

Agenda Item F.1.2
Public Comment 2
September 2005

September 16, 2005

Mr. Donald K. Hansen
Chairman
Pacific Fishery Management Council
7700 NE Ambassador Place, Suite 200
Portland, Oregon 97220-1384

Re: Groundfish Management
Proposed October 1, 2005 Nearshore Trawl Closure

Mr. Chairman Hansen and members of the Council,

My name is Lee Ann Hightower. I am a fisherman's wife. My husband and I own and operate a 53' trawler and we live in Washington State. My husband fishes in the ocean off of northern Washington. I am writing this letter with my own thoughts and concerns regarding the upcoming nearshore fishery closure for October 1, 2005.

If the Council is not already aware that the small boat nearshore sector (boats 60' and under) has a Fall fishery during the months of October and November, I would like to make you aware of that. This Fall fishery is very important to us. We rely on this part of the fishery to get us through the winter months, when the weather is too rough for us to go out and fish. We have always been regulated naturally during the Winter months by the weather. We get very little if any time to fish. In essence we have a closure every year from Nov to Feb. created by Mother Nature. This Fall fishery that occurs in October and November is the majority portion of our total trawl fishery. Previously the Council had closed the nearshore fishery for November and December. That closure effected us because we lost half of the Fall fishery (November), but we could still survive because we had the fish harvest from October to get us through. When the Council decided to add October to the nearshore closure, that has created devastating effects for us. It has taken the total Fall fishery away from us and it has compounded our ability to survive or be forced out of the fishery completely.

Many smaller boats in the trawl fishery can only fish in the nearshore area... for some only 100fm or less. We do not have the ability to go out to the deeper areas to continue fishing for the rest of the season, like the larger boats do. Some of us are limited by our size to battled the Winter storms and some of our boats are not even big enough to carry the winches and extra wire that it takes to fish the deeper areas.

The nearshore closure brings up safety issues too. When the small boats have been shut down for 3 months and lost the Fall fishery, we are forced to go through the Winter with little funds. When the fishery does open up again in January we are compelled to go out and fish ... no matter what the weather is like. We have struggled through 3 months with no income and need to generate cash flow once again. We can not continually survive a 3 month closure year after year?

The Council may feel that we just need to get bigger boats, that we have the same opportunity as everyone else does to fish out in the deep. But, in reality we do not. Some of us do not have the funds needed to go out and buy a larger boat and permit. In today's age of downsizing and conservation, I don't think that bigger boats for everyone is in the trawl fishery's best interest. Bigger boats and higher fishing capacity is not the issue here... fairness is.

This is not a big boat-vs-little boat agenda. That is not what I am trying to say. I am simply trying to say that there has to be some kind of a compromise that can be made to make the management practices of the Council fair for ALL fishers. There were compromises made for the Hake and Petrale fishery, I ask that some kind of a compromise be made for the nearshore fishery as well. As it appears right now the smaller boats are not being given equal consideration when it comes to maintaining an all year fishery.

The smaller boats should have the EQUAL opportunity to fish all year also... and should not be penalized simply because they are smaller and unable to fish in deeper areas.

I would like to remind the Council that the Magnuson Stevens Act was written for all fishers... large and small. Through the Sustainable Fisheries Act - Standard 8, the Council is required to provide that fishery management plans ensure sustained participation of fishing communities and minimize adverse impacts. The small boat trawlers are still a strong part of the communities in which we live. In addition, a national standard was added on promoting the safety of human life at sea. When we are shut down for 3 months and have lost the best part of our fishery, we are forced to go back out fishing immediately when the fishery reopens. This puts many small boats at great risk during bad weather. As a fisherman's wife, for me this is the worst part of this closure.

Something has to change or many of us will be forced out of the fishery permanently. We can not survive this year after year. There should be able to be some kind of a compromise of some sort. If we could just be able to fish the month of October we would be able to have some of the Fall fishery.

I urge and request the Council to please address this problem and work out some kind of a compromise so that we can have an equitable opportunity to keep fishing and survive. Losing October is the critical factor here. Please consider letting the small boat nearshore trawlers fish in October.

Thank you for reading my letter and considering my request.

Sincerely,



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