



**Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council (BAC)
Bycatch Utilization Subcommittee
Meeting Minutes – January 30, 2024**

Subcommittee Members: Brian Gabriel (Chair), Chelsae Radell, Duncan Fields

Call to Order: Chair Gabriel called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM with all three subcommittee members present. Introductions of subcommittee members were made.

Also present were Bycatch Advisory Council (BAC) members Linda Kozak, Stephanie Madsen, Karma Ulvi, and John Jensen, as well as Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker.

Forty-nine individuals attended the meeting.

Approve Agenda: The agenda was approved.

Meeting Minutes: The meeting minutes from December 19, 2023 were approved.

New Business: Chair Gabriel announced that the purpose of this meeting was to continue the discussion from the meeting held on December 19, 2023. He provided a brief overview of the issues raised in December before the public was invited to comment.

During public comment Chair Brian Gabriel, member Duncan Fields and BAC Chair Linda Kozak attempted to focus the comments on issues related to bycatch utilization. Several testifiers spoke to issues that will be addressed by the full BAC and were not under the Bycatch Utilization Subcommittee topics to address.

Public Comment: Ten members of the public provided comment.

Kiril Basargin – K-Bay Fisheries:

Spoke several times with an emphasis on the need to reduce or eliminate trawl bycatch and the impacts to the halibut fishery.

Darrell Vent, Sr.:

Provided testimony regarding the need to have a window where fish can come through to the Yukon.

Karma Ulvi (member of the Bycatch Advisory Council):

Felt the discussion on the issue of bycatch utilization was important, but feels strongly that this could hinder efforts to reduce bycatch and create more problems. Regulatory restrictions need to be stronger before trying to utilize bycatch. A big issue is what happens to the money? Will harvesters and processors be able to sell the product? The problem is bycatch.

Randy Mayo – Stevens Village Tribe:

Entire way of life in the villages is subsistence and bycatch needs to be controlled in order to allow fish to get to the areas where the subsistence harvesters have a chance to get some fish.

Eva Dawn Burk – (Member of NPFMC AP):

This discussion on bycatch utilization is difficult. Having corporations with vast resources being able to set the rules is a problem. We must not legitimize bycatch and look for ways to monetize bycatch. Bycatch utilization could mean a corporation would be able to point to their fishery as using 100% of the fish and no wastage is occurring, thus potentially justifying bycatch. Requested information on the Bering Sea regulations and restrictions similar to the presentation on the Gulf of Alaska.

Heather Mann –Midwater Trawlers Cooperative (Member of NPFMC AP):

Provided information on pollock catch vs. the low number of Chinook. Expressed concern that we shouldn't just focus on the trawl fisheries regarding bycatch. In regard to bycatch utilization, it is important to look at all fisheries and gear types.

Chris Woodley – Groundfish Forum:

Addressed some concerns about bycatch utilization for prohibited species and stated that compensation is a big issue. Maybe a focus should be on retaining and utilizing fish that are allowed to be kept, but are not desired due to market or processor considerations.

Paddy O'Donnell – (Member of NPFMC AP):

Spoke to the fact that all fisheries have bycatch. He agreed with the list of issues in the minutes of the December 19th meeting and reiterated that quality, size of fish, processor challenges, and market conditions need to be addressed. For fish that are too small or for which there is no market, the Kodiak plants now send it to the fish meal facility. This is not a good example of where we should be going with more full utilization.

Janet Woods:

Utilizing bycatch will create a false impression that it's okay for vessels to keep fishing. This is not solving the underlying problem.

Stanislaus Sheppard – Mountain Village:

Need to keep an eye on the big picture. Reducing bycatch should be the goal.

Subcommittee Discussion:

Duncan Fields began the discussion with three issues.

1. Reiterating the desire to ask IPHC personnel to address the regulatory steps necessary for halibut to be retained by gear types other than longline to enter the stream of commerce.
2. Another issue of interest would be a conversation with NMFS regarding retained bycatch which is sold. What are the agency protocols or regulatory process for retaining the funds and tracking the revenue stream and how could the Council designate a use for that revenue stream? This is an important component in looking at this issue, particularly for prohibited species.
3. He would also like to see a specific proposal from the Gulf of Alaska trawl sector regarding how better to utilize regulatory discards. Moving from the abstract to the specific and moving the issue over into the Council process.

Chelsae Radell responded that the trawl sector is very interested in addressing regulatory discards and how they could be better utilized. On the agenda for the upcoming April NPFMC meeting, there will be a discussion paper about maximum retainable amounts (MRA's) for retention of non-directed species when targeting another type of fish. This could provide a good opportunity to begin working on this issue within the Council process.

She would support recommendations to encourage the exploration of ways to improve utilization of regulatory discards. We are experiencing climate change and some fish are benefiting from this, while others are not. There will be a lot of opportunity to come up with ways to achieve more full utilization for species other than just PSC.

Chair Gabriel requested clarification regarding the sale of non-directed species under the MRA's and Chelsae responded that when they are under the PSC limit, they can be sold. It is different for each area and species. Once a regulatory discard limit is reached, NMFS puts the species on "PSC Status" and vessels must discard any bycatch of that species at sea and if it does enter the plant, those fish cannot enter commerce.

The subcommittee reviewed the issues raised at the December 19th meeting and they are shown below:

- IPHC regulatory restrictions
- Other regulatory changes that can help reduce bycatch
- How bycatch proceeds can/should be utilized (such as observers or research)
- Transportation challenges
- Supply chain issues
- Tariffs and foreign production impacts
- Work force availability and cost
- Processing plant configuration issues to process certain products
- Market conditions
- Poor quality product if required instead of voluntary
- Small fish that are not easily processed
- Prohibited species vs. regulatory discards
- Processor participation and partnerships

Chair Gabriel indicated a desire to address the subcommittee end product and how to create a path forward for reporting to the Bycatch Advisory Council.

Duncan Fields reiterated his desire on attempting to move the issue along regarding halibut bycatch and wanted the subcommittee to focus on this.

There was some discussion between the subcommittee and members of the BAC who were in attendance, specifically what is expected from the subcommittee.

It was determined that another meeting is needed to address some outstanding items and questions, but acknowledgment that a report to the BAC on March 26th has been requested.

BAC Chair Linda Kozak said that in a report from the subcommittee, it is important to note what steps would be needed in order to move forward with utilizing bycatch. Not barriers, but issues that would need to be addressed. The subcommittee does not need to come up with solutions to those issues, but it is important to know what they are. Halibut was specifically mentioned as a PSC species that could be addressed.

Action Items:

Members of the public and subcommittee had identified a few issues they would like to see addressed at the next meeting as informational requests and those are shown below:

Request a review of the BSAI regulations and restrictions regarding bycatch similar to the one presented on the Gulf of Alaska.

Information is needed from the IPHC on the process for allowing halibut retention in the trawl fisheries for bycatch utilization purposes.

A request for information regarding NMFS protocol or requirements for a revenue stream and how funds are utilized and the process to modify that if desired.

Subcommittee report preparation for the Bycatch Advisory Council March 26th meeting.

Next Meeting: 9:00 AM, Thursday, March 14, 2024