comments and recommendations from its advisory entities. NMFS will review the Council's preferred alternative, any other Council recommendations, and public comments and prepare the final EIS under NEPA. The Record of Decision is expected to be completed in June 2004.

At their April meeting the Council should decide if an amendment to the groundfish fishery management plan and/or regulations are necessary and then begin the amendment process. Alternatively, because this is a program-level evaluation, the Council could delay implementing specific measures, which would then be implemented through subsequent actions based on analyses tiered from the PEIS.

### **Council Task:**

- 1. Make recommendations for any revisions to the document before release of the DEIS.**
- 2. Decide whether to recommend a January 2004 release of the DEIS for public review/comment.**

### **Reference Materials:**

1. Exhibit D.11.b, Attachment 1: Executive Summary Groundfish Bycatch Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.
2. Exhibit D.11.b, Attachment 2: Preliminary Draft Bycatch Program Environmental Impact Statement (*document on CD-ROM, enclosed separately, limited copies available at meeting*).
3. Exhibit D.11.b, Supplemental Attachment 3: Draft Economic Analysis for Bycatch Programmatic EIS.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agendum Overview
- b. NMFS Report
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. **Council Action:** Approve DEIS for Public Review

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10/21/03