



Fish News

Aug. 25, 2010

NOAA Extends Public Comment Timeline on Steller Sea Lion Proposal

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announced this week that the agency is **extending the public comment period** for the draft 2010 Groundfish Biological Opinion (BiOp) until 5 p.m. Alaska Daylight Time on September 3, 2010. The original comment deadline was Friday, August 27, 2010. NMFS received numerous requests to extend the timeline, so the agency pushed the comment deadline back by one week.

In the draft opinion, NMFS proposed closing the Atka mackerel and Pacific Cod fisheries in the Western Aleutian Islands and restricting the Atka mackerel and Pacific cod fisheries in the Central Aleutian Islands (Areas 541 and 542).



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The agency was criticized by the fishing industry for what many said were shortcomings, such as stating as if they were fact, conclusions that have a very high degree of uncertainty associated with them.

Some from the fishing industry expressed concern that widespread closures would result in a large displacement of fishing to the Bering Sea. Currently, some fishermen from Sand Point's fishing fleet, the largest in the Aleutians East Borough, go to Adak to fish, which spreads out the fleet. However, if NMFS's recommendations were approved, those restrictive proposals would force them to fish locally, increasing competition.

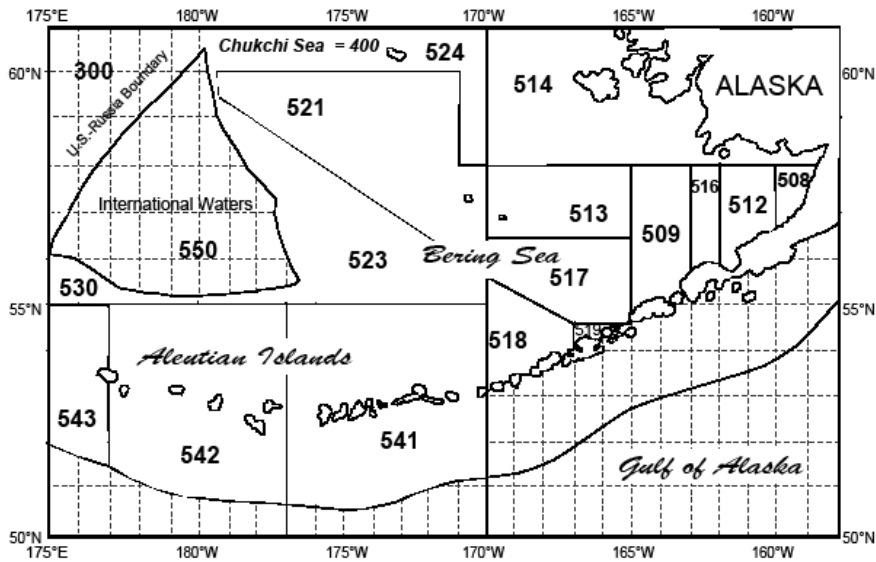
Last week (Sept. 16 - 20, 2010) the North Pacific Fishery Management Council held a special meeting to review the BiOp. As a result, the Council unanimously passed a motion recommending that NMFS consider another reasonable and prudent alternative (RPA) with less restrictive fishery closures in the Western and Central Aleutian Islands. The Council outlined this RPA in its News & Notes August 2010 Newsletter (see link below). The Council's proposed modified protections would protect Steller sea lion rookeries from competition from fishing in the areas and times needed, but would still allow a portion of the Atka mackerel fishery to continue in the Western Aleutians. The modifications would also allow the cod fishery to continue largely as-is.

The Council recommended a 2-year sunset provision for the mitigation measures. The measures could potentially either be renewed or replaced with another set of measures prior to the sunset date. NOAA plans to consider recommendations from the Council and the public when it develops the final 2010 Groundfish Biological Opinion. NMFS will present the final reasonable and prudent alternative at its October 2010 meeting. The agency will also present an updated analysis of fishery impacts associated with any revisions to the implemented RPA. The final BiOp and rulemaking to implement the management measures in the final RPA is scheduled to be completed by January 2011. For more details, visit the links and the map below.

[Link: NPFMC News & Notes August 2010 Newsletter](#)

[Link: NOAA Press Release: NOAA Extends Public Comment Timeline on Steller Sea Lion Proposal](#)

[Link: SeafoodNews.com - Balsinger Pledges NMFS Will Heed Council Advice on Steller Sea Lions](#)



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