

FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN AMENDMENT 18–BYCATCH

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan Bycatch Mitigation Program Final Environmental Impact Statement (Bycatch Mitigation Program FEIS) in September 2004, containing the Council's preferred alternative for this action. At their November 2004 meeting, the Council reviewed the substance of the preferred alternative and directed Council and NMFS staff to prepare preliminary drafts of (1) amendatory language to implement the bycatch program (Amendment 18) and (2) a work plan for implementing the management measures described in the preferred alternative.

As discussed at the November 2004 meeting, in addition to incorporating material related to the Bycatch Mitigation Program FEIS into the fishery management plan (FMP), the FMP would be updated to better reflect the current management framework. Attachment 1 is the draft amendatory language; pages ii through vii contain detailed information explaining and guiding the reader through the proposed changes. Highlights include:

- Reorganizing Chapter 6 (Management Measures) and incorporating material from Chapter 9 (Restrictions on other Fisheries) and Chapter 11 (Management Measures That Continue In Effect With Implementation of Amendment 4).
- Adding new bycatch monitoring and mitigation measures found mainly in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.
- Moving material in Chapter 6 relating to essential fish habitat into a new chapter.

Attachment 2 reproduces Chapters 6 and 11 of the current FMP in order to allow a detailed comparison of the reorganization and changes to the text.

Attachment 3 is the preliminary draft work plan. It focuses on implementing sector- and vessel-specific total catch limits for overfished species over the next five years.

At their February 26-27, 2005 meeting, the Ad Hoc Allocation Committee discussed total catch limits and the species and sectors to which they should be applied. Their recommendations were incorporated into the draft amendatory language and work plan. The meeting minutes are attached (Agenda Item F.5.c, Allocation Committee Minutes) for reference.

At this meeting the Council should recommend desired changes to the draft amendment language. Revised language would be brought back before the Council in June 2005, after which, subject to Council approval, it would be released for public review. This would allow final action by the Council at their September 2005 meeting. The amendment package would then be submitted to NMFS for review, with a final response expected by early 2006. (The Bycatch Mitigation Program FEIS satisfies National Environmental Policy Act requirements for this action.)

No similar legal/procedural requirement is attached to the work plan. In its final form it should assist the Council in planning future bycatch mitigation activities and serve to inform the public about the Council's intentions. The Council may wish to consider procedures and a timeline for public review and finalization of this document.

Council Task:

1. Provide guidance on preliminary draft amendment language and draft work plan.

Reference Materials:

1. Agenda Item F.5.a, Attachment 1: Preliminary Review Draft Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan [Excerpts], as amended through Amendment 18.
2. Agenda Item F.5.a, Attachment 2: Chapters 6 and 11 excerpted from the current Groundfish FMP.
3. Agenda Item F.5.a, Attachment 3: Preliminary Draft Groundfish Bycatch Mitigation Work Plan.
4. Agenda Item F.5.c, Allocation Committee Minutes.

Agenda Order:

- a. Agenda Item Overview
- b. NMFS Report
- c. Reports and Comments of Advisory Bodies
- d. Public Comment
- e. Council Guidance on Preliminary Draft Amendment Language and Draft Work Plan

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