



Pacific Fishery Management Council *NEWS RELEASE*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Monday, November 10, 2008

Contact: Ms. Jennifer Gilden, Communications Officer, 503-820-2280
Dr. Donald McIsaac, Executive Director, 503-820-2280

PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL ADOPTS SWEEPING CHANGES TO WEST COAST COMMERCIAL GROUND FISH TRAWL FISHERIES

Portland, OR. – At its meeting in San Diego last week, the Pacific Fishery Management Council revamped West Coast commercial groundfish fishery management by adopting a system of individual fishing quotas, or IFQs, for the shoreside trawl fishery, and a system of structured harvest co-operatives for the at-sea whiting fishery¹. These two commercial fisheries are the largest on the West Coast, with an annual dockside value of about \$61 million in recent years.

Over 100 people provided testimony on the decision, which was made around 9:30 p.m. on Friday, November 7. Those testifying included fishermen, processors, fishing and processing family members, port authorities, conservation group members, and local government officials. The Council also reviewed hundreds of written comments, including testimony from state and Federal elected officials.

The Council's decisions will be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service for approval and incorporation into Federal law.

These sweeping changes, known as trawl rationalization, were made to achieve conservation goals and improve the economic status of these large commercial fisheries. The West Coast trawl fishery is currently managed through a complex system of fleet-wide two-month cumulative landing limits, harvest guidelines and quotas, area restrictions, seasonal closures, gear restrictions, and frequent in-season adjustments. This system has resulted in a fishery many believe is economically unsustainable and plagued by undesirable levels of bycatch (bycatch are fish that are not kept or sold, but are discarded, usually at sea).

¹ The shoreside trawl fishery operates out of West Coast fishing communities to catch a range of groundfish species, including whiting. The at-sea whiting fishery is centered around motherships and catcher-processors that primarily operate and process whiting at sea.

The rationalization program includes quotas for individual vessels, as opposed to the fishing fleet as a whole. The new provisions mandate 100 percent observer coverage for better catch accounting, provide for safer fishing at sea, allow commercial fishermen to switch to more environmentally benign gear types, reduce wasteful catch practices, and improve the overall economic benefit of the fishery.

There are currently around 140 limited entry trawl vessels active in any one year on the west coast, spread across four distinct trawl sectors. Trawlers pull nets through the ocean, in contrast to trollers, which use hook-and-line gear. The rationalization program applies to groundfish limited entry trawlers, whiting catcher-processors, and to whiting mothership processors². The Council manages over 90 different groundfish species that, with a few exceptions, live on or near the bottom of the ocean, including rockfish, flatfish, roundfish (such as whiting), sharks, and skates.

IFQs

An IFQ is a Federal permit to harvest a quantity of fish, usually a percentage of the total allowable catch in the fishery. It is a revocable privilege, not a property right. While the initial allocation of IFQ will go to vessel permit owners and processors, the IFQ may be subsequently transferred, leased, or sold to captains, crew, communities, processors, environmental groups, or other entities. Harvest privileges can also be revoked if the IFQ holder does not comply with Federal fishing standards.

IFQs introduce harvester accountability into the fishery management system and provide incentives to minimize catch of protected species. With IFQs, harvesters can catch more healthy stocks if they avoid protected species. Harvesters will also have more flexibility to choose when they fish, operating in a safer, more efficient manner and optimizing the timing of their deliveries to coincide with market needs. This system will end the so-called “race for fish” in the whiting fishery, where harvesters compete with one another to catch as many fish as possible during a short time.

Under the rationalization program adopted by the Pacific Council, the shoreside whiting and nonwhiting sectors will be merged into a single sector and managed with IFQs. All vessels will be required to carry government-certified observers, improving catch estimates for all species.

² The whiting fishery has three sectors. The *shore-based sector* is made up of vessels that deliver their catch to coastal communities. The *catcher-processor sector* is composed of relatively large vessels of several hundred feet in length that harvest and process whiting at sea. The *mothership sector* is composed of motherships that process whiting delivered by catcher vessels at sea. Motherships do not harvest whiting themselves, but act as floating processors.

Without strict controls on quota ownership, IFQs can lead to the concentration of harvest privileges in the hands of a few large operators. Because of this, the program recommended by the Council includes accumulation limits to ensure that such concentration does not occur. Nevertheless, one of the program's goals is to increase the efficiency of the fleet. As a result of rationalization, inefficient vessels are expected to leave the fishery, leading to a substantial reduction in the number of trawl vessels operating on the west coast. Harvesters who do not engage in fishing or who leave the fishery will be able to lease or sell their IFQ, receiving some compensation for exiting the fishery.

IFQ programs have been successfully used to rationalize fisheries for Alaska halibut and sablefish, surf clams and ocean quahogs off the Mid-Atlantic states, wreckfish in the South Atlantic, and the West Coast limited entry fixed gear sablefish fishery. IFQs are also used in New Zealand, Australia, and Iceland. IFQ program specifics vary considerably, depending on the fishery in which they are used and the regulations for each program.

Co-ops

Besides IFQs, the rationalization program also includes harvest co-ops for the mothership and catcher processor sectors of the whiting fishery. The whiting fishery is a high-volume, low cost-per-pound fishery that accounts for approximately 60% of the value of the West Coast commercial groundfish trawl fishery (including the shoreside fishery).

A co-op is a mutual arrangement among vessels in which members are allocated a percentage of the allowable catch (similar to IFQs), but only if they pool their shares collectively (form a cooperative). Co-ops have many of the same benefits as IFQs because they impose individual accountability and have the same level of catch monitoring as IFQs. Co-ops are expected to result in lower levels of bycatch and fewer encounters with depleted species than under existing conditions.

Like IFQs, the proposal for at-sea whiting co-ops includes accumulation limits in order to distribute activity among more participants. The co-op program for the mothership whiting fishery would also limit the number of processing vessels (motherships) able to receive fish at-sea from catcher vessels.

Co-ops have been implemented in several other U.S fisheries and currently exist in the Bering Sea crab fishery and the Alaska pollock fishery, which are managed by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

Economic Impacts

The economic impacts of rationalization will vary among communities. Community impacts will depend on the level and distribution of fleet consolidation, the economic efficiency of operations in individual ports, and each community's proximity to high-bycatch fishing areas. Overall, the number of jobs in the trawl sector is expected to decline as less efficient vessels leave the fishery; however, the remaining jobs are expected to be more stable and earn higher wages.

The rationalization program includes an adaptive management provision for the shoreside non-whiting sector. Under this provision, a percentage of the IFQ will be set aside and may be used to encourage harvesters to stay with the same ports and processors, to aid community and regional development, to create incentives for gear switching, to mitigate unforeseen circumstances of rationalization, to promote sustainable fishing practices, and to facilitate new entrants to the fishery.

Process

The potential value of IFQs for management was identified in the Council's 2000 Strategic Plan. Subsequently, the Council and its advisory bodies have been actively considering whether to rationalize the fishery since November, 2003. The Council has considered input from its advisory bodies (which include representatives of the fishing industry, processors, conservation organizations, and agencies); from the public; and from state and Federal agencies. National Marine Fisheries Service will review the Council's recommendation for final approval and implementation into Federal law. A fully rationalized fishery is not expected to be in place before January 1, 2011.

During their meeting in San Diego, the Council discussed many details related to rationalization, including which species to manage under the rationalization program; the number of shoreside sectors; how to involve processors; formulas for initially allocating quota shares; accumulation limits; area management; the adaptive management provision; gear switching; carryover and data collection provisions; and much more. Details on these decisions will be posted on the Council website.

Council Role

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 for the purpose of managing fisheries 3-200 miles offshore of the United States of America coastline. The Pacific Council recommends management measures for fisheries

off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington. All Council meetings are open to the public.

###

On the Web

Pacific Fishery Management Council:

<http://www.pcouncil.org>

Trawl rationalization environmental impact statement:

<http://tinyurl.com/rationalizationdocs>

Trawl rationalization page:

<http://tinyurl.com/traawlrationalization>