

**Finding of No Significant Impact for
Amendment 100 to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea
and Aleutian Islands Management Area and
Amendment 91 to the FMP for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska
[RIN 0648-BD98]**

National Marine Fisheries Service

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Administrative Order 216-6 (NAO 216-6) (May 20, 1999) contains criteria for determining the significance of the impacts of a proposed action. In addition, the Council on Environmental Quality regulations at 40 CFR 1508.27 state that the significance of an action should be analyzed both in terms of "context" and "intensity." Each criterion listed below is relevant in making a finding of no significant impact and has been considered individually, as well as in combination with the others. The significance of this action is analyzed based on the NAO 216-6 criteria and CEQ's context and intensity criteria. These include:

1) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to jeopardize the sustainability of any target species that may be affected by the action?

Response: No. The environmental assessment (EA) analyzes the impacts of adding grenadiers as an ecosystem component (EC) species and no significant adverse impacts on target species were identified. The proposed action would not change the prosecution of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands (BSAI) or Gulf of Alaska (GOA) groundfish fisheries. Therefore, no impacts on the sustainability of any target species are expected (EA Section 3.6).

2) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to jeopardize the sustainability of any non-target species?

Response: No. The only non-target species potentially impacted are grenadiers. The EA analyzes the impacts of the action on grenadiers and no significant adverse impacts were identified. The proposed action would not change the prosecution of the BSAI or GOA groundfish fisheries. Therefore, no adverse impacts on the sustainability of any non-target species are expected (EA Section 3.5).

3) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to cause substantial damage to the ocean and coastal habitats and/or essential fish habitat as defined under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and identified in FMPs?

Response: No. The EA identifies that the proposed action would have no anticipated impact on essential fish habitat because of the limited potential for impacts. The proposed action would not change the prosecution of the BSAI or GOA groundfish fisheries. Therefore, no impacts on habitat and essential fish habitat are expected (EA Chapter 3, Table 3-1).

4) *Can the proposed action be reasonably expected to have a substantial adverse impact on public health or safety?*

Response: No. The EA identifies that the proposed action would have no anticipated impact on public health or safety. The proposed action would not change the prosecution of the BSAI or GOA groundfish fisheries. Therefore, no impacts on safety are expected (EA/RIR/IRFA Section 6.1).

5) *Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to adversely affect endangered or threatened species, marine mammals, or critical habitat of these species?*

Response: No. The EA identifies that the proposed action would have no anticipated impact on endangered or threatened species, marine mammals, and critical habitat. The proposed action would not change the prosecution of the BSAI or GOA groundfish fisheries (EA Chapter 3, Table 3-1).

6) *Can the proposed action be expected to have a substantial impact on biodiversity and/or ecosystem function within the affected area (e.g., benthic productivity, predator-prey relationships, etc.)?*

Response: No. Given that the proposed action would not change the prosecution of the BSAI or GOA groundfish fisheries, no substantial impacts are expected on biodiversity or ecosystem function. Because the proposed action would provide methods for accounting catch, and provide management measures to limit the overall grenadier harvest, it would be expected to provide a more precautionary management, and likely reduce impacts on the ecological role of grenadiers relative to Alternative 1, No Action (EA Section 3.7).

7) *Are significant social or economic impacts interrelated with natural or physical environmental effects?*

Response: No. The EA analyzes the economic impacts of the proposed action. Given that the proposed action would not change the prosecution of the BSAI or GOA groundfish fisheries, *de minimus* economic impacts are expected (EA/RIR/RIFA Chapter 4).

8) *Are the effects on the quality of the human environment likely to be highly controversial?*

Response: No. The effects of the proposed action on the quality of the human environment are not controversial based on the fact that this is really a very minor change to groundfish fishery management.

9) *Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in substantial impacts to unique areas, such as historic or cultural resources, park land, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas?*

Response: No. Given that the proposed action would not change the prosecution of the BSAI or GOA groundfish fisheries, no impacts to unique areas, such as historic or cultural

resources, park land, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas are expected.

10) Are the effects on the human environment likely to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks?

Response: No. The potential effects of the action are understood because of the level of existing knowledge about the fish species, harvest methods, and area of the activity (EA Chapter 3).

11) Is the proposed action related to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant impacts?

Response: No. The EA analyzes the cumulative impacts and no other actions were identified that would result in cumulatively significant impacts (EA Section 3.8).

12) Is the proposed action likely to adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources?

Response: No. This action will have no effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because these resources are not present in the action area.

13) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in the introduction or spread of a nonindigenous species?

Response: No. This action poses no risk of the introduction or spread of nonindigenous species into the exclusive economic zone off Alaska because it would not change fishing, processing, or shipping practices that may lead to the introduction of nonindigenous species.

14) Is the proposed action likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration?

Response: No. This proposed action would not establish a precedent for future action with significant effects because this decision does not represent a fundamentally new issue; NMFS has other species classified as ecosystem component species. Pursuant to NEPA, for all future amendments to the fishery management plans, appropriate environmental analysis documents will be prepared to inform the decision makers of potential impacts to the human environment and to implement mitigation measures to avoid significant adverse impacts.

15) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment?

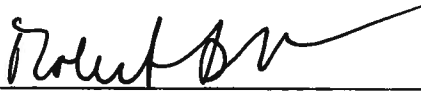
Response: No. This action poses no known risk of violation of federal, state, or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment.


16) Can the proposed action reasonably be expected to result in cumulative adverse effects that could have a substantial effect on the target species or non-target species?

Response: No. The effects on target and non-targeted species from the proposed action are not significantly adverse as the overall harvest of these species will not be affected. No cumulative effects were identified that, added to the direct and indirect effects on grenadiers, would result in significant effects (EA Section 3.8).

DETERMINATION

In view of the information presented in this document and the analysis contained in the supporting Environmental Assessment prepared for Amendment 100 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area and Amendment 91 to the FMP for Groundfish of the Gulf of Alaska, it is hereby determined that the proposed action will not significantly impact the quality of the human environment as described above and in the supporting Environmental Assessment. In addition, all beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed action have been addressed to reach the conclusion of no significant impacts. Accordingly, preparation of an EIS for this action is not necessary.



 James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.
Administrator, Alaska Region


Date