



Fish News

Sept. 10, 2012

AEB Fishermen Gear Up for Major Issues at Council, BOF Meetings



Several issues were discussed at an AEB fishermen's meeting in Sand Point and King Cove recently, including rationalization, the observer program and the WASSIP genetic studies.

AEB Fishermen met recently in Sand Point and King Cove to discuss several hot button issues that are expected to have major impacts on Area M in the future, including groundfish rationalization, the observer program, the WASSIP genetic studies and the Alaska Board of Fisheries proposals. AEB Natural Resources Director Ernie Weiss and Fisheries Consultant Sam Cotten led the meetings, which took place on Aug. 21st in Sand Point and Aug. 22nd in King Cove.

Central Gulf of Alaska trawl bycatch tools discussion is on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC or Council) Meeting Agenda in October 2012, and is expected to prompt calls for **Groundfish Rationalization**. However, any new program isn't expected to be finalized until at least three years from now. In the meantime, there

are many unknowns about the proposed program, and fishermen have the opportunity to examine a variety of options. The question for fishermen to examine is which tools are needed in order to obtain optimum yield while avoiding bycatch.

Fishermen in Sand Point and King Cove discussed several possible ways to protect the communities if the rationalization program is inevitable, including forming co-ops and transferability of bycatch. In the case of co-ops, boat owners would be allowed to have first right of refusal and the ability to lease out their quota share. Those who lease out their share would share in the profit and the burden with all the boats in the community that are 58 feet and under. But there are challenges.



Fishermen in King Cove and Sand Point discussed several possible ways to protect the communities if the proposed rationalization program is inevitable.

“What about lease rates?” Sam asked the group during the Sand Point meeting. “Should the government establish limits on lease rates? That’s an issue that’s come up. The whole problem with rationalization is it creates a false economic basis. For example, other programs have had price controls, sideboards and the need for community protection measures.”

Another idea mentioned was issuing individual bycatch quotas, which would provide individual accountability. However, if more than one fisherman delivers to the same tender, it’s difficult to tell who the fish belong to.



Sam explained that Council staff recently released a paper on rationalization which discusses several programs in effect around the country.

Other concerns include what might happen if the Central Gulf is rationalized and the Western Gulf remains the same. In that case, some fishermen worry that the Western Gulf could become the dumping ground for all of the other boats. Sam and Ernie plan to look into how to protect one area if it doesn’t participate in the rationalization program.

Sam explained that Council staff recently released a paper on rationalization which discusses several programs that are in effect around the country. This would give fishermen an opportunity to examine

other models to see what might work best in Alaska.

Fishermen also discussed a committee formed by Kodiak whitefish trawlers and processors. The committee plans to come up with a plan to present to the Council in October.

Sand Point Mayor Martin Gundersen said it's important to understand how to harness the rationalization program if it does come into play. He suggested establishing a committee within the Aleutians East Borough communities.



Several fishermen expressed concerns that if small boat fleets don't survive, communities won't survive.

"We don't want to see a community die because someone, who owns a large quota, leases it out, and all of the people in the community suffer," Mayor Gundersen said.

"People tend to automatically associate the term *rationalization* with *quotas*, like with the halibut or crab program. But you can prevent consolidation," Sam explained. "There are several different ways to design it. If it's going to happen, I know that Ernie and I are going to work towards making sure it doesn't harm the communities."

Several fishermen expressed concerns that if small boat fleets don't survive, communities won't survive. Many are also concerned about how the proposed program would affect the next generation of fishermen. Overall, no one at the meetings said they favor rationalization. But all expressed the need to protect the traditional fleets and the communities. The overall goal of rationalization is to avoid bycatch while still obtaining optimum yield.

Sam mentioned that another tool to deal with prohibited species catch (PSC) might be to reconsider the season dates. That would allow fishermen to fish when bycatch numbers are low and target species are aggregated.

"We were shut down the last time we tried this," said Sam, "But this is a new arena."



Sam mentioned that another tool to deal with PSC might be to reconsider the season dates.

The Observer Program is another major issue on the horizon. Currently boats between 58 and 125 feet are required to have 30 percent of their trips observed. NMFS hopes to have 30 percent coverage under the new program, which goes into effect January 1, 2013, and includes boats 40 feet and above. NMFS will determine who will take an observer and for how long. The government will pay for the program during the first year. After that, fishermen will pay 1.2 percent of their gross on observed fisheries. The government's plan will be to classify boats by size in order to get a representative sample.



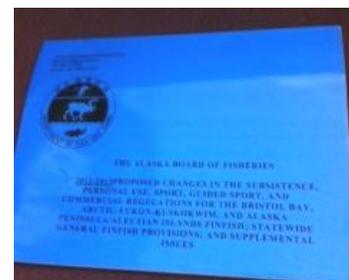
NMFS is expected to announce soon that some of the allocation in the trawl sector's B season will be rolled over to catcher vessels in the jig, longliner and pot fleet.

An announcement regarding the Groundfish Sector Split, which began earlier this year, is expected to be released soon. This topic was also discussed during the meetings. The trawl sector received the bulk of their allocation during the A season. However, some allocation in the B season may not be harvested due to PSC limits being hit. Therefore, at some point, the National Marine Fisheries Service is going to roll over the unharvested allocation to catcher vessels in the jig, longliner and pot

fleet. This will be the first time that this has ever happened.

Pacific Ocean Perch (POP) is a potential problem for pollock fishermen. Sam said after talking to officials in Juneau, he was asked to remind people that POP could pose serious issues for the pollock fishery. Currently, there's no limit on POP. But when it hits the over fishing limit (OLF), fishermen have to stop fishing. Officials with ADF&G said in the recent past, it has been very close to the OFL. Therefore, it's important to avoid them to prevent the pollock fishery from being shut down.

The Board of Fisheries (BOF) Proposals were also discussed during the meetings. The **meetings for the Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian Islands Finfish** are scheduled for **February 26 – March 3, 2013 at the Sheraton Hotel in Anchorage.** Sam and Ernie said there are several proposals from northern areas that would oppose Area M, including some that would reduce fishing time, establish a chum cap and require gillnets to be smaller.



Board of Fish meetings for the Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian Islands Finfish are scheduled for Feb. 26 – March 3, 2013 at the Sheraton in Anchorage.

The work session is scheduled for October 9 – 11, 2012 at the Egan Civic & Convention Center in Anchorage. Topics include Agenda Change Requests (ACRs), cycle organization and stocks of concern.



The Borough doesn't plan to take a position on BOF proposals where AEB fishermen are divided. However, the AEB will take a position on any proposals that attempt to shut down the June fishery.

Ernie mentioned that the Borough isn't planning to take a position on proposals where AEB fishermen are divided. However, the Borough will take a position on any proposals that attempt to shut down the June fishery.

Some fishermen mentioned that maintaining the status quo for the June fishery should be a huge priority for the Borough and the communities.

Several fishermen expressed concerns that the AK Peninsula/AI Finfish Meetings (Feb. 26 – March 3, 2013) happen at a bad time because they occur right in the middle of the cod fishery and Area M wouldn't have full representation. Ernie suggested that this could be an opportunity to put in an Agenda Change Request (ACR) because of this issue. (It was submitted.) **The deadline for comment on ACRs is Sept. 25, 2012.**

There are three proposals on cod. One of them was submitted by the King Cove Advisory Committee (AC), another by the False Pass AC and a third by a group from Sand Point. Another issue would move more fish into state waters and takes them out of the rationalized fishery.

Sam explained that he and Ernie have invited all of the Board of Fisheries members to the AEB communities through the executive director. The goal is to allow board members who have never visited the area before to familiarize themselves with the fisheries and the issues within the communities.

Fishermen in both communities expressed frustration over the July fishing schedule. Several proposals to the Fish Board address those concerns. One of the proposals calls for the same amount of hours but rearranged in a way to make it more convenient and cost-effective for fishermen.

The final draft of WASSIP (Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Project) is expected to be completed by the end of this month. An initial presentation of the data will be provided during the BOF workshop Oct. 9 – 11, 2012.

Upcoming Fish Meetings:

- Oct. 9 – 11, 2012 – Egan Civic & Convention Center, Anchorage – BOF Work Session
- Oct. 3 - 9, 2012 – Anchorage Hilton, North Pacific Fishery Management Council - [NPFMC October 2012 Meeting Agenda](#)
- Nov. 27, 2012 – 9 a.m. – noon - Silver Cloud Inn, Seattle – AEB Fishermen’s Meeting
- Feb. 26, March 3, 2013 – Anchorage Sheraton Hotel – BOF – Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian Islands Finfish

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