

ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES

Walleye Pollock Workgroup minutes

The workgroup met on October 6, 2014 at the Hilton Hotel in Anchorage, AK

1. Introductions

Workgroup members present or in attendance by teleconference*:

Sue Jeffrey, Co-Chair	Board of Fisheries
John Jensen, Co-Chair	Board of Fisheries
Karl Johnstone	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	CGOA LLP trawl vessel owner
Curt Waters	CGOA LLP trawl vessel operator
Matt Hegge	Proposal author; GOA trawl vessel operator/owner
Raymond May	Kodiak purse seine vessel
Beaver Nelson	Cook Inlet purse seine vessel
Darius Kasperzak	Kodiak jig vessel
John Gucer*	Cook Inlet jig vessel
Mitch Kilborn	CGOA large processor
Bill Fejes	CGOA small processor
Chris Sannito	CGOA small processor
Mike Flores	Charter operator
Ernie Weiss	WGOA Community seat
Pat Branson*	CGOA Community seat

Support staff:

Glenn Haight, Sherry Wright	Board support
Kelly Hepler, Nicole Kimball	ADF&G Commissioner's office
Forrest Bowers, Karla Bush, Megan Peterson	ADF&G Headquarters
Mark Stichert*, Trent Hartill*	ADF&G Westward Region
Tim Baker, Jan Rumble	ADF&G Central Region
Glenn Merrill, Rachel Baker	NMFS Sustainable Fisheries
Sam Cunningham, Chris Oliver	NPFMC staff

Members of the public: Sam Cotten, Sinclair Wilt, Rebecca Skinner, Heather McCarty, Theresa Peterson, Beth Stewart, Kurt Cochran, Stormy Stutes, Dave Long, Scott Kelley (ADF&G SE Region).

2. General Comments on the Purpose of the Pollock Workgroup.

Board member Jeffery opened the meeting by reviewing the goals and objectives of the workgroup. Stakeholders from all of the interested sectors are represented on the workgroup to help the board understand the impacts of proposal 44.

3. Update on 2014 GOA pollock season.

- a. Workgroup support staff Glenn Merrill (NMFS Sustainable fisheries) provided an overview of the most recent Western Gulf of Alaska (WGOA; Area 610) and Central Gulf of Alaska (CGOA; Areas 620 and 630) pollock fisheries. The GOA pollock total allowable catch

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(TAC) increased in 2014; TACs increased by 46% in Area 610, 54% in Area 620, and 36% in Area 630. The 2014 pollock D season closes on Oct. 31, 2014 and NMFS expects the quotas will be fully harvested in Areas 620 and 630. There was an increase in effort in Area 620 of the Central Gulf this year commensurate with higher catch rates (better fishing) in that area. In the Area 610, there were challenges this and last year that prevented the full quota from being harvested, primarily due to non-aggregated fish (dissimilar to ‘historic’ aggregations and larger proportions of smaller less marketable fish). Through the end of September, 32% of the WGOA pollock quota has been harvested and overall harvest is not expected to increase substantially through the end of the season.

- b. Pollock fisheries are managed similarly in the CGOA and WGOA. Vessels must have a federal fishery permit (FFP) and a license limitation permit (LLP) with the proper endorsements (for gear, area, etc.) to fish in federal waters. Catch accounting and observer coverage requirements are the same in both areas. Most of the vessels that fish in the WGOA are less than 60 feet in overall length, these vessels have recently been included in the restructured observer program, so there’s been substantial improvement in NMFS’ ability to manage in that area.

A Chinook salmon cap for the directed pollock fishery was implemented in 2012 (25,000 Chinook salmon for the WGOA and CGOA). Salmon bycatch in the pollock fisheries was estimated at 18,880 in 2012 and at 13,513 in 2013. The 2014 fishery is still open; through the end of September 2014 an estimated 6,580 Chinook salmon have been caught. Further improvements to bycatch performance are expected through the council’s proposed trawl bycatch program.

An updated stock of origin analysis has been completed for the genetic samples taken during the 2012 pollock fisheries¹. Results show that 97% of the Chinook salmon bycatch is comprised of stocks from coastal southeast Alaska, British Columbia, and the U.S. west coast (41% from BC, 33% from coastal SE AK, 23% from U.S. west coast). Fish hatcheries are a large source of Chinook salmon production in those regions, but the proportion of the bycatch that originates from hatcheries cannot be estimated from genetic samples (parental genotyping is an emerging technology) and are instead estimated from coded wire tagging data.

Workgroup member Julie Bonney (CGOA trawl voluntary cooperative manager) provided an update on industry efforts to control bycatch. The fleet is working hard not to race for fish as the pollock TACs increase (up 60% in recent years) under fixed bycatch caps by forming a voluntary cooperative. All license holders need to sign on to the cooperative agreement in order for it to succeed. There are approximately 40 vessels that participate in the CGOA (represented by 90+ license holders). In the CGOA, consensus on the cooperative agreement was established before each season in 2014 (four times a year: A, B, C, and D season). The desire to work cooperatively is driven by a desire to avoid hitting the Chinook salmon

¹ Report can be found on the Council’s October agenda under item C-7 “2012 GOA Chinook Bycatch Report”.
http://legistar2.granicus.com/npfmc/meetings/2014/10/894_A_North_Pacific_Council_14-10-06_Meeting_Agenda.pdf

bycatch limits and to avoid aggregations of small pollock. Vessels from the WGOA fished under a cooperative agreement for the first time during the C season in 2014 (19 vessels). This cooperative system is very fragile and it only takes one vessel (or license holder) to make it fall apart. The fleet is now working for a structured system through the council that's less fragile.

4. Proposed Federal trawl bycatch.

a. Motion review/update.

Workgroup support staff Sam Cunningham (NPFMC staff) provided an update on the proposed trawl bycatch management program. The council will review a discussion paper based on their April 2014 motion at the October meeting (this week). The council can move aspects forward for further discussion papers or they could initiate an analysis. Once they move to the analysis stage it's expected to be at least a year until final action is taken. Further review of the council's proposed program structure was provided at the Workgroup's May meeting and can be found in those minutes.

Workgroup member Julie Bonney (CGOA trawl voluntary cooperative manager) spoke to the merits of the cooperative agreements and the ability to react to changes in the fishery in real time as opposed to regulatory methods to control fishing or bycatch that take many years to change and implement. All members of a cooperative are held accountable through the agreement. The council determines what types of elements need to be in those agreements to meet their objectives for the program and NMFS reviews the cooperative agreements to ensure the elements are included before the cooperative is approved to receive catch allocations.

Cooperatives provide an annual report on their performance to the council. Cooperatives operating under other council programs have included information on individual vessel performance voluntarily², because they understand that transparency is important for such programs to be successful.

b. Coordination between State and Federal fisheries/update.

Workgroup support staff Nicole Kimball (ADF&G Commissioner's office) walked through an approach³ to coordinate the parallel fishery with the council's proposed program. This approach is different than the one presented in May, which included a catch accounting system that was determined to be exceedingly complicated. The new approach tries to maintain the current parallel fishery structure as much as possible and includes options for the board to consider in the future, pending needed coordination with the federal program.

The objectives of the proposed approach are to 1) facilitate a program to reduce trawl bycatch in both State and federal waters; 2) allow trawl pollock participants to continue to operate in both State and federal waters (0-200 nm); 3) increased monitoring (100% observer coverage)

² A cooperative is currently considered by NOAA General Council to be one entity, which limits what the council can require due to confidentiality.

³ Handout on the parallel fishery approach can be found on the GOA Pollock workgroup's meeting information page: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cgoapollockworkgroup.meetinginfo>

of trawl vessels in both State and federal waters; and 4) maintain an effective catch accounting system to ensure catch and bycatch limits are not exceeded.

The parallel approach applies to pollock trawl fishing, and offers that due to the low historical harvest of trawl Pacific cod in state waters, non-pelagic trawling for cod in state waters could be considered for prohibition in the remaining open areas in the WGOA. Other elements of the approach include:

- Opening the parallel fishery at the same time as the federal seasons (status quo), registration would be required for the parallel fishery by December prior to the fishing year.
- All pollock harvest would continue to accrue to the federal TAC, and non-federally licensed vessels could only fish in state waters for pollock (status quo). Currently no vessels are operating without a federal license in the pollock trawl fisheries of the CGOA or WGOA.
- Similar to status quo, NMFS would set an incidental catch allowance (ICA) to account for incidental catch needs of pollock in other fisheries. NMFS could choose to set the ICA to also account for any potential harvest by non-federally permitted vessels in state waters during the parallel fishery, as informed by the parallel registration process.
- Parallel waters would close to all vessels by emergency order when the directed pollock TAC is achieved, or if the ICA is taken and it is necessary to avoid exceeding an annual catch limit for pollock.

c. Discussion.

Workgroup member Patrick O'Donnell (CGOA LLP trawl vessel owner) noted that if state waters close before the federal season closes it could lead to greater concentrations of vessels in federal waters where bycatch rates may be higher.

Workgroup support staff Nicole Kimball (ADF&G Commissioner's office) responded that's the difficulty of this approach, which is that state waters could potentially close prior to federal waters. There is a need to include a mechanism to close parallel waters so overall harvest does not exceed annual catch limits. It is a risk management issue and none of the options so far considered are risk-free. This approach provides an opportunity for the fishery to operate from 0 – 200 nm, which we've heard is important due to inter-annual variability in where catch/bycatch occurs. The approach attempts to mitigate for a practice that has not yet occurred (vessels fishing without federal permits for pollock solely in state waters), but the potential exists so the approach provides a mechanism to ensure we could control and close state waters to avoid exceeding a catch limit if needed. ICAs are set by NMFS through their inseason management authority; ICA amounts won't likely be high and most of the pollock TAC will be allocated to the directed fishery. Any vessel that drops its federal permit would be prohibited from fishing in federal fisheries for 3 years and so it is expected that the risk of this happening to be low.

This approach is contingent on the council requiring vessels with federal permits to not harvest beyond their quota. One clear advantage of this approach is it allows bycatch control

measures associated with the program to apply in the parallel fishery for federally-permitted vessels.

This approach does not contemplate a GHL fishery (or preclude one). Under a GHL fishery, the board would need to adopt its objectives, a methodology for establishing a GHL, fishing seasons, and other management and monitoring measures that would be separate from the federal programs.

The board is aware that the council would like some indication of the direction they are headed for pollock trawl fishing in state waters. A trawl bycatch management program for GOA trawl fisheries likely requires some action by the board to manage the parallel fishery (registration, observer coverage). Staff presented an approach that closely maintains the current parallel fishery.

5. GOA and WGOA Community Views on New State GHL Pollock Fishery.

a. Kodiak Fisheries Workgroup discussions.

Workgroup member Pat Branson (CGOA community seat) highlighted a letter from Kodiak Island Borough and City of Kodiak⁴ to the council on their trawl bycatch management program. Three city council members and three borough members are on the fishery workgroup, which was formed over two years ago. The workgroup meets to discuss issues, takes the items back to their respective agencies, and then back to the full committee to make recommendations. It's a public process with diverse representation. The city of Kodiak passed a resolution to protect community interests and the economic engine of the community (fisheries). The letter describes high-level goals to maintain healthy, sustainable resources in the GOA and healthy, competitive economies. The workgroup has not taken up the issue in support of or against a GHL pollock fishery as contemplated under Proposal 44.

b. Western GOA discussions.

Workgroup member Ernie Weiss (WGOA Community seat) provided an update on talks with WGOA stakeholders about the proposed federal trawl bycatch management program. There is less consensus within this group, there was some reluctance at first to be included in the council's action but they petitioned to get involved in 2013. In the WGOA there are single processor towns, with mostly local fleets of vessels less than 60 feet in overall length. Communities in the WGOA have similar goals for management as Kodiak and they have reaffirmed those goals recently within Aleutians East Borough. The council has conducted outreach this spring in Sand Point and King Cove. Ernie reported they want to protect communities but there are differences in opinion between fishermen, communities, and others on how to do this. One of the goals is limiting consolidation and the Aleutians East Borough will conduct a survey to look at socioeconomic factors. Many experienced fishermen think that bycatch avoidance is best accomplished by people with the most fishing experience. There have not been any discussions with a broader group from the WGOA on developing a new GHL trawl pollock fishery under Proposal 44.

⁴ Letter can be found on the GOA Pollock workgroup's meeting information page: <http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=cgoapollockworkgroup.meetinginfo>

6. Proposed GOA State GHL pollock fishery.

a. Proposal 44 Review.

Workgroup member Matt Hegge (proposal 44 author/GOA trawl vessel owner and operator) reviewed the impetus for submitting his proposal; the status quo parallel fishery could not function the same way under a catch share program, so he proposed a GHL fishery as one way to coordinate and address state waters.

Workgroup member Curt Waters (CGOA LLP trawl vessel operator) stated that a GHL fishery would not work for him. He asked how many vessels would qualify for a GHL fishery and what happens if the GHL is not achieved (will there be mechanisms to avoid stranding fish). Karl Johnstone (Board of Fish Chairman; who was invited to sit at workgroup table) responded that the workgroup was created to provide information on the merits of the proposal and whether it would provide benefits to the State of Alaska.

b. Test Fishery Update.

Workgroup support staff Trent Hartill (ADF&G Westward) provided harvest information for the jig pollock fishery occurring under the authority of a commissioner's permit. To date, 33,000 pounds have been landed and the recent 5-year average for jig pollock harvest is approximately 11,000 pounds per year. None of this was directed catch. Only one trip exceeded the 20% maximum retainable amount of pollock this year while fishing for Pacific cod and other target species. Total harvest was higher this year than in recent years but the overall fishing behavior was consistent with previous years. The Kodiak jig fleet supports continued opportunities to explore the potential of this fishery.

A second opportunity to participate in a pollock seine gear test fishery was announced in the Kodiak Area starting September 22, 2014 and no applications for a commissioner's permit were received. Workgroup member Raymond May (Kodiak purse seine vessel seat) commented that the salmon season is long and that there's likely little incentive to invest in the gear necessary to seine for pollock around Kodiak just for a test fishery.

c. Potential/interest in seine and jig fishery.

Workgroup member Beaver Nelson (Cook Inlet purse seiner) said there are "lots of local seiners ready to go right now" and they could fish from now until February. He added that they have a market for the pollock catch. He also said that seiners requested a commissioner's permit test fishery earlier this year but were denied based on proposed efforts to conduct test fisheries in the Kodiak Area. In response, Deputy Commissioner Kelly Hepler told the workgroup that he would talk with Director Regnart about a test fishery in Kachemak Bay.

d. Discussion.

Workgroup member Curt Waters (CGOA LLP trawl vessel operator) asked if the board of fish members on the workgroup if they felt like they were getting the information they need. Board members responded that there is a lot of information for them to consider and they will keep working on it and that information gathering is an ongoing process.

There was discussion on the timeline for proposal 44; it was tabled for the March 2015 during the January 2014 meeting in Kodiak. Final action on trawl bycatch management by the

council could occur late in 2015 and program implementation would happen no earlier than 2017. It was unknown if the board would have enough information by their March meeting to decide on proposal 44.

There was follow-up discussion about when the workgroup should meet again. Workgroup members/stakeholders indicated they thought another meeting was necessary. It was suggested that the meeting should take place after the proposed Kachemak Bay test fishery was completed so the workgroup would have more information to consider at the next meeting. There was interest in continued tracking of the NPFMC's action as it moves to analysis and that the next meeting should take place after an upcoming Council meeting.

The board will discuss scheduling at their work session October 15 -16, 2014 and further refinement of the timeline can happen at that time.

7. Proposed meeting schedule.

No future meeting is scheduled; the board will discuss how they'd like to proceed with the workgroup at the October work session.