If approved by NMFS, this amendment would prohibit the use of trawl gear in a specified area of the BS that historically contributes to relatively high salmon bycatch rates during late summer months. This action also proposes two associated regulatory amendments that would (1) require mothership processor vessels and some shoreside processing plants to obtain an additional observer, and (2) require the affected mothership processor vessels and 100-percent-observer-coverage shoreside processing plants to obtain the necessary software and hardware for electronic transmission of daily observer

In 1993, the total "other" salmon bycatch amount in the BSAI fisheries was 245,000 fish—approximately six times the bycatch level estimated for each of the previous 2 years and triple the previous highest bycatch amount of 72,000 "other" salmon estimated in the 1984 foreign trawl fishery. "Other" salmon is defined as salmon other than chinook salmon. Historical observer data indicate that approximately 95 percent of the "other" salmon bycatch in the BS is chum salmon.

The magnitude of the 1993 chum salmon bycatch in the pollock nonroe season is of concern especially in view of poor returns of chum salmon to western Alaska river systems during recent years. These poor returns have precipitated closure, by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, of commercial, sport, and subsistence fisheries in several western Alaska Districts.

To address the problems of high salmon bycatch in the BS, NMFS implemented an emergency rule on August 15, 1994 (59 FR 35476, July 12, 1994) that imposed restrictions on 'other'' salmon bycatch during the pollock nonroe season of 1994. The emergency rule closed a specific area (the salmon savings area) in the CVOA after a limit of 42,000 "other" salmon had been taken in the CVOA. The salmon savings area (SSA) was defined based on historical observer data that indicated a relatively high "other" salmon bycatch rate. Under the emergency rule the SSA was closed to all trawling on August 20, 1994, 5 days after the opening of the pollock nonroe season. As in past years, vessels fishing in the SSA in 1994, prior to closure of this area, experienced a high "other" salmon bycatch rate. Continued fishing in the SSA in 1994 would likely have led to higher by catch rates than those seen after the closure.

At its January 1995 meeting, the Council recommended that NMFS implement the following long-term management measures to address the chum salmon bycatch problem in the BSAI pollock nonroe season:

1. The chum salmon savings area (CSSA), defined under the emergency rule as the SSA, would be closed to all trawling for the month of August, with the closure continuing or being reinstated once a bycatch limit of 42,000 "other" salmon has been reached in the CVOA. Accounting for chum salmon bycatch attributable towards the bycatch limit would begin on August 15. The CSSA would reopen to trawling on October 15.

- 2. Mothership processor vessels that receive pollock harvested in the CVOA during the 1995 pollock nonroe season would be required to carry two observers until the bycatch limit for ''other'' salmon is reached or until October 15, whichever occurs first. For the same period of time, those shoreside processing plants that also receive pollock harvested in the CVOA during the 1995 pollock nonroe season and that offload fish at two locations on the same dock and have distinct and separate equipment at each location to process those fish would also be required to have an extra observer. For 1996 and beyond, observer coverage requirements for these vessels and shoreside plants could be specified annually under the Research Plan.
- 3. Electronic communication capabilities would be required for each mothership processor vessel that receives pollock harvested in the CVOA during the pollock nonroe season and for each shoreside processing facility that receives pollock harvested from the CVOA during the pollock nonroe season and that is required to have 100–percent-observer-coverage under 50 CFR 677.10.

These measures are described in detail and justified below.

Chum Salmon Savings Area

At its January 1995 meeting, the Council adopted an FMP amendment that would provide the authority to prohibit trawl fisheries in an area within the CVOA that historically accounts for relatively high salmon bycatch rates during summer and fall months. The area would be closed from August 1 through August 31. The closure would continue or be reinstated once a bycatch limit of 42,000 "other" salmon is reached and the area would remain closed through October 14. Accounting of salmon towards the bycatch limit would start at the beginning of the pollock nonroe season on August 15. Only salmon caught in the CVOA would be counted towards the bycatch limit. This measure is intended to reduce

chum salmon bycatch in the pollock nonroe fishery.

The closure area (the CSSA) is defined by straight lines connecting the following coordinates in the order listed:

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56°00′ N., 167°00′ W.;
56°00′ N., 165°00′ W.;
55°30′ N., 165°00′ W.;
55°30′ N., 164°00′ W.;
55°00′ N., 164°00′ W.;
55°00′ N., 167°00′ W.;
56°00′ N., 167°00′ W.
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At its January 1995 meeting, the Council considered three different alternatives with seven options for time/area closures to limit chum salmon bycatch during the pollock nonroe season. The Council recommended the same closure area that was previously chosen for closure under the emergency rule. This area was chosen as a minimum closure area that would provide the most consistent protection to "other" salmon during the pollock nonroe season, but would still allow access to productive pollock fishing grounds.

The CSSA historically has accounted for a large proportion of "other" salmon bycatch and a relatively small proportion of groundfish harvest. The recommended 42,000 "other" salmon bycatch limit represents 50 percent of the 1991, 1992, and 1993 average of "other" salmon bycatch in the CVOA. The 42,000 "other" salmon limit approximates the 1991 and 1992 bycatch, while providing some buffer to accommodate slight increases in bycatch.

During the period July through October, the recommended CSSA accounted for 1.0, 0.8, and 7.0 percent of the total annual observed groundfish catch in the BSAI pollock and Pacific cod trawl fisheries during 1991, 1992, and 1993, respectively. During the period July through October of 1991, 1992, and 1993, this area accounted for 38, 40, and 54 percent, respectively, of the total annual "other" salmon bycatch. During the period July through October 1993, the CSSA had the highest "other" salmon bycatch rate of the areas analyzed—approximately 1.2 "other" salmon per metric ton (mt) of groundfish. Also, during the pollock nonroe season in 1994, the CSSA had a similarly high "other" salmon bycatch rate (1.12 salmon/mt groundfish) prior to the closure of this area. The initial number of salmon estimated in the first week of the 1994 pollock nonroe season was similar in both 1993 and 1994. Total bycatch was reduced in 1994 following the closure of the CSSA. Determining whether the reduced weekly catch of "other" salmon was due