

INSTITUTE OF THE NORTH

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Study shows fishery council follows scientific recommendations

ANCHORAGE – An analysis of the voting record of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) shows that its members consistently followed the recommendations of marine biologists in supporting actions that imposed constraints on the groundfish fisheries for purposes of conservation. That conclusion is made in a report detailing a retrospective analysis that examined the voting record of the NPFMC from 1994 to 2006.

“Such a record indicates the NPFMC has been able to allocate fish among a diverse user group, while never exceeding the recommendations of their scientific committee,” according to the study, *Conflict of Interest Standards & Regional Fishery management Councils*, issued by the Anchorage-based Institute of the North.

On the NPFMC, there are seven appointed interest seats and four government seats (for the National Marine Fisheries Service and representatives of the States of Alaska, Washington and Oregon). Criticism has been leveled in the past that regional fisheries management councils are dominated by commercial fishing interests who overpower state and federal council members when voting on such things as setting the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and restrictions based on conservation goals.

“Such an accusation does not seem to be warranted when looking at the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council,” said report author Ben Ellis, managing director of the Institute of the North. Among the findings in the report:

- Between 1994 and 2006 the council has never changed the SSC’s (Scientific and Statistical Committee’s) recommended Over Fishing Limits.
- Between 1994 and 2006, the council has never exceeded the SSC’s ABC (Allowable Biological Catch) recommendations.
- In 1994 and 1995, the council substituted the more conservative Plan Team ABC recommendation for the SSC’s recommended ABC for Pacific Ocean Perch.
- In the 12-year study period of final groundfish TAC specifications and 12 significant conservation actions, in no instance did the final vote include more than two government objectors.

The report also looked at the legal framework of conflict of interest standards as they applied to the council process and other similar federal committees.

“Given the voting record of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council on conservation issues, the consistent application of science to management questions, plus the 25-plus year history of managing stocks such that there are no overfished groundfish stocks in the North Pacific, it appears that the application of these (conflict of interest) standards is working to ensure that conservation takes precedence over short-term economic interests.”

Congress amended the Magnuson Stevens Act, the nation’s premier fishery management law that sets up the regional council process, in late 2006. Many of the changes Congress made were based on the successful conservation practices of the NPFMC. Congress also made adjustments to the conflict of interest provisions for the regional councils.

“I had the privilege to serve on the North Pacific Council and saw the process first hand,” Ellis said. “The conservation record of the Council is solid and provides a model for the rest of the country.”

An internet version of the report is available at www.institutenorth.org. For a printed copy, contact Ben Ellis at bellis@institutenorth.org or call 907-771-2444.

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Founded by former Secretary of the Interior and twice governor of Alaska, Walter J. Hickel, the Institute of the North specializes in how to utilize and care for the resource-rich commons for the benefit of those living in the region. Areas of special study include Alaska, the new Russia, the many regions of the Arctic and other areas of the world with sparse populations yet wealthy in human cultures and natural resources. www.institutenorth.org