

Alaska Board of Fisheries
Findings on Status of Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Rationalization and
Further Charge to Steering Committee
#2004 – FB - 234

Background

In 2003, the Board of Fisheries charged a committee to develop alternatives for board action concerning Gulf of Alaska groundfish "rationalization" issues for Alaska waters.¹ The committee fulfilled its charge, reporting to the full board in February and November, 2004.

In February, the committee reported on the results of meetings held with stakeholders in the fishery, and recommended pursuit of legislation to impose a temporary moratorium on entry to Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. The legislation was introduced, but did not pass. In November, the committee recommended that the committee receive a new charge to continue work on Gulf of Alaska groundfish rationalization issues, and informed the board of a potential long-term management approach that appears to merit further analysis.

As the board's committee performed its work, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council has continued to formulate a rationalization plan for Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Findings

Groundfish fisheries in Alaska waters in the Gulf of Alaska are facing significant changes, including: changing economic conditions, changing management practices in the EEZ affecting Alaska waters, and potentially, increased biological pressures as a result of economic and management changes. To fulfill the mandate of conserving, developing, and utilizing fishery resources, the board should carefully consider the nature of these changes and the ways in which state management should respond in order best serve the interests of the state.

The work performed in the board's Gulf Groundfish Rationalization Committee, with tremendous input from stakeholders appointed to a steering committee, has revealed a type of approach that appears to offer significant advantages that should be more thoroughly explored and weighed against potential disadvantages. The approach involves "dedicated access privileges," meaning that fishermen would have a temporary privilege to catch a specific portion of the harvestable surplus of a stock of fish. A key feature of this approach, as developed in the committee, is that the proposed allocations of "dedicated access privileges," or a portion of them, would automatically expire on a time certain basis and revert back to the State for reallocation by the board as it sees fit. In concept, the reallocated privileges could be issued according to criteria that can be modified by the board, if desired, in order to insure that they best serve the interests of the state. It is envisioned that many of the benefits of limited entry could be realized with this program, even in a diverse fishery, without making it too difficult for new entrants to come into the fishery.

The board has received advice from the Department of Law that the legislature has not conferred authority to allocate fishing privileges in proportion to the historical landings, so new authorizing legislation would be necessary to implement a dedicated access privilege program. The board finds that it would be desirable for the legislature to confer authority to allocate fishery resources on the basis of historical landings—but only in the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries—to skippers, crew, vessel owners, or other entities, by fisheries, as deemed appropriate. The proper

¹ See #2003 - 226 - FB.

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agency to receive such authority may be the board or the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission, or some combination of the two.

The board also finds that it would be desirable for the board to have express statutory authority to allocate fishery resources to cooperatives. Allocation to cooperatives is being considered by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council for the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries in the EEZ, and cooperatives may provide a good way to coordinate the two management regimes that fish on groundfish stocks that straddle jurisdictional boundaries between the State of Alaska and the federal government.

Pursuit of these authorities in the 2005 legislative session would enable the board to work in coordination with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council on Gulf groundfish rationalization issues, and ensure that such a program, if ultimately approved by the board, could be implemented. This approach maximizes the options available to the board as it continues its examination of promotion of resource conservation, economic efficiency, and safe and orderly fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries.

Charge to Steering Committee

The board's Gulf of Alaska Groundfish Rationalization Committee, comprised of Ed Dersham, Art Nelson, and Mel Morris, shall continue its work.

The committee shall continue to explore the dedicated access privilege model, giving special consideration given to the ways in which the model could promote resources conservation, economic efficiency, safe and orderly fisheries, and coordination with EEZ fisheries. The committee shall also consider administrative feasibility and constitutional standards for access to state resources. The committee may also explore options other than dedicated access privileges.

The committee shall advocate the adoption of legislation that would enable the allocation of fishery resources on the basis of historical landings, but only in the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. Further, the committee shall advocate the adoption of legislation that would enable the allocation of fisheries resources to cooperatives.

The committee shall keep the board apprised of its progress, and give a full report to the board at the work session in October 2006.

ADOPTED: 7-0
Anchorage, Alaska


Art Nelson, Chair

11/17/2004
Date