

COUNCIL DECISIONS AT THE APRIL 2004 MEETING

Salmon Management

Identification of Stocks Not Meeting Conservation Objectives for Three Consecutive Years

The Council discussed the only salmon stock that apparently had not met its conservation objective for three consecutive years – Grays Harbor natural fall chinook. This stock is a categorical exception from consideration under overfishing concerns, as the impact in Council-managed fisheries is minor (due to the ocean migration pattern of this particular stock). Further, the most recently completed inriver accounting of Grays Harbor natural fall chinook will show the spawning escapement goal was attained in 2003; a letter from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will be forthcoming to document the most recent estimates of spawner abundance.

Methodology Review Process for 2004

The Council adopted the following items the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) may consider for the 2004 Salmon Methodology Review:

- Chinook and Coho Fishery Regulation Assessment Model (FRAM) documentation
- Chinook FRAM for mark-selective fisheries
- Chinook Rebuilding Exploitation Rate analysis
- Coho FRAM fisheries for Canadian stocks
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Oregon Coastal Natural (OCN) matrix
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife management plan for Lower Columbia River coho salmon
- Columbia River fall chinook ocean abundance predictors
- OCN coho salmon prediction methodology

The final list of items will be determined at the September 2004 Council meeting, and the Review will occur prior to the November 2004 Council meeting.

Final Action on 2004 Salmon Management Measures

The Council adopted for submission to NMFS, salmon seasons off California, Oregon, and Washington. All options meet or exceed conservation standards for salmon stocks in the Council's Pacific Coast Salmon Plan and those listed under the Endangered Species Act. The management measures can be viewed on the Council website at www.pcouncil.org.

Groundfish Management

Observer Data and Model Implementation

A revised trawl bycatch model updated with a new year of at-sea observations and a new primary sablefish fixed gear bycatch model using at-sea observations from the inception of the West Coast Groundfish Observer Program were adopted for use in management decision-making for inseason adjustments in 2004 and preseason planning for the 2005-2006 management cycle.

Policy on Groundfish Management Information Usage

The Council adopted the recommendations contained in the Ad Hoc Groundfish Information Policy Committee (GIPC) report, including a schedule for Council consideration of new data from the Observer Program over the next few biennial management timeframes, a recommendation for an additional GIPC meeting between the April and June Council meetings, and a framework for further discussion.

Groundfish Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Analytical Model

The Council adopted the component of the EFH Analytical Model that identifies EFH boundaries for use in developing a range of EFH alternatives. The Council also adopted changes in schedule for further EFH EIS development, including:

1. SSC Groundfish Subcommittee consideration of the Fishing Gear Impacts component of the EFH Analytical Model during May.
2. Consideration of formal Council adoption of the Fishing Gear Impacts component of the EFH Analytical Model at the June 2004 Council meeting.
3. A meeting of the Ad Hoc EFH EIS Oversight Committee between the June and September 2004 Council meetings to develop recommendations for a preliminary range of alternatives for analysis in the EIS.
4. Formal Council adoption of a range of alternatives for analysis in the EIS at the September Council meeting.
5. Adoption of a preferred alternative at the November 2004 Council meeting.

Lastly, the Council appointed Mr. Chris Dorsett to the EFH Oversight Committee and replaced Mr. Neal Coenen with Dr. Patty Burke on the same Committee.

Status of 2004 Groundfish Fisheries and Inseason Adjustments

Responding to new information from the second year of observer data, results of the trawl buyback program, the status of groundfish fisheries, and new analyses of recreational fisheries, the Council adopted several inseason adjustments to 2004 groundfish fisheries, including:

1. Increased sablefish tier limits for sablefish-endorsed limited entry fixed gear vessels.

2. Increased trip limits for chilipepper, minor slope rockfish, splitnose, and Dover sole/thornyhead/trawl-caught sablefish complex (DTS) species for limited entry fixed gear and trawl fisheries, by various specific areas.
3. Several restrictions to California recreational fisheries, including:
 - a. Closure to all groundfish fishing during May 1 through July 30 and November through December in the area between 40°10' N latitude and Pt. Lopez and during July in the area between Point Lopez and Point Conception.
 - b. Changes in the depth line closures.
 - c. Closure to the retention of black rockfish north of 40°10' N latitude for May and September 1 through December 31.
 - d. The following recreational groundfish fisheries are to remain open under existing regulations including gear restrictions and bag limits, (1) fishing for sanddabs, (2) fishing from shore or while diving, and (3) fishing for leopard sharks within San Francisco Bay.

A complete list of inseason recommendations will be posted at the Council website soon.

Preferred Alternative Harvest Levels for 2005-2006 Fisheries

The Council determined preferred acceptable biological catches (ABCs) and optimum yields (OYs) for most of the groundfish stocks and stock complexes in the fishery management plan (FMP) for the 2005-2006 management period. The preferred alternatives decided under agenda C.12 also established the harvest levels for bocaccio, cowcod, widow rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish. The Council deferred adoption of final harvest levels for canary rockfish and other flatfish until the June 2004 meeting. The final 2005-2006 harvest levels for these groundfish species will be posted on the Council website in the near future.

Stock Assessment Planning for 2007-2008 Management

The Council adopted 23 groundfish stock assessments for the 2007-2008 management period. The highest priority assessments were for those stocks that are overfished, followed by those with large landings. New species suggested for assessment include California scorpionfish, gopher rockfish, kelp greenling, starry flounder, and vermilion rockfish. Eight Stock Assessment Review (STAR) Panels are tentatively scheduled for 2005 to review these assessments, which would be considered for final adoption at the November 2005 Council meeting. A full list of these assessments and STAR Panels will soon be posted on the Council website, www.pcouncil.org.

FMP Amendment 16-3: Rebuilding Plans for Bocaccio, Cowcod, and Widow and Yelloweye Rockfish

The Council adopted preferred alternatives for rebuilding bocaccio, cowcod, widow rockfish, and yelloweye rockfish. The preferred alternatives are as follows:

Bocaccio (using the STATc model): Target rebuilding year = 2023, F rate = 0.0498, Rebuilding probability = 70%.

Cowcod: Target rebuilding year = 2090, F rate = 0.009, Rebuilding probability = 60%.

Widow Rockfish (using Model 8): Target rebuilding year = 2038, F rate = 0.0093, Rebuilding probability = 60%.

Yelloweye Rockfish: Target rebuilding year = 2058, F rate = 0.0153, Rebuilding probability = 80%.

The Council also mandated the use of the Cowcod Conservation Areas as one of the primary cowcod rebuilding strategies. The Yelloweye Rockfish Conservation Area will be one of the optional rebuilding strategies for rebuilding yelloweye rockfish. Both of these closed area strategies can be modified through regulatory amendment.

The Council also tasked the SSC to develop a Terms of Reference for the standards and criteria for periodic reviews of rebuilding plans. This Terms of Reference will be presented to the Council in September with consideration for final adoption in November 2004.

Bycatch Monitoring Program Draft Programmatic EIS (DPEIS)

The Groundfish Advisory Subpanel asked the Council to consider a new alternative combining elements of all the alternatives and tailoring them to specific fishery sectors. During public comment, representatives from Oceana presented a modification of Alternative 4, which features bycatch caps, for Council consideration. The Council adopted a new alternative as their preferred alternative, labeled Alternative 7. This alternative incorporates elements from Alternative 1 (current measures), Alternative 4 (bycatch caps), and Alternative 5 (individual fishing quotas).

The Council deferred a decision on how the proposed action should be implemented until a later Council meeting. This would involve incorporating bycatch mitigation policies and/or measures into the Groundfish FMP.

Adoption of 2005-2006 Management Alternatives for Public Review

Information will be available on our website, www.pcouncil.org, early in the week of April 12, 2004.

Habitat Issues

Current Habitat Issues

The Council approved, as written, a letter to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission regarding Klamath River hydroelectric facility relicensing. The Council also asked staff to work with Habitat Committee members to revise and send a letter to NMFS on rulemaking for EFH.

Pacific Halibut Management

Adopt Final 2004 Incidental Catch Regulations for the Salmon Troll and Fixed Gear Sablefish Fisheries

Salmon Troll

The Council adopted the same landing restrictions for Pacific halibut caught incidentally in the salmon troll fishery as were in place for 2003:

License holders may land no more than 1 halibut per each 3 chinook, except 1 halibut may be landed without meeting the ratio requirement, and no more than 35 halibut may be landed per trip. Halibut retained must be no less than 32 inches in total length (with head on).

A "C-shaped" yelloweye rockfish conservation area is an area to be avoided for salmon troll fishing. NMFS and the Council request salmon trollers voluntarily avoid this area in order to protect yelloweye rockfish. The area is defined in the Pacific Council Halibut Catch Sharing Plan in the North Coast subarea (Washington marine area 3), with the following coordinates in the order listed:

48°18' N latitude; 125°18' W longitude;
48°18' N latitude; 124°59' W longitude;
48°11' N latitude; 124°59' W longitude;
48°11' N latitude; 125°11' W longitude;
48°04' N latitude; 125°11' W longitude;
48°04' N latitude; 124°59' W longitude;
48°00' N latitude; 124°59' W longitude;
48°00' N latitude; 125°18' W longitude;

and connecting back to 48°18' N latitude; 125°18' W longitude.

Fixed Gear Sablefish Fishery

The Council adopted new landing limits on incidental halibut harvest in the fixed gear primary sablefish fishery north of Point Chehalis:

Restrict incidental halibut landings to 100 pounds (dressed weight) of halibut for every 1,000 pounds (dressed weight) of sablefish landed and up to two additional halibut in excess of the 150 pounds per 1,000 pound ratio per landing. Retention of halibut allowed beginning May 1.

Highly Migratory Species Management (HMS)

FMP Amendment for Limited Entry in the High Seas Pelagic Longline Fishery

The Council directed the Highly Migratory Species Management Team (HMSMT) to expand the scope of the HMS FMP amendment. Based on the advice of the HMSMT and Highly Migratory Species Advisory Subpanel, the Council added consideration of measures to constrain ESA-listed sea turtle takes in HMS FMP fisheries to below threshold levels of the FMP biological opinion. This could include measures similar to those recently implemented in the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council-managed longline fishery (e.g., fleet-wide effort caps and gear/bait restrictions). The HMSMT will work with NMFS-protected resources to estimate projected sea turtle takes in restructured HMS FMP fisheries (i.e., high seas longline and drift gillnet). If directed by the Council, the HMSMT will provide a report to the Council at the September 2004 Council meeting.