



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

December 28, 2007

Dear Alaska Native Representative:

With this letter, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is notifying you that we are beginning two Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) so that you may participate in the process and contribute to the final decisions. NMFS is seeking written comments on the scope of issues that should be addressed in the EISs and alternatives that should be considered.

The first EIS will serve as the primary analytical document to support decision-making for salmon bycatch reduction measures for the pollock fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. The proposed action would replace the current Chinook and Chum Salmon Savings Areas in the BSAI with new regulatory closures, salmon bycatch limits, or a combination of both. These management measures could incorporate current or new bycatch reduction methods. The scope of the EIS will be to determine the impacts to the human environment resulting from these salmon bycatch reduction measures. For further information on this EIS, please contact Sally Bibb at 907-586-7389.

The second EIS will serve as the primary analytical document to support decision-making for revisions to the Steller sea lion protection measures for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries based on new information regarding the potential interactions between Steller sea lions and groundfish fisheries. The purpose of the proposed action is to maintain adequate protection for Steller sea lions to avoid jeopardy of extinction and destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act, while minimizing to the extent practicable the impacts to the fishing industry and coastal communities that result from complying with the protection measures. For further information on this EIS, please contact Gretchen Harrington at 907-586-7228.

NMFS has special obligations to consult and coordinate with tribal governments and Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) corporations on a government-to-government basis pursuant to Executive Order 13175 and the Executive Memorandum of April 29, 1994, on "Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Governments." As a result of your tribal or ANCSA corporation status, you have the opportunity to comment to NMFS at any time; however, comments submitted during the scoping period would be helpful in developing the EISs. I encourage you to submit written comments by mail or email. The enclosed notices of intent provide instructions for submitting comments and additional information on these projects.

Additionally, you have the opportunity to consult with and provide comments to NMFS in person. To request a meeting with NMFS, please contact the EIS project leader at the above phone number.



I look forward to working with you through the completion of these projects. For more information on the EISs under development, please visit our website at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Balsiger', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right. To the right of the signature, the initials 'for J/B' are written in a similar cursive style.

Dr. James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

Enclosure (Notices of Intent for the Salmon EIS and Steller Sea Lion SEIS)

Verifications

We conducted a sales verification of EuroChem from October 22, 2007, through October 24, 2007. We have made changes, as appropriate, to EuroChem's data to reflect our verification findings. See the sales verification report dated November 13, 2007, and the computer programs attached to the preliminary results analysis memorandum dated December 17, 2007, for the specific changes we made. In addition, we intend to conduct a verification of EuroChem's cost submission after we issue these preliminary results.

Preliminary Results of Review

As a result of this review, we preliminarily determine that a dumping margin of 0.00 percent exists for EuroChem for the period July 1, 2006, through December 31, 2006.

Extension of Time Limit for Final Results of the New-Shipper Review

Section 751(a)(2)(B)(iv) of the Act requires the Department to issue the final results of a new-shipper review of an antidumping duty order within 90 days after the date the preliminary determination is issued. The Act provides further that, if the case is extraordinarily complicated, the Department may extend the 90-day period to 150 days.

We determine that this new-shipper review is extraordinarily complicated and that it is not possible to complete the final results within 90 days of issuance of these preliminary results. Specifically, we find that the issues associated with whether and how to adjust EuroChem's natural-gas costs are extraordinarily complicated.

Therefore, in accordance with section 751(a)(2)(B)(iv) of the Act and 19 CFR 351.214(i)(2), we are extending the time period for issuing the final results of this review by 60 days to May 15, 2008.

Public Comment

We will disclose the documents resulting from our analysis to parties in this review within five days of the date of publication of this notice. Any interested party may request a hearing within 30 days of the publication of this notice in the Federal Register. If a hearing is requested, the Department will notify interested parties of the hearing schedule.

Interested parties are invited to comment on the preliminary results of this review. Because we have not yet made a determination with respect to the treatment of costs for natural gas, we will notify interested parties of the schedule for filing case briefs and

rebuttal briefs after we issue the decision memorandum, which will include an explanation of our decision, a cost calculation, sales-below-cost test, and margin recalculation.

We intend to issue the final results of this new-shipper review, including the results of our analysis of issues raised in the written comments, within 150 days after the date on which the preliminary results are issued. See 19 CFR 351.214(I)(1).

Assessment Rates

The Department shall determine, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) shall assess, antidumping duties on all appropriate entries, in accordance with 19 CFR 351.212. The Department will issue assessment instructions for EuroChem directly to CBP 15 days after the date of publication of the final results of this new-shipper review.

Because we found no margin for the U.S. sale subject to this new-shipper review, we preliminarily intend to instruct CBP to liquidate the entry without regard to antidumping duties. If we calculate a margin for the U.S. sale subject to this review for final results of review, because we have entered the value of EuroChem's U.S. sale, we will calculate an importer-specific assessment rate based on the ratio of the total amount of antidumping duties calculated for the examined sale to the total entered value of the sale pursuant to 19 CFR 351.212(b)(1).

The Department clarified its "automatic assessment" regulation on May 6, 2003 (68 FR 23954). This clarification applies to entries of subject merchandise during the POR produced by EuroChem where EuroChem did not know that its merchandise was destined for the United States. In such instances, we will instruct CBP to liquidate unreviewed entries at the all-others rate if there is no rate for the intermediate company(ies) involved in the transaction. For a full discussion of this clarification, see *Antidumping and Countervailing Duty Proceedings: Assessment of Antidumping Duties*, 68 FR 23954 (May 6, 2003).

Cash-Deposit Requirements

The following cash-deposit requirements will be effective for all shipments of the subject merchandise entered, or withdrawn from warehouse, for consumption on or after the publication date of the final results of the new-shipper review, as provided by section 751(a)(2)(C) of the Act: (1) The cash-deposit rate for EuroChem (*i.e.*, for subject merchandise both manufactured and exported by EuroChem) will be that established in the final results of this

review, except if the rate is less than 0.50 percent, and therefore, *de minimis* within the meaning of 19 CFR 351.106(c)(1), in which case the cash-deposit rate will be zero; (2) for previously reviewed or investigated companies not listed above, the cash-deposit rate will continue to be the company-specific rate published for the most recent period; (3) if the exporter is not a firm covered in this review or the original less-than-fair-value (LTFV) investigation but the manufacturer is, the cash-deposit rate will be the rate established for the most recent period for the manufacturer of the merchandise; and (4) the cash-deposit rate for all other manufacturers or exporters will continue to be 64.93 percent, the all-others rate established in the LTFV investigation. See *Urea From the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; Final Determination of Sales at Less Than Fair Value*, 52 FR 19557 (May 26, 1987). These cash-deposit rates, when imposed, shall remain in effect until further notice.

Notification to Importers

This notice also serves as a preliminary reminder to importers of their responsibility under 19 CFR 351.402(f)(2) to file a certificate regarding the reimbursement of antidumping duties prior to liquidation of the relevant entries during this review period. Failure to comply with this requirement could result in the Secretary's presumption that reimbursement of antidumping duties occurred and the subsequent assessment of double antidumping duties.

We are issuing and publishing this notice in accordance with sections 751(a)(2)(B) and 777(i)(1) of the Act and 19 CFR 351.214.

Dated: December 17, 2007.

David M. Spooner,
Assistant Secretary, for Import
Administration.
[FR Doc. 07-6155 Filed 12-21-07; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 3510-D5-M

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XE57

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Groundfish Fisheries in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; intent to prepare an environmental impact statement; request for written comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS, in consultation with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), announces its intent to prepare a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on revisions to Steller sea lion protection measures, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The proposed action is to revise the Steller sea lion protection measures for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) and the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries. The scope of the SEIS will be to determine the impacts to the human environment resulting from modifications to the existing protection measures. NMFS will accept written comments from the public to determine the issues of concern and the appropriate range of management alternatives to be addressed in the SEIS.

DATES: Written comments must be received by April 21, 2008.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on issues and alternatives for the SEIS should be sent to Sue Salvesson, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Comments may be submitted by

- E-mail: SSL-SEISM@noaa.gov.

Include in the subject line the following document identifier: SSL SEIS. E-mail comments, with or without attachments, are limited to 5 megabytes;

- Mail: P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802;

- Hand Delivery to the Federal Building: 709 West 9th Street, Room 420A, Juneau, AK; or
- Fax: 907-586-7557.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Gretchen Harrington, (907) 586-7228 or gretchen.harrington@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the United States has exclusive fishery management authority over all living marine resources found within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). The management of these marine resources, with the exception of certain marine mammals and birds, is vested in the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary). The Council has the responsibility to prepare fishery management plans for those marine resources off Alaska requiring conservation and management. Management of the Federal groundfish fishery located off Alaska in the EEZ is carried out under

the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area and the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska (FMPs). These FMPs, their amendments, and implementing regulations (found at 50 CFR part 679) are developed in accordance with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable Federal laws and executive orders, notably NEPA and the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Council is considering revising the Steller sea lion protection measures for the groundfish fisheries based on new information available regarding the potential interactions between Steller sea lions and groundfish fisheries. NMFS and the Council have determined that the preparation of an SEIS may be required for this action because revisions to the groundfish fishery regulations to protect Steller sea lions may result in significant impacts on the human environment not previously analyzed in the Final SEIS for Steller Sea Lion Protection Measures (November 2001). Thus, NMFS, in consultation with the Council, is initiating scoping for an SEIS in the event that an SEIS is needed.

NMFS is seeking information from the public through the SEIS scoping process on the range of alternatives to be analyzed; and on the environmental, social, and economic issues to be considered in the analysis. Written comments generated during this scoping process will be shared with the Council and incorporated into the SEIS.

The SEIS would be integrated with the related ESA documents that have been or are being prepared to address Steller sea lion issues to avoid redundancy, while providing a decision-making document that analyzes the potential impacts of the proposed action and its alternatives on the human environment. Related ESA documents (biological assessments, biological opinions, and a draft recovery plan) and background information are available on the NMFS Alaska Region website at <http://stellersealions.noaa.gov/>.

The SEIS on revisions to Steller sea lion protection measures will supplement the Steller Sea Lion Protection Measures Final SEIS (November 2001), which is available on the NMFS Alaska Region website at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/seis/sslpm/default.htm>.

The preferred alternative for Steller sea lions protection measures in the 2001 SEIS was the area and fishery specific approach, which allowed for

different protection measures specific to the type of fishery in the Aleutian Islands, Bering Sea, and Gulf of Alaska. NMFS implemented the current protection measures in 2003 (68 FR 204, January 2, 2003). This approach was a precautionary response to concerns about Steller sea lions and was intended to reduce the economic impact of the protection measures on participants in the groundfish fisheries. The protection measures in the preferred alternative were determined to neither jeopardize the continued existence of Steller sea lions nor adversely modify their designated critical habitat. Further, this approach met the Magnuson-Stevens Act mandates, especially with regards to safety at sea, minimizing bycatch, minimizing impacts to fishing communities, and attaining optimum yield.

Steller sea lion protection measures for the groundfish fishery currently include (1) global harvest controls for Steller sea lion prey species (pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel); (2) spatial harvest controls specific to prey species, gear type, and proximity to rookery, haulout, or forage areas to limit prey species removal in an area; (3) temporal harvest controls for pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel, including seasonal apportionments to limit prey species removal during certain times of the year; and (4) a vessel monitoring system requirement for all vessels (except vessels using jig gear) fishing for pollock, Pacific cod, or Atka mackerel.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to revise the Steller sea lion protection measures for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries based on new information available regarding the potential interactions between Steller sea lions and groundfish fisheries. The purpose of the proposed action is to maintain adequate protection for Steller sea lions to avoid jeopardy of extinction and destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat under the ESA, while minimizing to the extent practicable the impacts to the fishing industry and coastal communities that result from complying with the protection measures. The revisions are necessary to ensure the best scientific information available is used to: (1) ensure the fisheries are not likely to result in jeopardy of extinction and destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat; (2) alleviate any unnecessary restrictions for the fleet to improve efficiency and ensure economic viability for the industry; and (3)

minimize potential adverse economic impacts on coastal communities.

Alternatives

The SEIS will evaluate a range of alternative management measures for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. The Council's Steller Sea Lion Mitigation Committee (SSLMC) is reviewing the latest scientific information regarding Steller sea lions and potential groundfish fisheries interactions and developing alternative Steller sea lion protection measures. The SSLMC has collected proposals from the public for changes to the Steller sea lion protection measures and is scheduled to evaluate and prioritize these proposals for Council consideration in June 2008. After Council consideration, the Council may recommend management measures to the Secretary for evaluation and implementation. Information regarding the SSLMC and the proposal evaluation process is available from the Alaska Region website at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/sslmc/default.htm>.

Alternatives may include those identified here, and those developed through public scoping, Council, and SSLMC processes. Possible alternatives could include one, or a combination of, the following:

1. No action – retain the current suite of Steller sea lion protection measures as are currently in place for fishing year 2008.
2. Change the current spatial management of the Atka mackerel, pollock, or Pacific cod fisheries in the GOA and/or BSAI by opening or closing areas near Steller sea lion rookeries, haulouts, and/or foraging areas.
3. Change the current temporal management of harvests in the GOA and/or BSAI Atka mackerel, pollock, and/or Pacific cod fisheries.
4. Change other management measures that currently apply to the GOA and/or BSAI Atka mackerel, pollock, and/or Pacific cod fisheries, such as changes to gear restrictions or the Aleutian Islands platoon management system for Atka mackerel.

Preliminary Identification of Issues

A principal objective of the scoping and public input process is to identify potentially significant impacts to the human environment that should be analyzed in the SEIS. The analysis will evaluate the effects of the alternatives for all resources, species, and issues that may directly or indirectly interact with Steller sea lions and the groundfish fisheries within the action area.

The primary issues to be analyzed are the effects of the proposed action and its alternatives on Steller sea lions and their designated critical habitat. Additional impacts to the following components of the biological and physical environment may be evaluated: (1) other species listed under the ESA and their critical habitat, and other species protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act; (2) target and non-target fish stocks, including forage fish and prohibited species; (3) seabirds; and (4) the ecosystem.

Social and economic impacts also would be considered in terms of the effects that changes in the Steller sea lion protection measures would have on the following groups of individuals: (1) those who participate in harvesting the groundfish resources; (2) those who process and market groundfish and groundfish products; (3) those who consume groundfish products; (4) those who rely on living marine resources in the management area, particularly Steller sea lions, for subsistence needs; (5) those who benefit from non-consumptive uses of Steller sea lions and other living marine resources; and (6) fishing communities.

Public Involvement

Scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed in an Environmental Impact Statement and for identifying the significant issues related to the proposed action. A principal objective of the scoping and public involvement process is to identify a reasonable range of management alternatives that, with adequate analysis, will delineate critical issues and provide a clear basis for distinguishing between those alternatives and for selecting a preferred alternative. Through this notice, NMFS is notifying the public that an SEIS and decision-making process for this proposed action has been initiated so that interested or affected people may participate and contribute to the final decision.

NMFS is seeking written public comments on the scope of issues, including potential impacts, and alternatives that should be considered in revising the Steller sea lion protection measures. Written comments will be accepted at the address above (see ADDRESSES). Written comments should be as specific as possible to be the most helpful. Written comments received during the scoping process, including the names and addresses of those submitting them, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection.

The public is invited to participate in the SSLMC meetings and Council meetings where the latest scientific information regarding Steller sea lions and fisheries interactions are being reviewed and alternative protection measures are being developed and evaluated. Future Council and SSLMC meetings will be noticed in the **Federal Register** and on the website at <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/>. Additional information regarding regulatory, ESA, and NEPA activities for Steller sea lions is available at the website at <http://stellersealions.noaa.gov>. Please visit this website for more information on this SEIS and for guidance on submitting effective public comments.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: December 18, 2007.

James P. Burgess,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable
Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. E7-24951 Filed 12-21-07; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XD93

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Groundfish Fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; request for written comments.

SUMMARY: NMFS, in consultation with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, announces its intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on salmon bycatch reduction measures in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area (BSAI), in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The proposed action would replace the current Chinook and Chum Salmon Savings Areas in the BSAI with new regulatory closures, salmon bycatch limits, or a combination of both. These management measures could incorporate current or new bycatch reduction methods. The scope of the EIS will be to determine the impacts to the human environment resulting from these salmon bycatch reduction measures. NMFS will accept written comments from the public to determine the issues of concern and the

appropriate range of management alternatives for analysis in the EIS.

DATES: Written comments must be received by February 15, 2008.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on issues and alternatives for the EIS should be sent to Sue Salvesson, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, Attn: Ellen Sebastian. Comments may be submitted by

- E-mail: 0648-AW25-

SalmonBycatchEIS@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line the following document identifier: Salmon Bycatch EIS. E-mail comments, with or without attachments, are limited to 5 megabytes;

- Mail: P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802;

- Hand Delivery to the Federal Building: 709 West 9th Street, Room 420A, Juneau, AK; or

- Fax: 907-586-7557.

All Personal Identifying Information (e.g., name, address) voluntarily submitted by the commenter may be publicly accessible. Do not submit Confidential Business Information or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

NMFS will accept anonymous comments. Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe portable document file (pdf) formats only.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jason Anderson, (907) 586-7228 or jason.anderson@noaa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), the United States has exclusive fishery management authority over all living marine resources found within the exclusive economic zone. The management of these marine resources, with the exception of certain marine mammals and birds, is vested in the Secretary of Commerce. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) has the responsibility to prepare fishery management plans for those marine resources off Alaska requiring conservation and management. Management of the Federal groundfish fishery in the BSAI is carried out under the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP). The FMP, its amendments, and implementing regulations (found at 50 CFR part 679) are developed in accordance with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable Federal laws

and executive orders, notably the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Council is considering replacing the current Chinook and Chum Salmon Savings Areas in the BSAI with new regulatory closures, salmon bycatch limits, or a combination of both. These management measures could incorporate current or new bycatch reduction methods. NMFS and the Council have determined the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) may be required for this action because some important aspects of the impacts of salmon bycatch in the BSAI on the salmon stocks of origin and users of these salmon are uncertain or unknown and may result in significant impacts on the human environment not previously analyzed. Thus, NMFS and the Council are initiating scoping for an EIS in the event that an EIS is needed.

NMFS and the Council are seeking information from the public through the EIS scoping process on the range of alternatives to be analyzed, and on the environmental, social, and economic issues to be considered in the analysis. Written comments generated during this scoping process will be provided to the Council and incorporated into the EIS.

Chinook and Chum Salmon Savings Areas

To address Chinook salmon bycatch concerns, the Council adopted several management measures designed to reduce overall Chinook salmon bycatch in the BSAI trawl fisheries. In 1995, the Council adopted, and NMFS approved, Amendment 21b to the FMP. Based on historic information on salmon bycatch, Amendment 21b established a Chinook Salmon Savings Area (60 FR 61215, November 29, 1995). Under Amendment 21b, the Chinook Salmon Savings Area closed when the bycatch of Chinook salmon in BSAI trawl fisheries reached 48,000 fish. Amendment 58 to the FMP revised the Chinook Salmon Savings Area measures (65 FR 60587, October 12, 2000). Amendment 58 reduced the Chinook salmon bycatch limit from 48,000 fish to 29,000 fish, mandated year-round accounting of Chinook bycatch in the directed pollock fishery, revised the boundaries of the Chinook Salmon Savings Area closure, and implemented new closure dates.

The Council also adopted a time-area closure designed to reduce overall non-Chinook salmon bycatch in the BSAI trawl fisheries. In 1995, Amendment 35 to the FMP established the Chum Salmon Savings Area (60 FR 34904, July 5, 1995). This area is closed to all trawling from August 1 through August

31 of each year. Additionally, if 42,000 non-Chinook salmon are caught in the Catcher Vessel Operational Area during the period August 15 through October 14, the area remains closed for the remainder of the calendar year.

The Chinook and Chum Salmon Savings Areas were adopted based on historic observed salmon bycatch rates and were designed to avoid high spatial and temporal levels of salmon bycatch. From 1990 through 2001, the BSAI salmon bycatch average was 37,819 Chinook and 69,332 non-Chinook annually. Recently, however, salmon bycatch numbers have increased substantially. The numbers of Chinook and non-Chinook salmon bycatch in the BSAI groundfish fisheries from 2003 through December 7, 2007, are shown in the following table:

Year	Number of Chinook	Number of non-Chinook
2003	55,422	197,287
2004	63,188	457,817
2005	74,967	711,938
2006	87,730	326,445
2007 through December 7	130,246	97,904

NMFS and the Council are concerned with this level of salmon bycatch because of the potential negative impacts on salmon stocks in general, and on western Alaska salmon stocks in particular.

Recent Salmon Bycatch Management Measures

To address these increasing salmon bycatch amounts, the Council adopted, and NMFS implemented on October 29, 2007, Amendment 84 to the FMP (72 FR 61070, October 29, 2007). Spatial and temporal comparisons of non-community development quota (CDQ) vessels fishing outside of the salmon savings areas with CDQ vessels fishing inside of the salmon savings areas indicated that salmon bycatch rates were much higher outside of the savings areas, and closures were displacing vessels to higher bycatch areas. Amendment 84 exempts non-CDQ and CDQ pollock vessels participating in a salmon bycatch reduction inter-cooperative agreement (ICA) from closures of the Chinook and Chum Salmon Savings Areas in the BSAI. Additionally, vessels participating in trawl fisheries for species other than pollock are exempt from Chum Salmon Savings Area Closures

The purpose of the salmon bycatch avoidance ICA is to use real-time salmon bycatch information to avoid areas of high non-Chinook and Chinook

salmon bycatch rates. The ICA utilizes a system of base bycatch rates, assignment of vessels to tiers based on bycatch rates relative to the base rate, a system of closures for vessels in certain tiers, and monitoring and enforcement through private contractual arrangements.

Amendment 84 was adopted by the Council because it was perceived to be relatively simple to implement, with the potential to reduce salmon bycatch rates. Meanwhile, the Council also initiated analysis on this proposed action to further address salmon bycatch issues, and provide additional management measures should ICA members choose not to participate in the ICA in the future.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to replace the current Chinook and Chum Salmon Savings Areas in the BSAI with new regulatory closures, salmon bycatch limits, or a combination of both based on current salmon bycatch information. These management measures could incorporate current or new bycatch reduction methods. The purpose of the proposed action is to minimize non-Chinook and Chinook salmon bycatch to the extent practicable. The proposed action is necessary to maintain a healthy marine ecosystem, ensure long-term conservation and abundance of salmon, provide maximum benefit to fishermen and communities that depend on these resources, and comply with the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Alternative Management Measures

NMFS, in consultation with the Council, will evaluate a range of alternative management measures for the BSAI groundfish fisheries. The Council's Salmon Bycatch Workgroup is reviewing the latest scientific information regarding the impacts of salmon interactions with groundfish fisheries and developing alternative salmon bycatch reduction measures. Alternatives may be formulated based on the elements identified here, and those developed through the public scoping and Council processes. Possible alternatives could be constructed from one or more of the following measures:

1. Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) limit Establish a PSC limit for non-Chinook and Chinook salmon bycatch in the CDQ and non-CDQ pollock fisheries. PSC limits could be allocated among pollock fishery sectors or fishery cooperatives. Fishery participants would be required to stop fishing when a PSC limit is reached.
2. Fixed closures Establish one or more salmon savings area closures based on

current salmon bycatch information. These closures would occur on an annual or seasonal basis regardless of salmon bycatch amounts at the time of the closure.

3. Triggered closures Establish one or more salmon savings area closures based on current salmon bycatch information. These closures would occur based on criteria evaluated in the EIS. Criteria could include a threshold salmon bycatch number or rate.
4. PSC accounting period Revise the current PSC accounting period to coincide with the salmon biological year to provide additional protections to salmon in the BSAI. Accounting would begin annually in the "B" season, and continue through the following "A" season.

Additionally, the Council may incorporate the current or a new version of the salmon bycatch reduction ICA into one or more alternatives.

Preliminary Identification of Issues

A principal objective of the scoping and public input process is to identify potentially significant impacts to the human environment that should be analyzed in the EIS. The analysis will evaluate the impacts of the alternatives for all resources, species, and issues that may be directly or indirectly affected by salmon bycatch in the BSAI pollock fisheries. The following components of the biological and physical environment may be evaluated: (1) target and non-target fish stocks, forage fish, and prohibited species, including salmon species; (2) species listed under the ESA and their critical habitat; (3) seabirds; (4) marine mammals; and (5) the ecosystem.

Social and economic impacts also would be considered in terms of the effects that changes to salmon bycatch management measures would have on the following groups of individuals: (1) those who participate in harvesting pollock; (2) those who process and market pollock and pollock products; (3) those who consume pollock products; (4) those who rely on living marine resources caught in the management area, particularly salmon; (5) those who benefit from commercial, subsistence, and recreational salmon fisheries; and (6) fishing communities.

Public Involvement

Scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed in an EIS and for identifying the significant issues related to the proposed action. A principal objective of the scoping and public involvement process is to identify a range of reasonable management alternatives

that, with adequate analysis, will delineate critical issues and provide a clear basis for distinguishing among those alternatives and selecting a preferred alternative. Through this notice, NMFS is notifying the public that an EIS and decision-making process for this proposed action have been initiated so that interested or affected people may participate and contribute to the final decision.

NMFS is seeking written public comments on the scope of issues, including potential impacts, and alternatives that should be considered in revising salmon bycatch management measures. Written comments will be accepted at the address above (see ADDRESSES). Written comments should be as specific as possible to be the most helpful. Written comments received during the scoping process, including the names and addresses of those submitting them, will be considered part of the public record of this proposal and will be available for public inspection.

The public is invited to participate and provide input at Council and Salmon Bycatch Workgroup meetings where the latest scientific information regarding salmon bycatch in the BSAI groundfish fisheries is reviewed and alternative salmon bycatch reduction measures are developed and evaluated. Notice of future Council and Salmon Bycatch Workgroup meetings will be published in the *Federal Register* and on the Internet at <http://www.fakr.gov>. Please visit this website for more information on this EIS and for guidance on submitting effective public comments.

Dated: December 18, 2007.

James P. Burgess,
Acting Director, Office of Sustainable
Fisheries, National Marine Fisheries Service.
[FR Doc. E7-24953 Filed 12-21-07; 8:45 am]
BILLING CODE 3510-22-S

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XD61

Marine Mammals; File No. 10080

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice; issuance of permit.

SUMMARY: Notice is hereby given that Dr. Kathryn A. Ono, Department of Biological Sciences, University of New England, Biddeford, ME, has been