



Fish News

Dec. 15, 2011

News in brief from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council:

If you weren't able to make it out to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC or Council) in Anchorage recently (Dec. 7 - 13, 2011), here's a brief rundown of what happened:

- The Council set the 2012 total allowable catch (TAC) for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands groundfish:
 - Eastern Bering Sea pollock: 1,200,000 tons. A decrease of 4.2% from 2011.
 - Pacific cod: 261,000 metric tons. A 14.5 % increase from 2011.
 - Yellowfin sole: 202,000 metric tons. A 3.1 % increase from 2011.
 - Atka mackerel: 50,763 metric tons. A 4.4% decrease from 2011.
 - Pacific ocean perch: 24,700 metric tons. No change from 2011.
 - Sablefish: 4,280 metric tons. A 9.9% decrease from 2011.

- The Council set the 2012 TAC for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish:
 - Pollock: 116,444 metric tons. A 21% increase from 2011.
 - Pacific cod: 65,700 metric tons. A .9 % increase from 2011.
 - Pacific ocean perch: 16,918 metric tons. A .5% decrease from 2011.
 - Sablefish: 12,960 metric tons. A 14.8% increase from 2011.

- The Council set the 2012 TAC for the Western Gulf:
 - Federal fishery: Pacific cod: 21,024 metric tons.
 - State - waters GHL: Pacific cod: approximately 15.4 million pounds.
- The NPFMC postponed discussion on possible changes to GOA Pacific Cod A season opening dates until April. There's a potential conflict any time a change of season is proposed. Currently, pot cod fishing opens up January 1st. Tanner crab fishing opens up on January 15th. Fishermen who also want to go crab fishing can't go pot cod fishing because regulations don't allow them to have pots in the water two weeks before the crab season. If they wait until after the crab season is over, they've found that a lot of the cod is gone. Those in favor of changing the season dates would like it so local fishermen can do both - crab and cod pot fishing. Others prefer the status quo, which would result in fewer people participating in the crab fishery. Trawlers would prefer to wait because the fish don't school up until later. They would rather not waste their time and fuel chasing fish that aren't schooled up yet. But other potential conflicts could arise. For example, fishing representatives from the Central Gulf have expressed concerns that a later trawl opening in the Western Gulf would present an opportunity for Western Gulf trawlers to fish the Central Gulf early. In any case, all fishermen and industry representatives are expected to have their say in front of the Council in April.
- GOA Chinook salmon bycatch for all trawl fisheries was also postponed, most likely until the February 2012 meeting in Seattle. The Council has established a limit on Chinook bycatch in the pollock trawl fishery. This proposal would address the non-pollock fisheries such as arrowtooth flounder, shallow water flatfish and Pacific cod. Representatives from the Central Gulf (Kodiak) trawlers have proposed a rationalization program for GOA trawl fisheries as a way to reduce bycatch. Arguments in favor include ending the race for fish, which in turn, would allow fishermen a better ability to avoid bycatch. Rationalization opponents believe negative impacts on communities would result from consolidation and a decrease in economic activity. Experience with the crab ratz program has shown job losses and the ability of the owners of the fishing rights (IFQ holders) to lease the rights for as much as 65+%. If the same leasing were to be allowed in the trawl fisheries, an IFQ holder could live outside the community and enjoy a large percentage of the fishing revenue while the boat owner and crew would have to share the remaining smaller percentage. The AP recommended moving ahead (11-8 vote) with a catch share program and appointing a stakeholder committee to develop alternatives and options. A minority report suggested a separate effort on ratz while moving ahead with the Chinook bycatch on its own. Stay tuned.
- The Council heard BSAI crab stakeholder reports. Part of that includes ROFR (right of first refusal) by communities to purchase processor quota shares (PQS) for crab that would otherwise be sold to an entity outside of the community. A

proposal in front of the Council would improve notice so that if a community has the right to purchase PQS, they will have enough notice to do so. This issue could come back to the Council as early as February. Otherwise, it's expected to be on the agenda in April.

- The Council voted to re-appoint Ernie Weiss to the Advisory Panel. The term for his seat was due to expire at the end of this year. Ernie became an A.P. member when Beth Stewart, former AEB Natural Resources Director, retired in September. Ernie's new term expires in December 2014. The Council also reappointed all of the other A.P. members. In addition, the NPFMC added a one-year term halibut charter seat to the A.P.

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