

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Eric A. Olson, Chairman
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February 25, 2013

Senator Cathy Giessel
Chair Senate Resources Committee
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Sent by email: Senator.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov

Dear Senator Giessel;

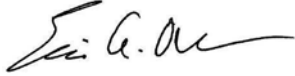
The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) supports the State of Alaska extending the current limited entry program for the Weathervane scallop fishery in state waters. The Council delegated authority to the State of Alaska to manage all aspects of the scallop fishery in federal waters off Alaska, except limited access, which remained a federal responsibility. The Fishery Management Plan for the Scallop Fishery off Alaska (FMP) established a license limitation program (LLP) in federal waters, effective January 16, 2001. The Alaska Legislature, as you know, also established a four-year vessel moratorium in 1997 that was first extended an additional three years until June 10, 2004, and then replaced with a vessel-based limited entry program that was scheduled to expire in 2008. At that time the legislature extended that expiration until the end of 2013. The Council is currently concerned that if this program is allowed to expire, the potential exists for an open-access fishery in State waters that is inconsistent with management measures to limit effort in federal waters.

Conservation concerns with crab bycatch and the overharvest of scallops in the early 1990s prompted the Council and the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) to work cooperatively to reduce scallop fishing effort in the overcapitalized Weathervane scallop fishery. In several areas of the state, Kodiak and Yakutat for example, scallop beds are bisected by the 3-mile boundary line separating state from federal waters. In these areas, the majority (80% or more) of the scallop harvest is taken from the federal waters portion of the scallop beds. Guideline harvest ranges established by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) are applied to the entire registration area, and are not apportioned to either state waters or federal waters. If the state waters portion of the fishery reverted to open access, additional vessels with unrestricted fishing capacity could target scallops in state waters. Disproportionate harvest of the scallop beds could lead to stock conservation concerns; including that portion of the stock in federal waters. Two additional concerns result from a bifurcated management regime. First, regulatory enforcement along the 3-mile line would be problematic. Second, Tanner and red king crab bycatch would likely increase as a result of increased fishing effort within a restricted portion of the scallop bed. Weathervane scallop stocks in Alaska are small. Concerns with overcapitalization, and the resulting stock conservation and crab bycatch concerns have largely been addressed through complementary federal and state limited entry/access programs. The Council encourages the Alaska Legislature to extend the Weathervane Scallop limited entry program in state waters to coordinate with the federal program implemented by this Council.

If you need any additional information relative to this issue, please feel free to contact the Council's Executive Director, Chris Oliver.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric A. Olson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Eric A. Olson, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Cc: Ben Brown, Commissioner CFEC