

Agenda Item #3 – Overview of Federal Groundfish Management

Federal Management

- **Governed by the Magnuson-Stevens Act**
- **Advised by the Council though final authority rests with NMFS**
- **Requires extensive opportunity for public input throughout the process**

Management is effective because of a strong collaborative working relationship with our partners – Council, State of Alaska, and the fishing community.

Primary Federal Responsibilities

- **Stock Assessment** – Federal stock assessments form the foundation of conservative management. These estimates are peer-reviewed. These assessments monitor the health of fishery resources and are relied upon to set appropriate catch limits in Federal, State GHL, and State parallel fisheries. They are not cheap.
- **Annual Harvest Specifications** – Once stock assessments are completed, the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee establishes two important limits: an Overfishing Level (OFL) – never to be exceeded! – and an Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC) – maximum permissible harvest, and ALWAYS below the Overfishing Level. The Council, after input from the public, sets the total allowable catch (TAC) – this is the actual permissible harvest. It can be the same, but not greater than the acceptable biological catch. These limits are established each year.
- **Management for total catch** -- The Magnuson-Stevens Act requires NMFS to ensure that total catch does not exceed its annual limits. This means that if catch is set aside in a State GHL fishery, such as in the Pacific cod fishery, then NMFS has to reduce the amount available in the Federal fisheries. It is a zero sum game.
- **Comprehensive catch accounting** – The Council and NMFS have established a wide range of tools to track catch on a timely basis. These include the Federal observer program to collect basic biological samples and monitor bycatch, especially for salmon and halibut. Tracking bycatch without onboard observers is very challenging. There are reporting requirements, vessel monitoring systems, video compliance (in some fisheries), and a catch reporting system developed in close coordination with the State of Alaska (eLandings).
- **Balances National Standards** – When developing fishery management plans, the Council and NMFS must balance objectives to derive the optimum yield from the fishery, with other goals such as minimizing bycatch, considering communities, promoting safety, and the efficient management of resources.... This balance has led to fishery management programs that try to maximize catch, but that will shut down fishing if salmon bycatch limits are reached (pollock); and programs that limit the number of participants to avoid a race for fish, but that provide harvest opportunities for specific rural communities (license limitation program).