

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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NMFS/NPFMC/ADF&G Salmon Outreach Meeting

Oct 5, 2017

Panel members:

Gretchen Harrington, Forrest Bowers, Lauren Smoker, and Jim Armstrong

On October 5, 2017 at 5:30 pm, NMFS, ADF&G, and Council personnel conducted an outreach meeting, to gather input from interested salmon stakeholders. Information was being gathered for the purpose of informing the Council on stakeholder opinion about the appropriate scope of a workgroup that would be involved in the development of an amendment that addresses the salmon fisheries in the Federal waters of Cook Inlet, Prince William Sound, and the Alaska Peninsula. Specifically, the panel was interested in stakeholder viewpoints on 1) specific issues the workgroup should focus on to be most effective, 2) the appropriate composition of the stakeholder workgroup, and 3) any other concerns stakeholders may have at present.

A sign-up sheet was circulated and attendance at the meeting was approximately 30, including approximately 20 salmon stakeholders and 10 attendees from various government entities.

Jim Armstrong opened the meeting by providing a brief description of the Council's committee and working group process. He informed the attendees that once the workgroup is formed, it will be an advisory body of the Council and the Council will direct its actions. Because the Council system was created by the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), and its purpose and function is described by the MSA, the information and recommendations that the stakeholder workgroup provides to the Council must also comply with MSA mandates.

Gretchen Harrington informed the group that in order to bring the FMP into compliance with the MSA, while covering the traditional net-fishing areas, specific MSA requirements will need to be met. The most difficult of these will be status determination criteria. She noted that the FMP would only apply to the fisheries in the EEZ. She described the alternatives that the Council is considering so far. She also noted some issues that are outside of the scope of the amendment such as elodea and northern pike invasions into salmon riverine habitat.

When asked how long will the amendment process take, Gretchen explained that we're at the discussion paper stage of development now, and as such, it is unfortunately unclear how far we are from final action. We are essentially developing a brand-new FMP with a lot of complicating factors, and are trying to understand how we can accomplish this under the MSA.

The issue of representation by areas outside Cook Inlet received some discussion. Some participants did not want to be part of the working group, and they also did not want their areas to come under federal management. Others, who were not from Cook Inlet (Area M, Kodiak, PWS, and SE) wanted to be involved because they wanted to either help shape the management outcome, or at least understand it.

Cook Inlet representatives expressed strong interest in participating in the workgroup and referenced a draft workgroup description provided in their written comments.

The issue of restriction of FMP authority to EEZ waters received discussion. Several UCIDA reps suggested that the MSA requires management of salmon resources throughout their range, which would include state waters. Lauren Smoker responded by saying that Federal fishery management authority under the MSA applies to the EEZ and does not extend to management of State water fisheries unless through formal pre-emption under the MSA.

A representative from the Mat-Su Borough stated that he would like to participate in the workgroup because he is concerned about the recovery of salmon stocks in northern Cook Inlet.

The issue of invasive species (elodea and northern pike) was addressed. Gretchen Harrington reminded the group that the MSA does not contain provisions for an FMP to manage invasive species in in-land waters. Jim Armstrong suggested that UCIDA appeal to other federal agencies such as USFWS and BLM that do dedicate resources to combatting invasives.

The panel was asked about how they plan to address ACLs. Gretchen stated that specifying ACLs and monitoring fishery catches relative to ACLs are some of the most challenging aspects of this amendment. It will require coordination of the slow federal process with the real-time management conducted by the State which allows for continual adjustments to harvest limits as information becomes available.

The example of crab management was cited as a potential model for dividing management responsibilities between state and federal agencies. If a coordinated approach were to be established (alternative 2) all of the management standards) would have to be described to ensure that they are MSA-compliant. Gretchen pointed out how that is being developed in chapter 2 of the discussion paper.

There was frustration expressed by some attendees with the perception of a lack of transparency in the State's decision-making process when escapement goals are set. There was discussion of a history of over-escapement occurring under State management and this was contrasted with the concept of optimum yield. Lauren Smoker suggested that that topic and others will be considered by scientists and others participating in the development of the amendment. An attendee remarked that the challenge is not to dictate to the state how it sets its escapement goals, but rather, how to identify OFL, ABC, and ACLs using state escapement goals – to translate escapement-based management into harvest-based management terms. The federal process will, however include review of escapement goals in order to establish that best available science is being used.

Allocation among state stakeholders by state managers was discussed as not being under the purview of Federal managers. Federal managers will need to anticipate what the state harvest will be because the only the remainder of harvestable biomass that is not dedicated to state operations will be available to EEZ fisheries.

The status determination criteria tier system used in management of the East area was discussed. Gretchen described the tier system, which, like the groundfish tier system is based on the quality of the information relative to stock dynamics.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7 pm.