



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:BYC 14-007

Agenda Date6/2/2014

Agenda Number:C5

Eric Olson, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:

Bering Sea Chinook/Chum Salmon Bycatch - Review Discussion Paper

ESTIMATED TIME:

8 hours

ACTION REQUIRED:

Review discussion paper

BACKGROUND

The Council has been iteratively addressing Bering Sea Chinook and chum salmon bycatch management revisions in recent years. The Bering Sea Chinook bycatch management program, implemented in 2011 under Amendment 91 to the BSAI groundfish FMP, established a system of PSC limits (divided by sector and season) and provided for industry-developed incentive plan agreements (IPAs) by sector in order to have increased flexibility in operations and management of incentives within sectors. Since 2011 three IPAs have been in operation, each designed to keep Chinook PSC levels below the performance standard implemented under Amendment 91 (47,591 Chinook salmon annually) while allowing for sectors to reach the sector-specific portion of the higher (60,000 fish) cap in 2 of 7 years as needed in years of high bycatch. Neither the sector-specific performance standards nor overall PSC limits have been approached since the program's inception in 2011.

The Council last reviewed Chinook salmon bycatch management in October 2013 after requesting a detailed staff analysis of fleet, sector and vessel performance under Amendment 91 as well an updated analysis of adult equivalence (AEQ) with particular emphasis on western Alaskan AEQ and impact rates of the fishery on WAK stocks. Overall bycatch has been much lower than historical levels in recent years. However, given continuing concerns regarding poor returns to western Alaskan Chinook salmon stocks, the Council continues to focus on potential improvements to Chinook bycatch management in the Bering Sea. Additionally, the Council is interested in moving forward with a more comprehensive concurrent management of Chinook and chum salmon bycatch management in the Bering Sea pollock fishery.

In October, the Council made a number of requests of both staff and IPA representatives for inclusion in a discussion paper. Main themes of the items in the Council's motion included the following:

1. Chum salmon: Discussion of the regulatory changes needed to incorporate Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch avoidance into the Chinook salmon Incentive Plan Agreements (IPAs). The objectives of this action are to prioritize Chinook salmon bycatch avoidance, while preventing high chum salmon bycatch and focusing on avoidance of Alaska chum salmon stocks, and allowing flexibility to harvest pollock in times and places that best support those goals.
2. Chinook salmon: Evaluation of possible measures to refine Chinook salmon bycatch controls in the Bering Sea pollock fisheries. These considerations included:
 - a. Modification in IPAs to impose restrictions or penalties on vessels with consistently high

- Chinook PSC rates relative to other vessels fishing at the same time.
- b. Requiring use of salmon excluders when Chinook encounter rates are high (through IPAs or in regulations)
 - c. Requiring a lower Base Rate (for rolling hot spot closures) starting in September (through IPAs or in regulations)
 - d. Provisions to shorten the pollock fishery when pollock catch rates decline and Chinook rates increase in October (through IPAs or in regulations)
 - e. Closing the fishery to a sector (or cooperative) if their Chinook rate exceeds a specified threshold in September or October through IPAs or in regulations)
 - f. Modification of the PSC accounting period for application of the Chinook PSC limit

Two discussion papers have been prepared to address the Council's request. The first discussion paper, 'Bering Sea Chinook and chum bycatch discussion paper,' provides: 1) updated analyses building upon the October analysis of fleet, sector and vessel performance under Amendment 91, 2) a summary of AEQ analysis and impact rates, and 3) an assessment of all the elements listed in the Council's motion but the provisions that would be put forward within the IPAs themselves to address modifications for Chinook bycatch reduction. Due to the timing of the availability of feedback from the IPA representatives, a second discussion paper was prepared, 'Bering Sea Chinook bycatch Incentive Plan Agreement (IPA) feedback,' which summarizes the feedback from the IPAs and provides, to the extent possible, a concise discussion and analysis of the possible impacts of proposed IPA modifications and lists questions for further clarification or consideration by the Council. This second paper is meant to complement the broader discussion and analysis contained in the first paper, and focusses only narrowly on those aspects put forward by the IPAs, specifically addressing primarily the provision to include vessel restrictions or penalties on vessels with consistently high Chinook PSC rates and issues related to requiring salmon excluder usage.

At this meeting the Council will review both discussion papers and may elect to move forward with an analysis for a comprehensive salmon bycatch management program for both Chinook and chum salmon in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. The Council may wish to consider a number of aspects such as the purpose and need for action, alternatives for consideration (to address the purpose and need), the analytical document necessary for evaluation of such modifications, and a time frame for review of alternative management approaches.