

ATTENTION

GROUND FISH OPEN ACCESS COMMERCIAL FISHERY PARTICIPANTS

In March 2009, the Pacific Fishery Management Council is scheduled to make a decision that may substantially change this fishery.

You may lose your privilege to fish commercially for groundfish.

*The Pacific Fishery
Management Council is
considering changes to the
groundfish open access
commercial fishery, including
limiting participation in the
fishery and, further,
specifying who may target
sablefish and lingcod.*

If you are involved in the
directed open access
groundfish fishery

OR

if you incidentally catch
groundfish in the open
access commercial fishery,
this may affect you.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A limited entry program for the West Coast groundfish fishery went into effect in 1994. The program restricted the number of vessels allowed to target groundfish in order to better align the fishery with the available harvest. To make sure that vessels landing groundfish incidentally while fishing for other species (like salmon) could continue to catch and sell groundfish, and to allow small amounts of groundfish to be landed as a target species, the "open access" commercial groundfish fishery was created. However, the percentage of the catch set aside for the open access fishery was relatively small, and landing rates were relatively low. Participation in this fishery has been unlimited.

RECENT BACKGROUND

The Pacific Fishery Management Council has been considering this issue since 1998. Limiting the open access fishery is a priority listed in the Groundfish Strategic Plan adopted in 2000. The Council has been considering and refining specific alternatives since June 2007. The Council adopted a preliminary preferred alternative at the September 2008 meeting, and scheduled final action for their March 2009 meeting.

WHY LIMIT ACCESS TO THIS FISHERY?

There are several reasons; however, the main reason is that the current open access fishery has too many participants pursuing too few fish, and allows more people to join the fishery, leading to smaller landing limits for each participant.

THE CURRENT PROPOSAL

The current preliminary preferred alternative has two main parts:

- ♦ Convert the directed (target) open access fishery component to limited entry management. **Only those with the proper landing history would be allowed to remain in the fishery.** Vessels with valid permits would be allowed to directly fish for, and land, specified groundfish species. This would be called the "B" permit program. Permits with sufficient catch history for sablefish and lingcod would be able to continue targeting those species.
- ♦ Convert the incidental (non-target) fishery component of the open access groundfish fishery to a license registration program. This would be called the "C" permit program. **Only commercial vessels with state licenses would be eligible for the C permit program.**

The Council's preliminary preferred alternative was drawn from six alternatives that addressed the following issues:

- ♦ Total fleet size goal
- ♦ Coastal community impacts
- ♦ Qualification criteria
- ♦ Permit transferability
- ♦ Previous year landing requirement
- ♦ Coastal state permit endorsement
- ♦ Use of A (current limited entry) and B permits on vessels in the same year (A permits fish in the groundfish primary limited entry fishery)
- ♦ Landing endorsements for sablefish and lingcod

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- ♦ Get more information by visiting the Pacific Fishery Management Council's website, which includes links to frequently asked questions, a projected timeline, a description of the alternatives, qualification criteria, the full analytical document (environmental assessment), and more.
<http://tinyurl.com/OAfishery>
- ♦ Submit comments for Council consideration (by February 18) at pfmc.comments@noaa.gov
- ♦ Attend the March 2009 Council meeting in person and testify with your opinion (see reverse).

WHY THIS NOTICE?

Notices in accordance with all Federal and state legal requirements for this type of action have been issued throughout the ten-year process that has led to this decision point. This notice goes beyond legal requirements as a courtesy to those who, for personal or other reasons, may not have been tracking the proceedings in the Pacific Fishery Management Council forum.

This is a very complicated regulatory matter that involves a Federal- and state-managed fishery extending from the shoreline out to the 200-mile limit of the Exclusive Economic Zone. This is only a brief notice providing a way for you to acquire detailed information on this potential action.

SCHEDULED FINAL DECISION:

Pacific Fishery Management Council

March 8-13 2009

Seattle Airport Marriott

(see <http://www.pcouncil.org/events/future.html>)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Briefing materials on this matter will be included in the advance Briefing Book available on the Council website by February 26, 2009.

See <http://www.pcouncil.org/bb/bbarchives.html>

Visit the Pacific Fishery Management Council web page on open access limitation:

<http://tinyurl.com/OAfishery>

(or <http://www.pcouncil.org/groundfish/gffmp/gfa22.html>)

QUESTIONS?

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