



NORTH PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Action Memo

File Number:BYC 14-010

Agenda Date6/2/2014

Agenda Number:D6

Eric Olson, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director

SUBJECT:
BS Trawl Salmon Excluder EFP - Review/consultation

ESTIMATED TIME:
2 hours

ACTION REQUIRED:
Review EFP Environmental Assessment

BACKGROUND:

In December 2013, Mr. John R. Gauvin (Gauvin and Associates, LLC) submitted an application requesting an exempted fishing permit (EFP) to continue research on salmon bycatch reduction devices in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery. The purpose of the EFP would be to improve performance of the salmon excluder device developed under EFP 11-01 in 2011 and 2012. The objective is to significantly reduce chum and Chinook salmon bycatch in the pollock trawl fishery without significantly reducing pollock catch rates. The EFP would allow for testing of the salmon excluder device from January 2015 through June 2016, for several weeks in each pollock A and B seasons. Testing in the A season is expected to examine the performance of the excluder primarily with Chinook salmon and roe-bearing pollock, testing in the B season would be with both Chinook and chum salmon and pollock that are not roe-bearing. EFP fishing would be conducted with one or two vessels in each season. The EFP would be subject to modification bending new, relevant information regarding the 2015 and 2016 fishery, including pollock harvest specifications or restructuring of the salmon bycatch management program.

To test the salmon excluder device, exemptions from existing regulations for salmon bycatch management, observer requirements, several closure areas, and total allowable catch (TAC) amounts for groundfish would be necessary. Taking salmon during the experiment is critical for determining the effectiveness of the device. Salmon taken during the experiment would not be counted toward the Chinook or chum salmon bycatch limits under § 679.21(e)(1)(vii) and (f)(2). The amount of Chinook or chum salmon bycatch by the pollock trawl fishery during the EFP period could potentially approach or exceed the Chinook or chum salmon bycatch limits. If the EFP salmon were counted toward the salmon bycatch limits, exceedance of the bycatch limits could create a burden on the pollock trawl fishermen that are not participants in an intercooperative agreement for chum salmon or incentive plan agreement for Chinook salmon bycatch reduction by causing an earlier closure of the Chum Savings Area or violating the plan agreement for Chinook salmon.

In order to achieve statistically significant results, the applicant would require 3,000 chum salmon and 1,450 Chinook salmon during the EFP period (Table 1).

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Table 1 Chinook and chum salmon requested by applicant for 2015 and 2016 EFP fishing

	2015		2016		Total
	A season	B season	A Season	B Season	
Chinook	600	250	600	-	1,450
Chum	250	2,500	250	-	3,000

The applicant has also requested an exemption from the Chum Salmon Savings Area (§679.21(e)(7)(vii) and §679.22(a)(10)), the Bering Sea Pollock Restriction Area (§679.22(a)(7)(ii)), and the Steller Sea Lion Conservation Area (§679.22(a)(7)(vii)). These areas provide ideal locations for conducting the experiment because of the expected abundance of salmon and pollock in these areas to ensure sufficient encounters of both salmon and pollock to satisfy the experimental design.

Groundfish taken under the EFP would be exempt from the TACs specified in the annual harvest specifications (§679.20). It is estimated that a total of 2,400 metric tons (mt) of groundfish, mainly pollock, would be taken during each season of the EFP for a total of 7,500 mt during the EFP period. The EFP pollock harvest would not be included in the harvest applied against the Bering Sea groundfish TACs, including the 2014 pollock TAC of 1,267,400 mt. The preliminary 2015 TAC for Bering Sea pollock is equal to the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) of 1,258,000 mt, but the TAC is likely to be adjusted during the 2015/2016 harvest specifications process, and may result in a TAC that is less than ABC. The EFP fishing would be permitted for this proposed action if the ABC for Bering Sea pollock exceeds the TAC by at least 5,000 mt in 2015 and 2,500 mt in 2016.

Because there is very little groundfish incidental catch in the pollock fishery, the harvest of other fish species during the EFP fishing is expected to be 50-80 mt per season. The majority of other species harvested under the EFP are likely to be Pacific cod, skates, flatfish, halibut, and jellyfish. The amount of groundfish harvest under the EFP and by the commercial fishery is not expected to cause the ABC of any groundfish to be exceeded in either 2015 or 2016. The EFP is expected to take approximately 12 mt of halibut per season, and the EFP would require an exemption from halibut PSC limits under §679.21(e)(3)(ii)(C). The halibut taken under the EFP and groundfish fisheries is not expected to exceed the halibut PSC harvest specifications in either 2015 or 2016.

The use of a Catcher/Processor (CP) would require an exemption from the Catcher Vessel Operational Area (CVOA) restriction (§679.22(a)(5)).

The EFP would include an exemption from selected observer requirements at §679.50, §679.51, and §679.55. The applicants would use NMFS-trained observers as “sea samplers” who would conduct EFP data collection and perform other observer duties that would normally be required for vessels directed fishing for pollock. EFP fishing trips would also be exempted from observer requirements for trip selection and fee collection.

The activities under the EFP are not expected to have significant impact on the human environment. Under regulations at §679.6, NMFS has consulted with the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) and has determined that the application contains all the information necessary to judge whether the proposal constitutes a valid fishing experiment appropriate for further consideration. NMFS is initiating consultation with the Council by forwarding the application to the Council, as required by §679.6(c)(2).

At this meeting, the Council will review the EFP application and the Environmental Assessment and decide whether or not to recommend that NMFS issue the EFP.