

BYCATCH MONITORING PROGRAM
DRAFT PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Situation: At its November 2003 meeting, the Council reviewed a preliminary draft of the Groundfish Bycatch Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) in advance of its release for public comment as required by federal regulations. The draft PEIS (DPEIS) was made available for public comment on February 27, 2004. It was also posted on the Council and NMFS websites in February, and copies were distributed to the Council and advisory bodies at the March Council meeting. The required public comment period will end on April 27, 2004. This closing date allows Council staff time to prepare and submit the Council's comments and recommendations stemming from decisions taken at the April Council meeting.

At this meeting, the Council is scheduled to choose its preferred alternative from among the six alternatives described in Chapter 2 of the DPEIS. The Council's preferred alternative will be identified in the final EIS (FEIS), which will be published after the public comment period. In the cover letter and text of the DPEIS it is stated that, once the FEIS is published, the Council is expected to immediately begin preparing a groundfish fishery management plan (FMP) amendment. That amendment would update the description of the current bycatch mitigation program, add any new goals and objectives, and include any conservation measures necessary to minimize bycatch and the mortality of bycatch that cannot be avoided, to the extent practicable.

The DPEIS differs from the preliminary draft in several ways. The DPEIS reflects Council and public comments made at the November 2003 meeting, as well as substantial expansion of the economic analysis. Descriptions of the alternatives were expanded and, in some cases, modified slightly to clarify how they could be implemented.

In discussing future steps to amend the FMP to reflect the preferred alternative, the Council may wish to consult on and consider the concept of practicability.

Council Action:

- 1. Adopt the Council's preferred alternative.**
- 2. Discuss steps necessary to prepare an FMP amendment to implement the preferred alternative.**

Reference Materials:

1. Exhibit C.13.a, Attachment 1: Executive Summary, West Coast Groundfish Bycatch Mitigation Program Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

(Note: The full document was distributed to the Council and advisory bodies as an informational item at the March Council meeting.)

Agenda Order:

- a. Agendum Overview
- b. NMFS Report
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. **Council Action:** Adopt Final Preferred Alternatives

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