



Considering community allocations: Power and the politics of enclosure in the Gulf of Alaska



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ABSTRACT

In 2012, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council initiated the process of designing a new management structure for the Gulf of Alaska trawl groundfish fleet. The new program is currently structured as a catch share program and driven by the need to end the 'race for fish' and provide the trawl fleet with the tools to reduce bycatch. To date much of the discussion among policy makers and stakeholders has centered on community protection measures and how best to avoid the negative social and economic impacts of catch share programs including impacts to crew, consolidation and the flight of quota and resource wealth from Gulf of Alaska fishery dependent communities. This paper examines how community protection measures related to the distribution of benefits and access to fishery resources are considered and challenged in the North Pacific today. Special attention is given to the ongoing debate surrounding the potential inclusion of an initial allocation to place-based Gulf of Alaska communities via a Community Fishing Association. As part of this effort, this paper examines the political space and underlying power dynamics in which consideration of alternatives to the commodification of fishing rights occurs.

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1. Introduction: Addressing bycatch, considering communities

In June 2012, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council began the process of developing a new management structure for the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish trawl fishery. The underlying impetus for the new management structure, entitled The Gulf of Alaska Trawl Bycatch Management Program, is reducing bycatch, particularly bycatch of Pacific halibut and Chinook salmon which are taken as Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) in the GOA groundfish trawl fishery.¹

As the governing body tasked with managing federal fisheries off of Alaska's coast, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC or the Council hereafter) has adopted important measures in recent years to address mounting bycatch concerns in the North Pacific.² These include first-ever caps on Chinook salmon bycatch and a 15% reduction in the halibut bycatch limit in GOA trawl fisheries.³ When these caps are reached, the fishery is

shut down. These bycatch limits were put into place amidst a statewide climate of crisis and conservation concern over declining stock abundance as well as mounting public pressure stemming from glaring inequities, notably that the full burden of resource conservation was born by subsistence, charter/sport and commercial fishermen who directly target and depend on healthy Chinook salmon and halibut stocks in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea [1–5]. At the same time, GOA trawl vessel owners and representatives expressed concerns to the Council regarding the difficulty of adapting to new bycatch limits under the existing management structure.

From the outset, the new management structure under consideration by the Council has been a catch share program intended to create "vessel-level and/or cooperative-level incentives to eliminate wasteful fishing practices, provide mechanisms to control and reduce bycatch, and create accountability measures when utilizing PSC, target and secondary species" [6].⁴ As a form of enclosure, catch share programs allocate secure, exclusive and often transferrable property-like rights or 'privileges' to fishery participants. Catch shares are a highly controversial management tool due to expected and unforeseen impacts associated with the uneven distribution of wealth and opportunity that occurs through

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¹ Prohibited Species Catch (PSC) is nonretainable catch that is captured incidentally.

² The NPFMC is one of eight Regional Fishery Management Councils nationally established under the Magnuson Stevens Act. The Councils are advisory to the National Marine Fisheries Service (also referred to as NOAA Fisheries) and the Department of Commerce.

³ In 2011, the NPFMC voted to place the first-ever cap (limit) of 25,000 fish on Chinook salmon bycatch in the GOA pollock trawl fishery (Amendment 93). In 2013, the NPFMC set a hard cap of 7500 salmon on Chinook salmon bycatch in all remaining (i.e. non-pollock) GOA trawl fisheries (Amendment 97).

⁴ This is not the Council's first attempt at rationalizing the GOA trawl groundfish fishery. A 2006 attempt was abandoned due to myriad practical and social concerns [31].

the privatization of fisheries [7–10]. Foley et al. (2015:395) describe how “enclosure is a means to reorder social wealth generating opportunities, but the principles for governing resource access and property arrangements created through enclosure are also deeply contested” [11]. This paper focuses on the challenges and contestations surrounding the potential inclusion of a Community Fishing Association (CFA) in the emerging GOA Trawl Bycatch Management Program. The purpose of a CFA, discussed in greater detail below, is to mitigate some of the negative consequences of catch share programs through an initial and direct allocation (or ‘anchoring’) of fishing privileges to place-based fishing communities.

2. Objectives, methods and organization of article

2.1. Key objectives

Couched in a political ecology framework, this paper considers the politics of enclosure, ‘competing narratives’ (Walker 2006) and allocation perspectives influencing the development of the GOA Trawl Bycatch Management Program [12]. Robbins (2004:12) broadly defines political ecology as “empirical, research-based explorations to explain linkages in the condition and change of social/environmental systems, with explicit consideration of power” [13]. Refracted through this lens, the overarching purpose of this paper is twofold. For one, this is an investigation of how community protection measures related to the distribution of benefits and access to fishery resources are considered and challenged in the North Pacific today. Special attention is given to the ongoing debate surrounding an initial allocation to place-based GOA communities via a Community Fishing Association. Specifically, this paper assesses: 1) the strengths and weaknesses of a Community Fishing Association (CFA) in achieving management goals and objectives;⁵ 2) how a direct allocation of quota to a CFA can serve as a community protection measure; and 3) how the inclusion of a CFA in the initial program design is considered and contested among policy makers and fishery stakeholders at the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. Second, and more generally, this paper examines the political space and underlying power dynamics in which consideration of alternatives to the commodification of fishing rights occurs [11,14]. An underlying objective of this article is to contribute to scholarly and applied efforts to develop new resource allocation regimes in fisheries which advance social goals and preserve locally-based fishing opportunities [15–16].

2.2. Methods and materials

This paper draws primarily on NPFMC meeting minutes, documents and public testimony related to discussion of the GOA Trawl Bycatch Management Program between the June 2012 and October 2014 Council meetings (the entirety of the Council discussion to date). This includes review of the NPFMC’s Scientific and Statistical Committee and Advisory Panel meeting minutes

⁵ The NPFMC has identified 14 Goals and Objectives for the GOA Trawl Bycatch Management Program including the following which specifically address social and community concerns: authorize fair and equitable access privileges that take into consideration the value of assets and investments in the fishery and dependency on the fishery for harvesters, processors, and communities (#4); balance interests of all sectors and provide equitable distribution of benefits and similar opportunities for increased value (#5); promote community stability and minimize adverse economic impacts by limiting consolidation, providing employment and entry opportunities, and increasing the economic viability of the groundfish harvesters, processors, and support industries (#6); minimize adverse impacts on sectors and areas not included in the program (#13); and promote active participation by owners of harvest vessels and fishing privileges (#14) [52].

and the CFA Workshop hosted by the NPFMC in Seattle in February 2014. The author attended all Anchorage-based Council meetings in this time frame (Oct/Dec 2012, Oct 2013, Apr/Oct 2014) and the June 2012 meeting held in Kodiak. The author listened online to the two remaining Council meetings which included discussion of the GOA Trawl Bycatch Management Program and Community Fishing Association concept (June 2013, Feb 2014). This paper also draws on meeting minutes, documents and public testimony heard at Kodiak Fisheries Workgroup meetings. The Kodiak Fisheries Workgroup (KFWG) is made up of Kodiak Island Borough Assembly and City Council members. The workgroup was created in 2013 to better understand and engage in fishery management actions which may impact Kodiak Archipelago communities. The potential impacts of the GOA Trawl Bycatch Management Program remain a key focus of the KFWG. The workgroup regularly submits comments to the NPFMC and representatives travel to Council meetings to testify in person.

2.3. The GOA trawl fleet and fishery dependent communities

The GOA trawl fishery is currently fished by 89 catcher vessels and 20 catcher/processors [17]. The fishery occurs in two primary management areas, the Central Gulf of Alaska (Areas 620 and 630) and the Western Gulf of Alaska (Area 610) (Fig. 1). The KFWG’s active participation in the policy-making process is indicative of the central and potentially significant ways in which Kodiak communities will be impacted by a new management structure for the GOA trawl fleet. Situated in the Central Gulf of Alaska, Kodiak finds itself at the epicenter of the emerging GOA program. The majority of the GOA trawl-caught groundfish harvest is landed in the City of Kodiak (pop. 6130) [18]. The City of Kodiak is Alaska’s largest and most diverse fishing port with more than 700 local commercial fishing vessels filling the harbor, roughly 120 of these vessels are over 80 feet in length [7]. Groundfish landings (particularly pollock and cod) comprised over 75% of the total volume of fish landed in Kodiak in 2010 (382 million pounds) [7]. A recent analysis suggests that if a port of landing requirement that is currently under consideration by the Council were to be implemented as part of a new GOA management structure, over 80% of the Central GOA groundfish catch would be required to be delivered to Kodiak [19].⁶ Kodiak is also home to the largest number of GOA trawl fishery participants including processing workers, catcher vessel (CV) owners, skippers, crew and others dependent on onshore support services and businesses.⁷ Twenty-six of the 89 CV owners comprising the GOA groundfish fleet reside in Kodiak. This is followed by 15 CV owners in the Seattle area [17].

Fishing communities in the Western Gulf of Alaska region will also be greatly impacted by a new management structure for the GOA trawl fishery. The communities of King Cove and Sand Point in the Aleutians East Borough (pop. 3141) in particular are highly vulnerable to shifts in the restructuring of harvesting and seafood processing opportunities in the region [20]. Each community relies on the operation of a single seafood processing plant in contrast to the eight large seafood processors currently in operation in Kodiak [17]. There are currently 13 CV owners in Sand Point and six in King Cove [17]. The Western Gulf trawl fleet is comprised entirely of trawl vessels under 60 feet in length. Western Gulf community leaders and representatives from the Aleutians East Borough and the locally based Peninsula Fishermen’s Coalition regularly participate in the federal fisheries policy arena and have been active

⁶ Other Central GOA communities that have received trawl fisheries, notably Seward, have expressed concerns that a rationalization program could preclude them from ever processing trawl-caught groundfish.

⁷ The City of Kodiak is somewhat unique in Alaska in that it has a large resident processing workforce.

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