



Fish News

Dec. 22, 2013

Highlights from the AEB Winter Fisheries Teleconference Meeting

Many AEB fishermen are gearing up for the upcoming 2014 winter fisheries. With that in mind, the Borough's Natural Resources Department hosted a winter fisheries teleconference meeting last week to discuss several issues. Representatives from NMFS and ADF&G took part in the conversation on December 19th to clarify several items and help field questions. The meeting was broadcast live on KSDP.

Pacific Cod Sector Split – Permits & Endorsements:

NMFS started off the discussion about a reminder associated with the Pacific cod sector split. Brent Pristas of NOAA Fisheries Enforcement said fishermen with a federal fisheries permit who plan to fish in state waters during the parallel season, must have an LLP with endorsements.

“If you want to move into a new PCod fishery or change how you’re fishing, I would recommend giving our office a call, just to make sure that you’ve got all the right permits and endorsements because there are a lot of different pieces that factor into this,” Pristas added.

New BSAI State-Water P. Cod Fishery:

ADF&G's Mark Stickert reminded fishermen that the new Bering Sea Aleutian Islands (BSAI) state-water PCod fishery (Area O), which was approved two months ago during the Alaska Board of Fisheries meeting, is similar to the South Alaska Peninsula PCod fishery. Historically, that area had not been a state-managed fishery in the Bering Sea. Vessels that are 58 feet and under using pot gear can participate in this fishery. The GHL for the new BSAI state-waters PCcod fishery equates to 18.86 million pounds for 2014, based on 3 percent of the combined BSAI ABC.

Stickert said another change is the increase in the GHL for the SAP PCod fishery.

"For quite a while, it's been based on 25 percent of the allowable biological catch (ABC) in the Western Gulf," he added. "The Board increased that by 5 percent."

So from this point forward, the GHL will be based on 30 percent of the Western Gulf's ABC.

VMS Units:

NMFS Enforcement cautioned fishermen to make sure equipment on board is in good working order. Pristas said it's come to their attention that the SkyMate VMS (vessel monitoring system) units are sending out transmissions containing larger gaps than what's considered normal.

"They should be transmitting every 30 minutes," Pristas said. "My personal observation or suspicion is that I think that many of these units are coming to the end of their useful life. Many of you may be getting calls that your units need to be checked or replaced."

Observer Program:

As a reminder, fishermen who participate in the federal fisheries or IFQ fishing are required to participate in the observer program. However, vessels less than 40 feet in length are not required to have observer coverage. Vessels between 40 and 57 ½ feet in length are in the vessel selection category. NMFS will send a letter to the fishermen who are selected for coverage. Boats greater than 57 ½ feet in length are in the trip selection category. That group is required to log each fishing trip. Operators/owners can do that on the web.

For those who prefer to log their trips on the phone, NMFS has made a change that fishermen should be aware of. The observer call center has moved from Anchorage to Seattle. The new number is 1-855-747-6377.

“The reason for that is to make it easier,” said Jennifer Mondragon with the NMFS Alaska Regional Office in Juneau. “In the past, you had to call one number to log your trip. Then, if you were selected, you had to make a second call to the observer provider. So the agency decided to consolidate this process. Now, you would log your trip and then you’re basically on the phone with the observer provider, so if you get selected, they can start coordinating with you. It’s a one-stop process.”

Pristas says it’s important to note that if the federal season is open, and a fisherman has a federal fisheries permit, the observer call-in requirements also apply to that operator.

Coast Guard Inspections:

Fishermen also need to make sure they are in compliance with all Coast Guard safety regulations.

“You are required to have a Coast Guard inspection prior to departing with an observer,” Pristas said. “The observer will not get on your boat if you don’t have a valid safety decal.”

If any other basic safety requirements are out of compliance, observers are prohibited from leaving port in those vessels.

“We don’t give them the option of working around it,” Pristas added.

Another safety issue that came up during the discussion focused on the practice of some boats shutting down at 9 p.m. and just drifting, which is considered to be a violation of Coast Guard safety rules.

“We have sent warnings to vessels that do this,” said Pristas. “Anyone who has done this in the past with no one at the wheel watch has committed a violation of safety regulations, and that’s a rule, regardless of whether an observer is on board or not.”

EMS:

NMFS is currently looking into the option of an electronic monitoring system to evaluate its effectiveness in addition to, or instead of, human observers. The agency has

established a pilot program and is looking for volunteer fishermen to allow equipment on board. The first priority would be to work on the smaller hook and line boats. Anyone interested in volunteering can call Liz Chilton with the observer program in Seattle at (206) 526-4197.

“If you’re fishing with a different gear type, I think it’s still worth letting Liz know. We would put systems on other boats if the situation is right,” said Mondragon. “I think in some situations, we’re limited a bit by the ports from where you fish. We may not be able to get a camera system out to all of the ports. However, I think it’s still worth letting Liz know that you would be interested.”

Prohibitive Species Status:

After the winter fisheries wrap up, Pristas recommended that IFQ fishermen check with NMFS or local canneries to find out if a species has recently gone into prohibited status. He warned that several species, such as Yellow Eye or Big Skates, which have always been in bycatch, are going into prohibitive species status (PSC). Pristas said it typically occurs during the middle of the summer.

“So say you call and say, ‘I’m going longlining for halibut in the Western Gulf, is there anything in prohibitive status that’s pretty quick and easy for us to look out for?’ That’s something we keep a close eye on, and we know right off the top of our heads,” Pristas added. “So please give us a call before you start IFQ fishing, especially late in the summer.”

If you missed the AEB Winter Fisheries teleconference, you can listen to a KSDP recording of the meeting by clicking on the following link: <http://apradio.org/mp3/12-19-2013-AEB-FISHERIES.mp3>

Contact information:

Vessel Safety Coordinator numbers for the USCG 17th District:

(907) 463-2810 or (907) 463-2823

New Observer Call Center Number:

(855) 747-6377

Electronic Monitoring Pilot Project:

Those interested in volunteering can call Liz Chilton at (206) 526-4197

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