

November 29, 2017

Dan Hull, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 W. 4th Ave, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501
npfmc.comments@noaa.gov

Agenda Items:

D1 Western GOA Pacific Cod A Season Halibut PSC Rates (change start date)

D3 Western GOA Pollock Trip Limits

Dear Chairman Hull,

I own and operate a 58' combination trawl/seine vessel based in Sand Point, Alaska. The boat primarily fishes in the Western Gulf. At last year's December council meeting I was actually a bit relieved when the Gulf Bycatch management plan went down, because I thought that I would be through with council meetings and having to spend time writing letters and everything else involved when issues that involve my business are on the council agenda. After Governor Walker was elected it was pretty obvious we were going nowhere good. I was happy with just one less thing to worry about, until I listened to Commissioner Cotten's two proposals, D1 and D3, to manage bycatch in the Western Gulf. First, and most important, these two proposals have absolutely nothing to do with controlling bycatch and is all about reallocating quota (money) to someone and I don't think anybody is really certain whom that someone is.

I am adamantly opposed to changing the start time for cod in the Western Gulf only. At the time that I am writing this letter it appears that there won't even be a cod trawl season in the Western Gulf, and I am going to be curious if the people advocating for this change are as enthusiastic about it as they once were, for two reasons. One of the reasons that I have never been for delaying the start is that we have become "low hanging fruit" for boats looking for something else to do. We got the first taste of that this past winter when the Bering Sea closed, February 23rd, and 5 trawlers moved over from the Bering Sea and fished the latter part of the Western Gulf season. Next year the Bering Sea is projected to close around the 15th of February. If this was a normal year, and the Peninsula Fisherman's Coalition (PFC) had their way, our fishery would open just in time for all the Bering sea boats to show up. Trawling is all about horse power and if we have to compete with larger boats with more horsepower than the smaller boats, such as mine, we are going to lose. The Western Gulf fleet is comprised of mostly 58' vessels and at most there are 22 of them fishing. I believe there are 78 Western Gulf trawl endorsed LLPs. Every one of those licenses has just as much right to fish there as I do. It's my understanding that the Bering Sea/Kodiak boats that did fish in the Western Gulf did just fine. It must have caught N.M.F.S. off guard, because when the Western Gulf closed on March 8th we exceeded the quota by 628 MT. Bottom line, I want every minute I can have in the Western Gulf while other boats are busy doing what they normally do when the season opens, for every other trawler, on January 20th.

The second reason these people may want to rethink this is 2017 was the 2nd year in a row that the Area M state water pot cod quota has not been caught. The last couple of years when the state water season opens by regulation on March 7th fishing has been good and then drops off as time goes on. I will be really surprised if the residents of King Cove and Sand Point, that are pot boats only, don't ask the B.O.F. to move the start date for state water pot cod forward. A large majority of the local trawl vessels fish the trawl season and then switch to pots. The last two years the trawl season has not closed before the pot season has opened. Lost opportunity. If the state season were to be moved forward in the year and the trawl season moved later in the year, this problem would only be exacerbated. I believe that one of the biggest mistakes we make as fishermen is trying to second guess fish timing. Also, in 2016 both Trident and Peter Pan suspended buying cod for a few days, because they were overwhelmed with trawl and pot cod at the same time. Every year I hear the plant manager at Trident say, "We're doing way more head and gut than we'd like". When there is too many fish being delivered all at once, both quality and price suffer. Condensing seasons will certainly not help that.

Allow me please, a little history here. The second time that we were at the water's edge with Gulf rationalization Sarah Palin was elected and it was dropped. At that point I thought that I would never see any catch-share plan in my time left, so I made the decision to make the boat a more competitive small trawler. As I said earlier, trawling is all about horse power, but the more horse power you add, the more you have to modify (spend) on all your equipment downstream. Bigger gear, bigger winches, bigger engines for hydraulics and the list goes on and on. Bottom line, I believe my boat has become a more effective small trawler. I will not make the argument, for one brief moment, that this was a wise financial decision, but I know as a fact that my boat has become a much more efficient, effective trawler amongst the small boat trawl fleet in the Western Gulf. So now with encouragement of the local Sand Point, fleet, Commissioner Cotten has asked staff to research moving the opening of just the Western Gulf cod season from January 20th until February 15th.

We are racing for fish and with the investments made, my boat can "scratch fish" more effectively with more horse power I've installed. Kiley Thompson, who is the president and spokesman for the Peninsula Fisherman's Coalition was asked the question during public testimony at the December 2016 council meeting, something to the effect of "Are any boats fishing early? His reply was, "There's a few, and they're making a living". My question is, what's the matter with that and isn't that the point of all this? For twenty years now the A.E.B. has been on record of opposing any type of I.F.Q. The local fishermen have always opposed any sort of I.F.Q., until it was apparent that the Central Gulf was going to rationalize. When that all fell apart I listened to Western Gulf fishermen, again, advocate for status quo. In a June 10th interview with Peggy Parker Commissioner Cotten was asked, "What about the race for fish"? He replied "in Alaska we call that a competitive fishery". From that statement I am assuming he is promoting, is happy with, the race for fish. I understand being competitive and I certainly understand the position of not wanting a rationalized fishery, but what I don't understand is that I am playing by the rules that all these same people want, and now they don't like the end result and want to try and change the rules, in hope, of favoring themselves.

Mr. Laukitus, I would hope you would understand my position better than most. You have made, what most would consider, a sizable investment in what's referred to as a "Super 8". I am assuming, please

correct me if I'm wrong, that you built that boat so you could fish in more rough weather and when the opportunity arises and you can haul in more pounds to deliver than the traditional Alaska limit seiner. In short, catch more than the next guy, correct? Well that is what I have tried to do. My boat actually packs less pounds than at least six other 58' boats that I compete with so I did what I could to make my boat "scratch" fish more effectively. If this scheme were to pass, what should be my next step be? Ask the Washington council members to ask staff to research a trip limit equal to what my boat packs?

If in fact, D-1 was proposed to control bycatch, which it was not, I find it ironic that this same group, the Peninsula Fisherman's Coalition, want to dictate how bycatch is managed for the rest of us. The PFC has no credibility when it comes to controlling bycatch. I understand that D-1 is supposedly addressing halibut bycatch, but I want to use 2016-17 C and D seasons as examples how this same group control bycatch. In short, they don't. I am certain that council members are all aware of the tendered, non tendered pollock issue that arose in Sand Point in C and D season of 2016. If you're not, ask N.M.F.S enforcement, they will be able to enlighten you. This year again there was a high rate of Chinook bycatch and nothing done to slow it down and we exceeded the Chinook PSC quota. And please be aware, because of the good salmon season on the peninsula this past summer, the local Sand Point/King Cove fleet did not start fishing until, I believe, around the 7th of September. Had the entire fleet started on August 25th, we would have gone over the cap a lot worse than what we did.

This year was the perfect storm for that fleet to prove to us that they can control bycatch. I, and other boats were fishing south of Akutan and delivering to Akutan and to the Icicle ship located near Dutch Harbor. The fleet that remained around Sand Point were comprised of all 58' trawlers and for the most part "local" fishermen. There were no "outsiders", or big boats. In that entire fleet I only know of one of the individuals that has invested in a salmon excluder for his pollock net. I'm not certain if he used it some or any of the time. I have included a list (exhibit A) that shows the observed totals of each boat fishing in area 610 during the 2017 C/D Pollock season. I have highlighted the boats that stayed in the Sand Point area and they are all "small local trawlers".

When he was a member of the council I listened to commissioner Cotten suggest that one of the ways to control bycatch was, "when you haul back and see that you have a high abundance of salmon, you can move to a different area". Just that simple. Well this year it was. South of Akutan on Davidson Bank it was faster, better fishing, no salmon, and a better price. I know for certain that Trident would have preferred to have their whole fleet out there. Now these same people that refuse to invest and use a salmon excluder, and refuse, for whatever reason, to wander too far away from home, have almost closed the season early for the rest of us, two years in a row now. I acknowledge that they are claiming to address halibut bycatch in D-1, but again, have we considered modifying gear instead of not fishing? It's been five years ago when the state of Alaska promised to give us "the tools we need", to control bycatch. I started to invest in gear that fishes cleaner, thinking (silly me) that ultimately I would be responsible for my own bycatch. For my bottom trawl I have bought a salmon excluder, a halibut excluder, a second 8" mesh intermediate and an 8" mesh cod end, and a net that is built using 8" mesh. All of that contributes to cleaner fishing. So when the Sand Point fleet finally got commissioner Cotten to ask staff to explore moving the start date, I found this interesting considering a year and half ago commissioner Cotten said at the June council meeting in Sitka that "the data didn't support the claim of

less bycatch". In the discussion paper that was released November 28 (Halibut PSC in the Western GOA Pacific Cod Trawl A Season), it shows a higher PSC rate at the beginning of the season, however it is my understanding that it is based on only 8% of the total observed rates of halibut mortality for the Western gulf? Is this a true representation? What the observed data does not show is whether that vessel was using a halibut excluder and was the trawl and cod end built using 5 inch or 8 inch mesh.

My boat delivers to tenders in the Western Gulf trawl Cod season so we do not have many observed trips. I am not ashamed of what my boat has done so I am including my observer data (exhibit B) from the 4 trips we have had observed. The January 28th trip is a bit skewed because there was a first of the season glitch and the target species wasn't what it could have been.

I'm advocating modifying gear to reduce bycatch. I'm not making this up. These practices have been accepted in the Bering Sea for a number of years now. I've included the co-op agreement (Exhibit C) that was in place last year. Notice the required use of excluders and the minimum mesh size. This is all to deal with halibut.

I would ask the council when a Peninsula Fisherman's Coalition member or representative comes in front of the council to ask the questions, "Are you using a salmon and halibut excluder and if not, why?" And "If it was indeed better fishing west of Sand Point, with no salmon to speak of, why did you not move to that area?" I am not going to be at the December council meeting, but I would enjoy listening to those questions asked and to hear an explanation how delivering 200,000 pounds reduces bycatch from delivering 300,000 pounds.

In the same June, 2016 interview with Peggy Parker and John Sackton where commissioner Cotten strongly advocated the race for fish where he stated, "In Alaska we call that a competitive fishery", he also was defending Alternative 3 by saying, "Let's allocate bycatch share to ensure that no part of the industry can't ruin the show for everybody". Mercifully Alternative 3 went nowhere and this is exactly what is happening in the Western Gulf right now. Before this administration, the council seemed intent on "controlling and reducing bycatch". The N.P.F.M.C. had a chance to make the individual responsible for their own bycatch, but tabled it, and sent a strong message that the race for fish was just fine. So here we are today.

It's pretty obvious that D-1 and D-3 have absolutely nothing to do with bycatch control and all about reallocation.

Most Sincerely,

Tom Evich
F/V Karen Evich
Owner/Operator

Exhibit A:

Chinook Salmon, summed for the 2017 C/D Season, WGOA observed vessels only. Highlighted vessel names are the small, local Sand Point boats that fished in the Sand Point area. The other vessels fished South of Akutan.

Source: https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/reports/car270_psc_rates2017.csv

Boat	Sum Of Chinook
LADY JOANNE	215
TEMPTATION	138
TERN	88
CAPE ST ELIAS	74
CAPE RELIANT	73
DECISION	65
CARAVELLE	48
CELTIC	32
OCEAN STORM	31
COURTNEY NORAL	29
PRIMUS	26
SUNSET BAY	23
ALASKA DAWN	17
SEA MAC	17
ANTHEM	13
MICHELLE RENEE	12
KAREN EVICH	11
ADAMANT	9
BAY ISLANDER	9
MARAUDER	5
COLUMBIA	2
ADVANCER	1
ALASKA BEAUTY	1
LADY LEE DAWN	0
Grand Total	939

Exhibit B: Karen Evich observed reports for 2017.

updated fleet halibut bycatch rates before and after Feb 15 based on posted NMFS reports (except for 2015, no diff at all).

Jan 23 2013 Cod	Sum Extrap Wt (Kg)	
FLATHEAD SOLE	120	0.33%
PACIFIC COD	31,596	88.23%
POLLOCK	3,976	11.10%
ROCK SOLE	94	0.26%
YELLOW IRISH LORD	24	0.07%
Grand Total	35,810	
Halibut	57	0.16%

Jan 31/Feb 1 2016 Cod	Sum Extrap Wt (Kg)	
FLATHEAD SOLE	653	1.37%
PACIFIC COD	46,439	97.74%
POLLOCK	67	0.14%
YELLOW IRISH LORD	13	0.03%
REX SOLE	222	0.47%
ARROWTOOTH	119	0.25%
Grand Total	47,512	
Halibut	730	1.54%

Jan 23/24 2017 Cod	Sum Extrap Wt (Kg)	
FLATHEAD SOLE	272	1.43%
PACIFIC COD	15,902	83.95%
POLLOCK	39	0.21%
REX SOLE	150	0.79%
ARROWTOOTH	1,194	6.30%
BIG SKATE	807	4.26%
BIGMOUTH SCULPIN	464	2.45%
BERING SKATE	54	0.28%
ROCK SOLE	61	0.32%
Grand Total	18,943	
Halibut	590.4	3.12%

Jan 25 2017 Cod	Sum Extrap Wt (Kg)	
FLATHEAD SOLE	82	1.58%
PACIFIC COD	4,825	93.22%
POLLOCK	4	0.07%
REX SOLE	25	0.48%
ARROWTOOTH FLOUNDER	87	1.68%
BIG SKATE	106	2.05%
SOUTHERN ROCK SOLE	19	0.36%
GREAT SCULPIN	26	0.50%
ALASKA PLAICE	3	0.06%
Grand Total	5,176	
Halibut	220	4.25%

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Exhibit C – Co-op Agreement for decreasing Bycatch

From: agdb [agdb@gci.net]
Sent: Friday, February 03, 2017 1:20 PM
To: Julie Bonney
Subject: Better Practices Protocols BSAI CV cod trawl

Kodiak trawl fleet:

With the increase in Kodiak Gulf trawl boats participating in the Bering CV cod trawl fishery, some AFA Bering Sea cod trawl participants have requested that AGDB inform the Kodiak vessels about the best practices adopted by the AFA shoreside co-ops with the hopes that that Kodiak vessels will work towards the same end. See below:

Better Practices Protocols – in brief

1. Halibut Excluder. Each Coop member Vessel shall use a halibut excluder bycatch reduction device (BRD) on every cod trawl tow. The halibut BRD used must, at a minimum, be constructed and installed in a manner similar to halibut BRD devices that are generally recognized by Coop members as effective for reducing halibut bycatch. However, this provision is not intended to prohibit or restrict the development and implementation of new halibut BRDs, provided that there is a reasonable expectation of increased halibut bycatch reduction through their use.
2. No Night Fishing. Coop member Vessels shall not fish for cod during the period of the night beginning two (2) hours after sunset and ending two (2) hours prior to sunrise.
3. Minimum Codend Mesh Size. Member Vessels use codends in the BS cod fishery constructed of mesh no smaller than 7 inches, as determined by between-knot measure.
4. Enforcement of Better Practices Protocols and Damages for Breach. In the event that a Coop Board of Directors determines that one of its member Vessels has failed to comply with one or more of the protocols set forth above, the Board of Directors may assess liquidated damages in an amount not to exceed Five Thousand Dollars (\$5,000.00) for each violation.

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November 29, 2017

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Agenda Item D1 Western GOA Pacific Cod A Season start date

Dear Sir,

My name is Joe Puratich and I own and operate a 58' trawler in the Western Gulf. I am opposed to changing the start date for trawling in the Western Gulf. If the start date was delayed in the Western Gulf only, there is a very strong possibility that when the Gulf did open that the quota in the Bering Sea would be nearly caught and that some of those boats would enter the Western Gulf fishery, shortening the season for the boats that regularly fish the Gulf. To some degree that happened in 2017. A uniform starting date in all areas is the only fair solution.

Sincerely,

Joseph Puratich
F/V Marauder
Owner/Operator



NPFMC comments - NOAA Service Account <npfmc.comments@noaa.gov>

Agenda Items D1-D3

1 message

Mike Galligan <mikegalligan@icloud.com>
To: npfmc.comments@noaa.gov

Wed, Nov 29, 2017 at 3:20 PM

Dear Council,

My name is Michael H Galligan. I have been on the back deck, as crew, of a top 5% 58' trawl/Seine vessel in the Western Gulf Cod/Pollock fisheries for over the past 29 years. I have also, at times, filled in as an interim operator and am now in the process of purchasing the vessel I have been on with two other crew members who have also been on this boat for the past ten years.

Being on the back deck of one of these "58's" has given me a "boots on the deck" first hand perspective of the evolutionary changes of these Fisheries over the past 29 years. You will find, in many ways, my opinion may differ to that of many owner/operators based on my "boots on the deck" perspective -vs- the "bottom line" perspective of an owner on many of these issues from bycatch to the observer program and all points in between.

I'll keep this short and get to the topics at hand, 1) changing the WGOA Trawl Cod start date, 2) adjusting Pollock quotas of A-D and 3) Trip Limits.

1) COD TRAWL START DATE

I see no reason to change the historic start date of Western GOA Trawl Cod from Jan 20 to Feb 15. I believe the motivation of such a change, by many, is hiding behind making it an issue of bycatch -vs- their attempt to limit the Trawl catch while they "chose" to harvest Cod using Pots or, as is often the case, "chose" to stand down because they are simply not as competitive. This is then more of an attempt in the reallocation of quota than it is a bycatch issue.

To survive in these Fisheries today, WE need to have the ability to simply "adapt to changes in the environment" I have witnessed, first hand, the positive results of using excluders both for immature halibut/assorted flats and salmon in the midwater fishery. And, in worse cases, even moving away from areas of high abundance of bycatch. Bottom line. Excluders work. Frankly, I'm surprised they are not a requirement, IF...this is really such an issue...why are they NOT is the more pertinent question? This is more of a move to limit the competitiveness of the top producing trawlers...who have successfully adapted their abilities to avoid unnecessary bycatch ...by those that fail to take those same proven steps and chose to either fish Cod with Pots or simply stand down until the spawning biomass appears in greater numbers...which also does NOT necessarily conform to a set date of February 15 but, can vary greatly from year to year as Moon, Tide, and Ocean Conditions such as water temperatures dictate.

A 26 day shift in the Trawl Cod Start Date has no rational purpose in managing the cod fishery other than limiting the ability of the top producers for the benefit(?) of those that "chose" to not participate anyway and, most of them historically switch away from trawling back to State Water pots before the Trawl quota is even caught.

Moving the Start Date back will also have the possible effect of increasing the catch effort as the timing will most likely allow the trawlers finishing the Bering Sea Trawl fishery to jump into the mix as they have the last couple years.

The current start date of January 20 has been working fine for over 25 years. The problem...if bycatch is the real issue...is those individuals that have the inability to adapt to changes in the efficiency of avoiding bycatch, NOT the Start Date.

2) ADJUSTING POLLOCK QUOTAS FROM "C/D" to "A/B"

Again, I understand it is being promoted that Immature Chinook Salmon bycatch is another main reason for this requested shift.

And again, it is being made by those that have the inability to adapt to changes in the efficiency of using methods to avoid significant bycatch. I even heard it said, by the assistant director at the most recent AEB meeting, that "small boats can not use excluders." That is NOT the case. It's that many small boats chose to NOT use excluders or take steps to move away from areas of high concentrations of salmon bycatch. Adjusting the quarterly quotas is another unnecessary step and another attempt to manipulate the efficient catch rate of those who take the necessary steps to avoid bycatch, by those who fail to do so. This is unacceptable.

"C&D" season have recently been the most productive quarters....for those that chose to participate.

Also...With future reductions in stock assessments. Would harvesting more Pollock during the spawning phase of A&B season be counter productive?

3) REDUCTION OF CATCH LIMITS

Are you beginning to see a pattern here?? It seems all of these agenda items are continued attempts by a few individuals

December 2017

to limit the success of those that have adapted to changes in the evolution of these Fisheries. The Western Gulf Fleet is comprised of only about 20-25 58' vessels...myself included. The majority of these boats pack far less than 300,000lbs. There are 70 some Western Gulf LLPs so, there are a number of boats capable of packing 300,000 lbs, in fact that's a majority. Even though I personally can NOT pack 300 I do NOT see the logic behind limiting the ability to do so. Processors may find it inefficient to operate at this new limited capacity and could be actually forced to discontinue. Again, this current 2017 C&D the majority of the fleet "chose" to NOT participate or take the necessary steps to avoid bycatch by using excluders or moving to areas of less bycatch abundance...but instead...another attempt to Limit "those who have the ability to adapt to changes in their environment"...which by the way, is Charles Darwin's definition of "Species Survival".

In summary, I personally feel it is the job of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council to manage this Constitutional National Resource for ALL the citizens of the United States of America...NOT just a few who seem to actually put more effort into limiting the success of those who continue to successfully adapt to the continuous evolutionary changes of these modern Fisheries.

Thank you for your time and effort. I applaud you for the job you all do in dealing with so many issues, and the diversity of this user group. It's a daunting task, again Thank you!

P.S.

Please excuse this Rant...but...Don't even get me started on salmon bycatch. It's a documented fact WE kill thousands more immature chinook salmon with Purse Seines than we ever have with a bottom or mid water Trawl. I have personally been "shhhhhh'd" by more than one fisherman for even bringing up the "dead elephant under the carpet" issue. The disparity between Fisheries is alarming when there are multiple totes of immature chinook on the dock while a daily offload of salmon occurs...meanwhile offloading Groundfish there is simply one tote with a lock on it?? I understand the politics involved but, that infuriates me AND I both Seine and Trawl.

Michael Galligan
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