



Fish News

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Report from the October Meeting of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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Gulf of Alaska Pacific cod sector split



Final action on the Pacific cod sector split will occur during the NPFMC's December meeting in Anchorage, scheduled for Dec. 7 - 15, 2009

The proposed sector split would allocate the Western and Central GOA Pacific cod TACs among the various gear and operation types. Final action is scheduled for the December meeting in Anchorage (Dec. 7 - 15, 2009). The reason to allocate among the sectors is to eliminate uncertainty and provide some stability to the participants.

The Western and Central Gulf will be managed separately and the allocations will depend primarily on a sector's history in each area. Factors other than history may be considered -- such as bycatch, catch monitoring, social objectives and

conservation.

Defining the sectors is one step and deciding what percentage to assign each sector is the next. Choices include whether to divide a gear group by vessel size. For example, should

the pot sector be divided based on a vessel length of over or under 60 feet? The pot sector averages around 40% of the TAC. If the pot sector were to be divided, the large, over 60' sector and the small, less than 60' sector would come close to splitting the catch evenly. Some folks have said they would prefer the certainty of a share for small boats while others would rather compete for the entire allocation.



Pacific cod

Another example in the trawl sector may result in a different decision. The large trawl vessels take a relatively small share of the catch while the small vessels take a much larger percentage. Depending on which years are chosen, the large vessels range from 3.4% to 14.1 %, while the smaller vessels range from 21.4% to 32.9%.

The choice of years is also a significant feature of the decision. For the trawl gear, the earlier years would be better as they caught a higher percentage of the cod TAC, while the pot sector had larger numbers in recent years. The choices range from 1995 to 2008 with different sets of years to consider as options.

One of the concerns I have expressed is the potential for a significant portion of the TAC to be allocated to catcher processors. The concern I have is the lack of contributions to the local communities on the part of vessels that catch and process the fish on board. The communities receive much less tax revenue and little support for the harbor, local economy, fishermen or processors.

Sideboards would still be in effect for the non-AFA crab sideboard vessels. Sideboards may or may not be in effect for the AFA non-exempt vessels, depending on whether the trawl CV sector gets divided into over-and under-60' sectors. If the large boats have their own sector, the sideboards will not be in effect because their TAC will be lower than the sideboard limit. If the large and small boats combine into one sector, the limits would apply.

There are other important features in the proposal, including:

- Allocation to a jig fishery that could increase over time.
- What happens to rollover or a sector's unharvested allocation?
- How is bycatch allocated?
- Should mother ships or floating processors be allowed?
- What will happen in the parallel waters?

Other issues at the council meeting included:

- An update on NMFS's proposed implementation plan for a new observer program. The general idea would be to expand coverage to include vessels less than 60' which are now exempt from observer requirements. In addition, the plan

would charge fees for all fishermen and then assign observers at no additional cost. Management of the fisheries would be more efficient with better information. Under the current system, information is often non-existent due to a lack of observer information.

- Redesign of the Kodiak rockfish pilot program. The original program included processor linkage requirements which are no longer available according to NOAA general counsel (the federal lawyers who advise the agency and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council). Options still available include IFQs for fishermen and Processors. In addition, it sounds like there is support for a Kodiak delivery requirement.
- Crab issues included the Western Alaska Golden King crab (WAG) delivery requirements. The concern is that Adak Fisheries, the lone shore processing plant in the western Aleutians, may not reopen to buy crab. The plant filed for bankruptcy on September 11, 2009. Typically, there are no floaters in the area. A proposal was submitted for relief from the regional delivery requirement.
- The eastern Bering Sea snow crab is under a rebuilding plan. Even though the Mature Male Biomass (MMB) has gone from 146 million pounds in 2002 to an estimated 251 million pounds, next year's rebuilding plan requirements have not been met. A reduced harvest level is being recommended by NMFS.
- Permit fees for some fisheries were proposed by NMFS and approved by the council.
- Chinook salmon bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska remains at the discussion level, probably until better observer data are available. Tanner crab bycatch in the Kodiak Trawl fisheries is being looked at and may result in some area closures.



NMFS is recommending a reduced harvest level for the eastern Bering Sea snow crab.

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