



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Northwest Region  
7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Bldg. 1  
Seattle, WA 98115

Mr. Donald Hansen, Chair  
Pacific Fishery Management Council  
7700 NE Ambassador Place  
Portland, OR 97220

SEP 6 2006


Dear Mr. Hansen:

By this letter, I am approving Amendment 18 to the Pacific Coast Groundfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP). As you know, Amendment articulates the Council's bycatch minimization approach for the groundfish fisheries and provides comprehensive direction for current and future bycatch minimization efforts within Pacific Coast groundfish management. Amendment 18 largely re-wrote Chapter 6 of the FMP, *Management Measures*, to focus on bycatch monitoring and minimization.

NMFS published a proposed rule to implement Amendment 18 on June 27, 2006 (71 FR 36506), and we expect to have the final rule effective in late 2006. Regulations implementing Amendment 18 would: require that groundfish fishery management measures take into account the co-occurrence ratios of overfished species with more abundant target stocks; require vessels that participate in the open access groundfish fisheries to carry observers if directed by NMFS; authorize the use of depth-based closed areas as a routine management measure for protecting and rebuilding overfished stocks, preventing the overfishing of any groundfish species, minimizing the incidental harvest of any protected or prohibited non-groundfish species, controlling effort to extend the fishing season, minimizing the disruption of traditional commercial fishing and marketing patterns, spreading the available recreational catch over a large number of anglers, discouraging target fishing while allowing small incidental catches to be landed, and allowing small fisheries to operate outside the normal season; and, update the boundary definitions of the Klamath and Columbia River Salmon Conservation Zones and Eureka nearshore area to use latitude and longitude coordinates in a style similar to that of the Groundfish Conservation Areas.

NMFS appreciates the Council's work to bring its bycatch minimization policies into the FMP and its ongoing efforts to reduce bycatch in the groundfish fisheries.

Sincerely,

  
D. Robert Lohn  
Regional Administrator

