
Alaska Groundfish Fisheries and Associated Investigations in 1987

*Prepared for the Twenty-Ninth Annual Meeting
of the Technical Subcommittee
of the
Canada-U.S. Groundfish Committee*

June 6-9 Monterey, California



Regional Information Report No. 1J88-48

Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Commercial Fisheries
Juneau, Alaska

June 1988

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Prepared by
Barry E. Bracken

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AGENDA ITEM VI. REVIEW OF AGENCY GROUND FISH PROGRAMS

United States

Alaska

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) groundfish program underwent considerable change again during 1987. The state groundfish budget, which was reduced substantially during 1986, was reinstated to near pre-1986 levels by July 1, 1987. The program funding was made up of a combination of state, federal aid matching, and federal contract funding. Much of the contract funding was for specific purposes and so the program objectives, particularly in the Central and Westward Regions, were redirected to a large extent.

Personnel levels were increased in both the Southeast and the Westward regions for the last half of 1987, but remained low in the Central Region. The Westward region was staffed with a project coordinator, a management biologist, and three observers in Kodiak as well as part-time support personnel in Dutch Harbor and Sand Point. The Central Region staff was reduced to a part-time data entry technician stationed in Homer for the purpose of entering groundfish fish tickets from landings in the Central Region. The Southeast Region was staffed with the project leader, an on-board observer, and a port sampler in Petersburg, an assistant project leader and a port sampler in Sitka, and a port sampler in Ketchikan. In addition, a state-wide groundfish information systems manager was hired and stationed in Juneau to set up and coordinate collection of catch data from the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off Alaska.

Southeast Region. The Southeast Region's groundfish project has responsibility for research and management of all groundfish resources in state waters of the Eastern Gulf of Alaska. The project also cooperates with the federal government for management of the waters of the adjacent EEZ. The project leader participates as a member of the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Plan Team and, with passage of amendment 14 to the Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Management Plan, the state has assumed management responsibility for shelf rockfish in both the federal and state managed waters of Southeast Alaska.

Project activities center around fisheries monitoring and in-season management of the groundfish resources based on data collected from the fisheries and from limited resource assessment surveys. Primary tasks include fish ticket collection, editing, and data entry for both state and federal managed fisheries; dockside sampling of sablefish and rockfish; skipper interview and logbook collection and data entry; and biological studies of important commercial species. Regulation development and review and information dissemination also require considerable staff time.

Fish tickets are collected from as many as fifteen ports which accept groundfish within the region. The fish tickets are edited, batched, and entered on microcomputers in Petersburg and Sitka. Because of the intensity of many of the region's groundfish fisheries, a "soft data" accounting system using processor contacts is also utilized when necessary to track landings prior to fish ticket data entry. State entry of fish tickets from the EEZ was resumed in June of 1987 as the result of a contract from the National Marine Fisheries Service to accomplish that task.

During 1987 port sampling efforts included sampling of rockfish landings in Sitka, Ketchikan, and Petersburg, and sampling of sablefish landings in Petersburg and Ketchikan. The rockfish landings were sampled primarily for species composition and biological data including length, weight, sex, and maturity of key species. Otoliths were also collected from predominant rockfish species in anticipation of funding for age reading which resumed early in 1988. The sablefish landings were sampled for length and weight data and age structures were collected from deliveries of round fish. Skipper interview and logbook programs were continued with increased effort during 1987. Skipper interview effort concentrated on the state managed sablefish and rockfish fisheries and logbook effort concentrated on the mandatory trawl logbook program. Both of these programs are designed to provide detailed location and effort information which, when coupled with the fish ticket data, provides an estimate of CPUE by management area for the landed catch. As in past years, a disproportionate amount of time was spent monitoring and developing regulations for the rapidly expanding nearshore rockfish fishery. A draft management plan was completed and more restrictive regulations were implemented in May 1987 resulting in the first closures ever for state-managed rockfish fisheries.

Besides the port sampling, biological studies during 1987 were limited to a rockfish abundance indexing survey conducted in the coastal waters off Sitka during July. Data from that study is still being analyzed and will be used to redesign the subsequent surveys in that area.

Rockfish sex and maturity data from port samples in Sitka was summarized and incorporated into a report on reproductive timing of nearshore rockfish which was published as an ADF&G Informational Leaflet.

Management activity during 1987 included the closure of both inside area sablefish fisheries after the shortest seasons on record, and the closure of three areas to flatfish trawling for conservation reasons. New regulations which went into effect during 1987 included establishment of groundfish management areas, setting of preliminary demersal shelf rockfish harvest limits for each of those areas and establishing a provision for the retention of demersal shelf rockfish of 10% by weight after the closure of the directed rockfish fishery.

Central Region. The Central Region groundfish project was effectively non-existent during 1987 with the exception of fish ticket data entry in the Homer office. Responsibility for management of the Prince William Sound sablefish fishery was absorbed by salmon and shellfish management personnel.

Management action in the Central region during 1987 was limited to the closure of the Prince William Sound sablefish fishery. The fishery opened on April 1 to coincide with the opening of the adjacent EEZ fishery and closed on June 25 after 86 days of fishing, four days longer than the 1986 season.

The fishery was marred by problems with Orcas and it was estimated that loss to the whales accounted for 9% of the total 93 t harvest.

Westward Region. The Westward Region groundfish program, which is centered out of Kodiak, concentrated on fulfilling fish ticket data entry and on-board observer contracts funded during 1987. The domestic annual production (DAP) harvest has increased exponentially over the past few years. The observer program, although grossly under-funded and under staffed, is expanding in an attempt to determine the bycatch rates of non-target species (crab salmon halibut) in those fisheries. The 1987 program consisted of 2-4 observers during peak fishing

periods. The observers, stationed at Kodiak and Dutch Harbor, concentrated on the shore-based component of the domestic fleet rather than the offshore catcher-processor component during 1987. Results of the 36 observer trips made during 1987 were publicized in ADF&G News Releases and summarized data was presented to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council.

Fish ticket data entry was more difficult during the start up of the NMFS contract because of the considerable amount of work needed to systematize state/federal data collection and reporting procedures. That problem was not unique to the Westward region and required considerable staff time state-wide.

The Westward Region groundfish program coordinator serves as a member of both the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea Groundfish Plan Teams and participates as an ADF&G representative to INPFC.

Headquarters. Headquarters participation in the groundfish program during 1987 was limited to NMFS contract supervision. The groundfish information systems manager hired to oversee collection and entry of catch data from the EEZ is stationed in the NMFS Alaska Region office in Juneau.

Sport Fish Division. The Division of Sport Fish has been conducting a state-wide angler survey in recent years to determine landings from recreational fisheries, including groundfish. In addition, detailed creel census programs are being conducted at major ports of landing in the southeast and southcentral areas of the state. The creel census forms have been modified to provide information from groundfish landings with emphasis on rockfish harvest. The Commercial Fisheries Groundfish staff has worked closely with creel census personnel to assist them with species identification and provide other information. Beginning in 1987 an eight fish per day bag limit was adopted for all species of rockfish in Sitka Sound and adjoining waters, the first such limit on recreational groundfish fisheries in the Southeastern area.

A limit of ten rockfish per day and ten in possession has been in effect in the Cook Inlet - Resurrection Bay salt water area since 1985. In 1987 a limit on lingcod of two per day and two in possession was also implemented for that area.

AGENDA ITEM VII. REVIEW OF NORTHEAST PACIFIC GROUND FISH FISHERIES

Canada-U.S. Fisheries

Commercial Fisheries

Alaska. The ADF&G groundfish staff began collecting groundfish catch data from the EEZ under contract by NMFS in July 1987. The data entry system used is, however, not yet programed to provide reliable catch data back to the area offices. Therefore, the ADF&G catch report is limited to the state-managed fisheries again for

1987. The report on DAP fisheries in the EEZ will be provided by the observer from the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council.

With the exception of shelf rockfish in the Southeastern area, which are managed by the state in the EEZ, groundfish management authority is restricted to waters within three miles of shore and to the internal waters of Southeastern Alaska, Yakutat Bay, and Prince William Sound. The catch data included with this report is presented accordingly.

Landings of all species increased 23% in the state managed fisheries from 3,681 t during 1986 to 4,526 t in 1986. The largest numeric increases were in the Pacific cod and lingcod landings which increased by 170% and 72% respectively over the 1986 harvest levels. Sablefish landings dominated the state-managed groundfish harvest again in 1987, but catches remained nearly the same as in 1986 because of regulations and harvest restrictions in that fishery.

Virtually all of the sablefish, rockfish, and Pacific cod landed from state waters were taken on setline gear, while most of the flatfish landed were taken by trawl gear. Small landings of these groundfish species were also made by troll and mechanical jigging machine fisheries, but represent an insignificant amount of the total state-managed groundfish landings.

One exception to the dominance of setline and trawl gear in the Alaskan groundfish fisheries is in the lingcod fishery where approximately 33% of the landings were by mechanical jigging machines and 8% were from troll gear. A large amount of the lingcod harvest reported as caught by mechanical jigging machines was actually taken by trollers using "dingle bar" gear licensed as jigging machines.

Recreational Fisheries

Alaska. Estimates of recreational groundfish harvests are not yet available for 1987. The state-wide angler survey indicated that 101,258 rockfish and 81,351 other groundfish were retained from the recreational fisheries in Alaska in 1986. Assuming a five pound average for rockfish, these data indicate that approximately 230 t of rockfish were retained. Creel census data in Southeast ports indicates that discard of rockfish exceeds the retained portion of the catch suggesting that over 500 t of rockfish were taken in the recreational fisheries statewide.

No data is available to determine the species composition of the "other groundfish". It is assumed, however, that lingcod, Pacific cod, and flat fish are the predominant species taken. It should be noted that the discard rate on other groundfish also likely exceeds the retained portion of the total harvest.

The ADF&G is attempting to obtain better data on recreational fisheries and has requested funding to determine the landings from the steadily increasing charter boat fleet.

AGENDA ITEM VIII. GROUND FISH RESEARCH

Stock Assessment

Rockfish

A two-week relative abundance indexing survey was conducted to assess condition of rockfish stocks off the coast of Kruzof and Baranof Islands during July 1987. That is the first year of a five-year study to determine rockfish abundance trends and to obtain biological information on rockfish independent of the commercial fishery. Data analysis is continuing and a trip report is available upon request.

Related Studies

Other

Sex and maturity data were recorded from port samples taken in the Sitka area rockfish fishery. Analysis of data collected over a three year period indicates that reproductive timing for nearshore rockfish may not occur later in the year than in more southerly areas as previously reported. A report on reproductive timing of Sebastes rockfishes in Alaskan waters was published as an informational leaflet.

Work is also continuing on sablefish and rockfish age/growth studies although no results were published during 1987. Age structures collected from rockfish and sablefish fisheries and from the rockfish survey were sent to Kodiak for reading and aging work which commenced early in 1988.

REPORTS COMPLETED DURING 1987

1. Bracken, B. E. and V.M. O'Connell. 1987. Condition of shelf rockfish stocks in the Gulf of Alaska as assessed in 1987. Unpub. Manuscript ADF&G, Box 667, Petersburg, AK. 99833. 22p.
2. Bracken, B.E., and V.M. O'Connell. 1987. Other rockfish. In R. Major (editor), Condition of groundfish resources in the Gulf of Alaska region as assessed in 1986. NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS F/NWC - 119. pp. 169-180.
3. Bracken, B.E., and V.M. O'Connell. 1987. Southeast Alaska rockfish management plan. Unpub. Manuscript ADF&G, Box 667, Petersburg, AK. 99833. 21p.
4. Kramer, D. E. and V. M. O'Connell. 1986. Guide to the Northeast Pacific rockfishes genera Sebastes and Sebastolobus. U. of Alaska Marine Advisory Bull. No. 25. 78 p.
5. O'Connell, V. M. 1987. Reproductive seasons for some Sebastes species in Southeastern Alaska. AK. Dept. of Fish and Game Info. Leaflet No. 263. 21p.

NOTE: Reports number 1 and number 3 above were subsequently published as Regional Informational Reports.

Table 1. Total groundfish landings (t) from State of Alaska managed fisheries in 1985 and 1986 by major species group.

Species	1986	1987	Percent Change
Sablefish	2,193	2,128	- 3%
P. O. Perch	-0-	-0-	-0-
Other Rockfish	930	1,254	+ 35%
Flatfish	237	405	+ 71%
Pacific Cod	191	515	+170%
Lingcod	130	224	+ 72%
Total	3,681	4,526	+ 23%

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

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