



NPFMC Completes Virtual June 2020 Meeting

By Ernie Weiss, Aleutians East Borough Natural Resources Director

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council completed their very first virtual special meeting in May to address some IFQ issues. On June 10th, the Council completed the first virtual full Council meeting, including both the Science & Statistical Committee (SSC) and the Advisory Panel (AP). Council members, staff and public interacted by phone and online using Adobe Connect during this abbreviated meeting. The April 2020 meetings of the Council, the SSC and the AP were cancelled due to COVID-19 concerns.

The Council adopted overfishing limits (OFL) and acceptable biological catch (ABC) levels for scallops, and OFLs and ABCs for 3 crab stocks as recommended by the SSC. Those crab stocks: Aleutian Island Golden King Crab, Pribilof Island Golden King Crab and Western Aleutian Island Red King Crab. The Council also adopted a rebuilding plan for St Matthew Blue King Crab as final action, with an option to allow the directed fishery to open, based on the State harvest strategy, while the stock is rebuilding.

The Council gave feedback and recommendations to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the observer deployment plan for 2020 and 2021 under COVID-19 conditions. Council priorities for the 2021 deployment plan are: 1) continuation of the trawl EM EFP; 2) integration of electronic monitoring into the overall monitoring of fixed gear; and 3) evaluation of different criteria to define the 'zero selection' pool to meet data needs and improve cost efficiency.

The Council moved the analysis on the Cook Inlet salmon fishery management plan (FMP) amendment forward. The Council is not moving the Cook Inlet Salmon Committee's recommended expanded scope of Alternative 2 forward for analysis. The Council thanked the Cook Inlet Salmon Committee for their work, since the committee has fulfilled their original purpose. Committee members can continue to provide input on the Cook Inlet Salmon FMP amendment through the normal public comment process.

The amendment is slated for final action at the December meeting to comply with a district court order.

The Staff Tasking (E) agenda item garnered 98 written comments, with most of the written comments in response to a petition for emergency rule by 3 trawler groups to increase the amount of eastern Bering Sea herring bycatch, in order to avoid triggering closing herring savings areas. The Council actually addressed this issue during the B agenda items, recommending NMFS use their in-season management authority to provide for a targeted reopening of Herring Savings Area 2, and/or potential closures from July 1 to August 15.

The Council passed a motion during Staff Tasking to recommend to the Chair and Executive Director, priorities for future agenda items, whether for a virtual or in-person meeting. Several items including crab and groundfish specification setting, the observer deployment plan, and initial review of the Cook Inlet Salmon FMP amendment, must be accomplished in October. Other items the Council recommended for the October agenda are the halibut abundance-based management analysis and final action on squid and sculpin product types. Additional items to be considered in the event of an in-person October meeting or as priority for the December meeting are Initial Review of the BSAI Pacific cod Trawl CV and the BSAI Pacific cod pot catcher processor rationalization packages.

The full recap of the June Council meeting can be found in the [NPFMC June 2020 Newsletter](#) when it is posted later this week.

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