

## Groundfish Management Policy Background Summary

The Council's Groundfish Management Policy was developed through its 2004 Programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (PSEIS) that comprehensively reviewed and analyzed the groundfish fisheries in both the BSAI and GOA. Additionally, the PSEIS accomplished the following:

- Updated information contained in the original EISs by providing a historical review of how the groundfish fisheries and the environment have changed since publication of the original EISs.
- Described how new scientific and fishery information are being utilized.
- Described the cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future groundfish fisheries management on the marine ecosystem and the environment.
- Analyzed the existing and alternative management regimes to determine the potential impacts on the human environment.

Under the fourth of the above bullets, the Council considered a range of policy-level alternatives that would characterize and guide future management actions along a range of management dimensions. Each alternative was comprised of three elements:

1. a management approach statement that describes the goals, rationale and assumptions behind the alternative
2. a set of management objectives that complement and further refine the goals set forth in the management approach
3. a pair of example FMP "bookends" that illustrate and frame the range of implementing management measures

At its April 2004 meeting, the Council recommended a Preferred Alternative based on its review of the draft PSEIS as well as more than 13,400 public comments. The Preferred Alternative was based on the policy goals and objectives described under Alternative 3 in the PSEIS, with refinements incorporated from Alternatives 1 and 4 as well as suggestions taken from public comments.

In terms of the three elements of the alternatives identified above, the preferred alternative included the following Management Approach Statement:

"The productivity of the North Pacific ecosystem is acknowledged to be among the highest in the world. For the past 25 years, the NPFMC management approach has incorporated forward looking conservation measures that address differing levels of uncertainty. This management approach has, in recent years, been labeled the precautionary approach. The NPFMC's precautionary approach is about applying judicious and responsible fisheries management practices, based on sound scientific research and analysis, proactively rather than reactively, to ensure the sustainability of fishery resources and associated ecosystems for the benefit of future as well as current generations. Recognizing that potential changes in productivity may be caused by fluctuations in natural oceanographic conditions, fisheries, and other, non-fishing, activities, the NPFMC intends to continue to take appropriate measures to insure the continued sustainability of the managed species. It will carry out this objective by considering reasonable, adaptive management measures as described in the MSA and in conformance with the National

Standards, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and other applicable law. This management approach takes into account the National Academy of Science's recommendations on Sustainable Fisheries Policy.

“As part of its policy, the NPFMC intends to consider and adopt, as appropriate, measures that accelerate the NPFMC's precautionary, adaptive management approach through community or rights-based management, ecosystem-based management principles that protect managed species from overfishing, and where appropriate and practicable, increase habitat protection and bycatch constraints. All management measures will be based on the best scientific information available. Given this intent, the fishery management goal is to provide sound conservation of the living marine resources; provide socially and economically viable fisheries and fishing communities; minimize human-caused threats to protected species; maintain a healthy marine resource habitat; and incorporate ecosystem-based considerations into management decisions. This management approach recognizes the need to balance many competing uses of marine resources and different social and economic goals for sustainable fishery management including protection of the long-term health of the resource and the optimization of yield. This policy will utilize and improve upon the NPFMC's existing open and transparent process to involve the public in decision-making.

“Adaptive management requires regular and periodic review. Objectives identified in this policy statement will be reviewed annually by the NPFMC. The NPFMC will also review, modify, eliminate or consider new issues as appropriate to best carry out the goals and objectives of this management policy. To meet the goals of this overall management approach, the NPFMC and NOAA Fisheries will use the PSEIS as a planning document. To help focus its consideration of potential management measures, it will use the [following] objectives as guideposts to be re-evaluated as amendments to the FMP are considered over the life of the PSEIS.”

[This is followed in the PSEIS by the enumerated list of 45 Management Objectives.]

In response to the adoption the Management Policy into the FMPs, and fulfilling its intent to use the PSEIS as a planning document, the Council developed a workplan that served as a bridge between its management policy and its near term activities. This workplan was not a required part of the Management Policy, but was instead created to provide a tangible expression of the Policy in the context of current activities. Provided in tabular form for every Council meeting, the workplan historically provided columns including general priorities, specific priority actions, management objectives as appropriate, and finally “status”, meaning recent or pending Council activities and associated time horizons. Status and time horizon were updated for each meeting, however, the list of “specific priority actions” had not been modified since Feb 2007.

The limitations of the “specific priority actions” tended to prevent inclusion of activities that did not match up with the subset of management objectives that were in the workplan. At its February 2016 meeting, the Council chose to re-format the workplan, to include all of its management objectives, with these essentially replacing the specific priority actions, so that Council activity could be identified in association with each objective. At its April 2016 meeting, the Council will review each of the management objectives and the activity associated with it and determine whether the Management Policy is being adequately fulfilled, thus satisfying the annual review requirement. If the Council is to determine that changes to the Policy are necessary, an FMP amendment would need to be developed in order to

facilitate that change. In 2015, a Supplemental Information Report was approved which determined that the 2004 PSEIS continues to provide NEPA compliance for the groundfish FMPs. That determination is a reflection of the comprehensive, forward-thinking nature of the analysis that was carried out through the PSEIS as well as the continued applicability of the Policy.