

# ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES

## Walleye Pollock Workgroup minutes

The workgroup met on February 18, 2015 at the Westmark Hotel in Anchorage, AK.

### 1. Introductions

#### Workgroup members present or in attendance by teleconference\*:

Sue Jeffrey, Co-Chair	Board of Fisheries - BOF
John Jensen, Co-Chair	Board of Fisheries
Tom Kluberton	Chairman, Board of Fisheries (attended)
Ed Dersham	North Pacific Fishery Management Council- NPFMC
Duncan Fields	North Pacific Fishery Management Council
Julie Bonney	CGOA trawl voluntary cooperative manager
Patrick O'Donnell	Trawl vessel owner/operator
Jason Chandler	Trawl vessel operator
Matt Hegge	Proposal author; Trawl vessel owner/operator
Raymond May	Kodiak purse seine
Beaver Nelson	Cook Inlet purse seine
Darius Kasperzak	Kodiak jig
John Gucer	Cook Inlet jig
Mitch Kilborn	CGOA large processor
Bill Fejes	CGOA small processor
Ernie Weiss	WGOA Community seat
Pat Branson	CGOA Community seat

#### Support staff:

Glenn Haight*, Taryn O'Conner Brito	ADF&G, Boards Support
Forrest Bowers, Karla Bush, Trent Hartill	ADF&G Headquarters
Nick Sagalkin, Wayne Donaldson, Mark Stichert	ADF&G Westward Region
Tracy Lingnau, Tim Baker, Jan Rumble	ADF&G Central Region
Sam Cunningham*	NPFMC staff

Members of the public: Henry Mitchell, Bob Kruger, Buck Laukitis, Chuck McCallum, Mike Flores, Jessie Nelson, BJ Summers, Karen O'Conner, Sinclair Wilt, Tim Schmidt, Heather McCarty\*.

### 2. General Comments on the purpose of the Workgroup.

Board member Jeffrey opened the meeting with a brief summary of past workgroup meetings; this is the final of three workgroup meetings. The purpose of this meeting is to hear from user groups on what a state-waters guideline harvest level (GHL) fishery could or would look like and what the pros/cons would be of creating a GHL pollock fishery. Past meetings were focused on learning about the federal pollock fishery, Council initiatives to restructure Gulf of Alaska (GOA) trawl fisheries for bycatch reduction, and how the existing state (parallel) fishery could be changed to dovetail with those efforts. At this meeting the hope is to focus on what a new state-waters GHL fishery could look like for the three gear groups considered (seine, jig, and pelagic trawl). Minutes of this meeting will be presented to full BOF in March.

### **3. Review of Proposal 44.**

Proposal 44 author Matt Hegge reiterated his reasoning for submitting the proposal: the BOF should coordinate with the Council if the federal GOA trawl fisheries are restructured.

- 4. Review ADF&G comments on Proposal 44.** Mark Stichert provided harvest data related to proposal 44. With the exception of the Prince William Sound (PWS) pollock pelagic trawl fishery, the state has not historically directly managed pollock fisheries and does not have a groundfish observer program, which may be necessary to monitor a trawl pollock GHL fishery. Staffing for and development of a groundfish observer program would be expensive. The department needs more direction on size, scope, scale, and purpose of an observer program before estimates of costs can be calculated.

Workgroup discussion points:

- Mark Stichert -State-waters pollock harvest in the South Alaska Peninsula was lower in 2013 and 2014; this could be due to a variety of factors including size and distribution of fish, bycatch, etc.
- Wayne Donaldson - Program costs for other state observer programs (crab and scallop) are paid for through federal funds and/or test fishing (cost-recovery). Vessel costs are paid either entirely by the vessel (100% coverage), through test-fishing, and/or federal funds.
- Forrest Bowers - The state's budget will be reduced in FY16, with further cuts expected in FY17.
- Tim Baker/Jan Rumble - There are no observer coverage requirements for the PWS pollock fishery. The fishery started after the oil spill and department staff were deployed as observers in the early years when there were only a few vessels participating. Bycatch limits for this pollock fishery were developed based on survey and observer data and are PWS-specific. Bycatch composition is likely area-specific for other regions of the GOA as well.
- Wayne Donaldson - The department has concerns about fishery bycatch and would like to have more observer information for the PWS fishery, but is constrained financially. A new fishery could not be supported with existing staff.

### **5. Update on seine and jig gear test fisheries in Kodiak.**

Seine gear:

Mark Stichert reviewed development of a commissioner's permit for the test fishery in 2014. ADF&G advertised the test seine fishery through a News Release and provided the opportunity outside the salmon season. No one applied for the commissioner's permit.

Workgroup discussion points:

- Raymond May –
  - Lack of participation was due to timing of other fisheries that were going on; the salmon season extended into September 2014.
  - A herring seine, or other custom-made seine, would be necessary for this fishery and it is difficult to make that investment if there is no assurance there will be a fishery.

- Mark Stichert - The department can issue permits and could continue to do so if the BOF felt that the information is useful. However, ADF&G would need to continue to coordinate with NMFS on harvest amounts that would be available for a test fishery.

Jig gear:

Mark Stichert provided an overview of jig effort. Permits were issued that ran concurrent with the state-waters Pacific cod jig fishery in 2014. Forty-six vessels were issued permits and 42 made landings. Total catch was 33,000 pounds; average landing per vessel was 245 pounds. Existing regulations allow pollock to be retained at a rate equal to 20% of the Pacific cod onboard. Only one vessel retained over the 20% incidental catch allowance (as authorized by the permit).

Workgroup discussion points:

- Mark Stichert –
  - In 2014, the state-waters Pacific cod jig fishery opened on March 15 and remained open throughout the year. Total pollock catch by jig gear in 2014 was ~36,000 pounds.
  - From 2004-2013, the average pollock harvest by jig vessels was ~10,000 pounds. During the past five years harvest has averaged ~15,000 pounds.
- Darius Kasperzak - The jig fleet is trying to recover from 2013 when the available Pacific cod biomass and price were low. Last year some boats started getting back into the cod fishery and numbers of vessels in the fleet is picking up. Effort in the Pacific cod fishery was low in 2014; the best opportunity for pollock was in June and vessels were targeting black rockfish during that time.
- Julie Bonney - Jig gear is currently an allowable gear type for pollock in the federal and state parallel fisheries. The federal pollock fishery opens annually for fixed gear on Jan. 1, this year it will likely be open until April. The fixed gear season opens again on Aug. 25 and is usually open until Nov. 1.
- Mark Stichert - The department has authority to issue commissioner's permits for jig gear again in 2015 and is looking for BOF feedback on whether the information collected under the permits would be useful. Commissioner permits are authorized for state-waters only and the 2014 permits were tied to the state-waters Pacific cod fishery because it also only occurs in state waters. The state-managed black rockfish fisheries occur in both state and federal waters and having different rules for incidental catch allowances complicates management and enforcement.
- Julie Bonney - The Council could create a pollock jig opportunity that could be fished from zero to 200 miles.
- Darius Kasperzak - The jig fleet is interested in having a pollock fishery opportunity when the federal season is closed (summer months). The fish are shallower, easier to catch during this time, and larger fish are found inside bays. In general, the jig fleet is more comfortable with state-managed fisheries since most participate in state-waters Pacific cod and black rockfish fisheries.
- Mitch Kilborn - The current dock price in Kodiak for Pacific cod is \$0.35 for bled fish and pollock is \$0.11 per pound.

- 6. Update on seine gear test fisheries in Cook Inlet.** Jan Rumble provided an overview of test fisheries in Cook Inlet. A total of five commissioner's permits were made available in Dec. 2014 with a maximum combined harvest of 220,000 pounds; four permits were issued. Provisions were similar to the Kodiak permits and had a 10,000-pound trip limit. Logbooks and department staff as observers were required to account for harvest and bycatch. The department received comments from the Homer Advisory Committee; these comments centered primarily on concerns for Chinook salmon due to the robust winter Chinook sport fishery in the area. Two vessels participated and harvested a total of approximately 32,000 pounds of pollock. Forty-five Chinook salmon were caught as bycatch with two obvious mortalities. Herring seine nets were used and participants thought that deeper nets would have been more successful. They tried fishing at different times of day; fishing during the day seemed better than fishing at night. They tried several markets; the fish were too small for a filet market and the bait market targets fish smaller than 15 inches. Overall harvest rates were low (likely due to gear; a deeper seine may be needed) and markets were not robust. Salmon were dipped out of the seines and released alive. Staff time and resources were significant and are likely unsustainable under the current conditions.

Workgroup discussion points:

- Beaver Nelson - A workgroup member estimated that approximately 20% of the pollock that were caught with the seine gear that was tested were suitable for the bait market.
  - Jan Rumble - Chinook salmon bycatch was predominantly smaller fish in the 2 – 3 pound range; same size as the pollock. No genetic samples were taken.
  - Julie Bonney –
    - Genetic sampling results from Chinook salmon caught as bycatch in the CGOA federal trawl fisheries show that ~96% of the bycatch is comprised from British Columbia, West Coast U.S., and Coastal Southeast Alaska stocks<sup>1</sup>.
    - The CGOA pollock fishery cap for Chinook salmon is 18,300 fish. In order for the fleet to stay within this hard cap, vessels cannot catch more than 20 Chinook salmon per 300,000 pounds of pollock. The extrapolated Chinook salmon bycatch from the Commissioner's permit is ~420 Chinook per 300,000 pounds of pollock.
- 7. Pollock workgroup scope expansion.** The scope of the pollock workgroup was expanded to include representation from the WGOA after the first meeting in April 2014. The draft state-water GHL management plan requested by the workgroup co-chairs includes all areas of the GOA.

a. Western GOA:

Ernie Weiss on behalf of King Cove and Sand Point – Fishermen are concerned about a requirement for 100% observer coverage. They support electronic monitoring (EM) as a cost-savings method to collect data necessary for harvest and bycatch monitoring. The Aleutians East Borough has commissioned a socio-economic study to help understand the impacts of the

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<sup>1</sup> Genetic stock composition analysis of Chinook salmon taken in Gulf of Alaska trawl fisheries can be found on the Alaska Fisheries Science Center's publication page for Technical Memorandums: <http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/Publications/techmemos.htm>

Council's proposed trawl bycatch reduction package. Most vessels in the King Cove and Sand Point fleet are less than 58 feet in length.

Chuck McCallum on behalf of Chignik – Fishermen are listening to this conversation on pollock, but have not formed a consensus position. Chignik doesn't currently have a land-based processor, and when they did, very little groundfish was processed. There is interest in diversifying fisheries and concern that locals may get closed out because of limited processing.

Workgroup discussion points:

- Duncan Fields - Steller sea lion (SSL) closures disproportionately affect the Chignik Area. Part of the discussion should include whether the state wants to go along with existing closures, or have further discussions with NMFS Protected Resources Division.
- Chuck McCallum - Some of the fleet has seen SSL closures as a benefit by keeping trawlers out of areas that are important to other fisheries that aren't closed out of those areas.

Southeast and Eastern GOA:

Board member Jensen – Several fishermen in southeast spoke to me about wanting a seine fishery opportunity. Currently, these areas are designated as non-trawl in the federal fisheries, but there's a building biomass of pollock and I wanted to start the discussion. Sitka herring fishermen are interested in pollock seining.

#### **8. Update on Prince William Sound pollock proposals and trawl fishery.**

Jan Rumble provided an overview of recent Board actions on pollock proposals from the Cordova meeting, December 2014.

Proposal 26 was an attempt to provide the department with tools to manage the fishery. The proposal would have lowered the trip limit (to 200,000 pounds) and added a prohibition on tendering.

Proposal 27 would have created a seine and jig fishery in PWS for pollock with a 58 foot length limit for all vessels. This proposal may have allowed more local processors and vessels to participate.

The BOF took no action on either of these proposals in December.

Update on 2015 PWS trawl fishery: Jan Rumble provided the overview. The fishery just finished a few weeks ago and was managed differently this year. Last year, all the vessels showed up at once to participate and the fishery closed early due to the fleet exceeding the rockfish bycatch limit. This year, ADF&G staff worked with Julie Bonney who coordinated the fleet so that no more than six vessels were fishing in PWS at any given time. This allowed for better tracking of harvest and bycatch information. The fishery began on January 20 and went until February 5. A total of 35 landings were made by 17 vessels; each vessel made between one and seven landings. Bycatch limits were not exceeded and 9.8 million pounds of pollock (99% of the GHL) was harvested. Trip limits were only exceeded in four landings. ADF&G received no bids to conduct the cost-recovery fishery.

Workgroup discussion points:

- Julie Bonney –
  - An important aspect to this year's success was that the fleet acted cooperatively. Generally, these tools are not available in a state-water fishery; if the fleet doesn't voluntarily cooperate, then this type of coordination doesn't work. It only takes one vessel to have this fall apart.
  - The PWS fishery is an open access fishery though all participating vessels have federal permits. All vessels that participated were greater than 58 feet in length and all but two vessels pack 300,000 pounds.
- Jan Rumble –
  - The fishery has a trip limit of 300,000 pounds; this is a management tool to help regulate how much pollock and bycatch is harvested in each subarea and overall.
  - Other bycatch in the PWS pollock fishery this year included: 442 pounds of salmon (11% of cap), 889 pounds of sharks (1% of cap), and 240,125 pounds of squid (80% of cap).

9. **Draft management plan for new state GHL pollock fisheries.** Wayne Donaldson reviewed the draft plan. Department staff developed a management plan template as per the co-chair's request. It has a similar structure to the state's Pacific cod plans, where there are separate management plans for each area; it is not meant to be a single statewide plan. The BOF could select different elements (gear, season, GHL, etc.) for each area if they decide to develop a state-waters GHL pollock fishery. The full BOF has not seen this yet; the workgroup chairs wanted something the workgroup could comment on.

Workgroup discussion points:

There was discussion amongst the group about process. Some felt it did not make sense to go through the template before discussing pros/cons of developing a state-waters GHL fishery in the first place. It was clarified that the co-chairs wanted feedback on the pros/cons of the elements in the template and that costs/benefits would come out as they are discussed.

- Julie Bonney/Patty O'Donnell/Jason Chandler - Kodiak trawlers are opposed to a state-waters GHL pollock fishery. Limiting the fishery to state waters wouldn't work for the fleet, they need the ability to go back and forth over the line to follow fish and avoid bycatch. A GHL fishery for trawl is contrary to the management objective of avoiding bycatch.
- Patty O'Donnell - The existing parallel fishery is a state fishery and the state can modify the rules of a parallel fishery as desired.
- Ernie Weiss - WGOA trawlers agree that a 58-foot length limit is appropriate and it would be consistent with vessel length limits in the Pacific cod parallel trawl fishery.
- Patty O'Donnell commented that his vessel is 86 feet in length and fishes in state waters for pollock in the WGOA. He does not support a 58-foot length limit.
- Ernie Weiss - There is no seine gear interest in WGOA pollock at this time, but some don't want to preclude that opportunity.
- Julie Bonney/ Patty O'Donnell - Concurrent seasons for state-waters GHL and federal pollock trawl fisheries would be problematic, as it would likely be the same vessels fishing. There was concern about stranding fish. If the state season opened after the

federal season, then it would be an April time closure (in most years) when there is no-roe and fish are spawned out. The best value for pollock is at the height of the roe season (Feb/March), if rollovers happen later in the year, then you've lost all the value and bycatch has generally been higher later in the year.

- Matt Hegge - Trip limits less than the current 300,000-pound limit would make fishing less economical. Trip limits could be useful if the GHL is small to make the fishery manageable. Trip limits should only be set if needed for management purposes.
- Mark Stichert - Checking in/out of the fishery (if concurrent seasons are open) is important for management and enforcement; you need to have 'bright lines' that define who is fishing what and where.
- Ernie Weiss - Full observer coverage would not be economically viable for some vessels although it may be necessary if individual accountability is the goal.
- Duncan Fields - Need to consider spatial depletion within state waters and distribute the fishing effort.
- Karla Bush - Bycatch caps in a state-waters GHL fishery would be additive to the federal cap. The Council could look to reduce their bycatch cap if the state set a Chinook salmon cap for a state-waters GHL pollock fishery, but there's no guarantee that the federal bycatch limit would change.
- Ed Dersham/Duncan Fields - Review of the Council trawl bycatch package is delayed until October 2015 due to the change in state administration. It would be wrong to assume that nothing else will happen at the Council. The bycatch reduction package may change, but the Council won't stop working on bycatch reductions in the GOA.
- Ernie Weiss - Exclusive registration would be supported in the WGOA.
- Mark Stichert - Steller sea lion no fishing zones are almost all recognized during the parallel Pacific cod fishery. Only the no transit zones are recognized during the state-waters Pacific cod fishery.
- Duncan Fields - The Eastern population of Steller sea lion is no longer endangered and it may be appropriate to start a dialogue with NMFS Protected Resources Division to see if some of those measures should be rolled back.
- Ed Dersham - State-waters measures are considered in the Biological Opinion for Steller sea lion measures under other cumulative effects. Measures in state waters may have to be mitigated by changes to the federal fisheries.
- Raymond May/Julie Bonney - Gear restrictions: several points were made about not defining specific gear because it doesn't allow for innovation. It's better to look for incentives to reduce bycatch (through gear modifications) rather than dictate gear specifications.
- Mark Stichert - Pacific cod are taken as incidental species during pollock trawling. The BOF would need to consider these Pacific cod removals in the state Pacific cod management plans.

## **10. Costs/Benefits of state GHL fishery**

### Trawl fishery:

- Julie Bonney –

- Difficult to know what the correct GHL would be, harvest in state waters varies every year. Difficult to set district bycatch caps.
- Fractures the fishery – forces fishing inside three miles versus the zero to 200 miles that trawlers have now.
- Conflicts with the current parallel fishery that allows for new entrants.
- A GHL fishery would be repetitive and increases costs.
- Fish may be stranded if you can't roll back to federal fisheries or if they happen too late in the year.
- Patty O'Donnell –
  - Oppose elimination of a parallel fishery to have a state-waters GHL, need to fish inside when the weather is bad.
  - Exclusive state-waters fishery around Kodiak would impact those that currently fish and increase inefficiencies.
- John Gucer - Efficiency doesn't equate to more money. More money would go to the local communities if the pollock fishery duration was longer.
- Julie Bonney - Pollock is a high volume, low value fishery. Need to be efficient enough to cover the cost structure of the platform and crew costs. It's more expensive to operate a trawler.
- Duncan Fields - If federal waters are not rationalized, then why should the BOF move forward?
- Julie Bonney –
  - A trawl GHL fishery may allocate pollock to a group that doesn't exist; there are no GOA trawlers who only fish state waters.
  - Impacts to other state fisheries need to be considered. There are a larger number of efficient 58-foot vessels fishing now; if you create another opportunity for 58-foot vessels you may erode what happens in other fisheries such as Pacific cod.

#### Seine fishery:

- Beaver Nelson - Support for concepts in proposal 44.
- Tim Baker - Need more time to continue with commissioner permits to see if something can be developed before moving forward with a management plan.
- Raymond May - Participants in Cook Inlet have proven that pollock can be caught with a seine, which was the purpose of the commissioner's permit.
- Mark Stichert - Seine fishery would look different in Kodiak than in Cook Inlet. We do not have information on catch or markets for other areas yet.
- Beaver Nelson - The seine gear that was tested in Cook Inlet is likely not what would be used in a developed fishery.

#### Jig fishery:

- Darius Kasperzak - Support to see a jig fishery develop. Benefits to the state may be more permits in the hands of Alaskans.

#### General

- Raymond May - State should manage fishery if fish occur in state waters. Locals will fish if there's an opportunity.

**11. Statewide pollock meeting**

Board member Jeffrey commented that the BOF will announce whether there will be an October 2015 meeting at the end of the Sitka meeting (March 3). Proposal 44 will be taken up again at the statewide meeting in March 2015. We are not expecting to have a full finalized report by that time. March 3 is deadline for 'on time' comments, though comments can be submitted up until the proposal is taken up at the meeting. All public comment already taken on proposal 44 during the 2013-2014 BOF meeting cycle will be included in the meeting documents for March 2015.

**12. Final Comments.**

The Workgroup co-chairs greatly appreciate everyone's participation.

**13. Adjourned at 3:48 pm**