

NPFMC Passes Cod Endorsements

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Mike Mason/KMXT

A decision reached Friday afternoon by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council has the potential to dramatically change the Federal Pacific Cod fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska. Mike Mason was there and filed this story.

-- (Cod Endorsements 5:00 SOC OUT)

The first proposal taken up by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council during their ongoing meeting in Anchorage was a series of amendments to the management plan for groundfish in the Gulf of Alaska. Specifically, the amendments add Pacific cod endorsements to Western and Central Gulf fixed-gear License Limitation Program licenses based on "Recency". In other words the proposal rewards those who have fished for Pacific Cod within the last 6-years with a cod endorsement. The LLP licenses were created in the 90's to limit access to the groundfish and crab fisheries in the Bering Sea, the Aleutian Islands and the Gulf of Alaska as a precursor to full-scale groundfish rationalization. However, in 2006 the Council decided to delay the rationalization program in the Gulf of Alaska. But the LLP licenses remain. On Friday the Council put in place the criteria for determining if individual licenses can carry the Pacific cod endorsement. After days of public testimony and deliberations the final amended proposal was approved by a vote of 10 to 1. Council member Duncan Fields from Kodiak ended up as the lone dissenting voice on the Council.

Spot----Cod
1----20-seconds----Q: "residents"

The approved proposal includes some provisions that would allow LLP license holders who would not qualify for a cod endorsement to get one anyway. For instance there was a provision added that was supported by the Freezer Longliner Coalition. That group represents 34 hook and line catcher processors. During public testimony the group was represented by Kenny Down, who stressed the impact to the fishery if the exemption was not included.

Spot---Cod

4----12-seconds----Q: "cooperatives"

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proposal also included language allocating groundfish harvest history to all stacked licenses. Stacking is where multiple LLP's are registered to a single vessel. The provision, in essence, allows non-cod fishing license holders to earn an endorsement. The final amended proposal also stipulates that a certain number of LLP licenses be allocated to Community Quota Entities, which are commonly referred to as "C-Q-E's". At present there are 21 Gulf of Alaska communities eligible to create a "C-Q-E" including Larsen Bay, Old Harbor, Port Lions, and Sand Point. However, of the 21 eligible communities only 9 have actually formed a "C-Q-E". Reserving some cod fishing opportunities for coastal communities was the main point of emphasis during the public testimony of Olie Olson. He's a member of the Gulf of Alaska Coastal Community Coalition which represents 42 communities and around 24-thousand Alaskans.

Spot---Cod

5---25-seconds---Q: "That much"

Late

in the deliberations on Friday the "C-Q-E" section was changed to stipulate the exact number of licenses available for individual communities. In total there will be just over 70 such licenses. Among the reasons cited for considering the cod endorsements for the LLP licenses is to limit the number of vessels that can participate in the fisheries in part because of increased participation by harvesters who have been displaced from other fisheries and a shrinking total allowable catch requirement in the fisheries. One of the most vocal supporters of the cod endorsement proposal was Council member Gerry Merrigan from Petersburg.

Spot----Cod

2-----16-seconds----Q: "8-years"

Merrigan noted that cod fishing opportunities exist in the state managed fishery and the parallel fishery. He also pointed to the exemption included in the proposal for the use of jig gear in Federal waters in the Western and Central Gulf of Alaska. The cod endorsement proposal prompted quite a bit of public testimony in opposition including from State Representative Alan Austerman from Kodiak. In an unprecedented move he was speaking on behalf of the Alaska House of Representatives. Austerman confirmed that the House approved a resolution calling for the Council to strongly consider the "No-Action" alternative included in the proposal.

Spot----Cod

6----14-seconds----Q: "state"

While

the State House approved the resolution it did not make it out of the State Senate before the current meeting of the Council. The final amended proposal includes qualifying years and catch thresholds to determine if an existing LLP licenses qualifies for the cod endorsement. The qualifying period is from 2002 through December 8th of last year. For catcher vessels under 60'feet in length the catch threshold is 10-metric tons over the entire qualifying period while that threshold jumps up to 50-metric tons for vessels over 60-feet. The proposal approved by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council now goes up

the regulatory chain of command to the Secretary of the Department of Commerce, who must still sign off on the proposal.

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