



North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Simon Kinneen, Chair | David Witherell, Executive Director
1007 W. 3rd Avenue, Suite 400, Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone 907-271-2809 | www.npfmc.org

October 27, 2020

VADM Linda L. Fagan
Coast Guard Pacific Area Commander
Coast Guard Island, Building 51-6
Alameda, CA 94501

Jonathan M. Moore – Acting Assistant Secretary,
Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES)
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520-7878

Dear Vice Admiral Fagan and Assistant Secretary Moore:

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) met October 9 through October 14, 2020. During the meeting, Captain Jason Brennell of 17th Coast Guard District and Ms. Staci MacCorkle of U.S. State Department provided an in-depth briefing of the events surrounding the August 26, 2020 encounter between Russian naval vessels and aircraft and the U.S. domestic fishing fleet legally fishing in the U.S. EEZ of the Bering Sea. During the encounter, the Russian naval vessels and aircraft directed the U.S. fishing vessels to depart the area due to safety concerns associated with a missile launch. As noted in September 22, 2020 testimony submitted by Stephanie Madsen, Executive Director, At-Sea Processors Association, to the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Security, U.S. fishing companies and vessels had not been directly advised that a major Russian military exercise was planned in the middle of the primary fishing grounds of the U.S. EEZ of the Bering Sea. Further, the tone of the request by Russian warships, submarines, and aircraft “gave rise to genuine fears of safety of captains and their crews, and in some cases led to operational decisions that cost companies hundreds of thousands of dollars of lost fishing opportunities and gear.” The Council is deeply concerned about this interaction between our domestic fishing fleet operating in the U.S. EEZ and the Russian military. In addition, recognizing the importance of the Northern Sea Route as access to the Arctic, the Council is concerned about future foreign military exercises that could take place in the U.S. EEZ and the interactions with the U.S. fishing fleet legally operating in these waters. The USCG report provided at our recent meeting was clear that Russian defense authorities have publicly stated they plan to continue this exercise on an annual basis; however, the details of future areas included are unknown.

Shortly after receiving reports from U.S. fishing vessels operating in the area concerning the encounter with the Russian surface combatants and aircraft, the Coast Guard District 17 diverted Coast Guard Cutter Alex Haley from Dutch Harbor to the location of the U.S. fishing fleet to provide presence and assistance as necessary. From the Council’s perspective, this event is a prime example of why the presence of the Coast Guard on the fishing grounds is necessary and is extremely vital for ensuring the safety of the U.S. domestic fishing fleet operating in the U.S. EEZ. The Council strongly supports the efforts of the U.S. Coast Guard to provide a presence on the fishing grounds and encourages the Coast Guard to continue this practice.

The Council was informed during the presentation that U.S. Coast Guard District 17 and Department of State have engaged with individual fishing industry representatives on the incident in order to provide best practice guidelines to ensure full dissemination of future HYDROPAC messages to all U.S. fishing vessels. These best practice efforts include leveraging community outreach, engagement, and education in order to highlight available safety information as well as equipment carriage requirements that would ensure receipt of vital safety notices while underway. The Council supports and encourages the continued engagement with U.S. fishing fleets to improve immediate and vital communication between the U.S. Coast Guard and the fishing fleet regarding future events, and suggests that additional proactive efforts be undertaken to inform coastal communities and smaller vessels in advance of these events, as not all of them may have access to the same communication tools. A commitment to ongoing government coordination and industry engagement appears critical to keeping U.S. fishermen safe and minimizing future disruptions to our fisheries.

Finally, the Council would like to recognize the knowledge and thoroughness of Captain Brennell and Ms. MacCorkle's in-depth briefing and I would like to personally thank them for their clear and comprehensive presentation.

Sincerely,



Simon Kinneen
Chairman

Cc:

Ambassador John J. Sullivan, US Embassy Moscow
Jonathan Moore, Acting Assistant Secretary, OES
Staci MacCorkle, State Department
Rear Admiral Matthew Bell - USCG D17 Commander
Captain Michael Long - USCG Liaison, INDO-PACOM
Captain Ian Bastek – USCG Liaison, NORTHCOM
Captain Jeffrey Radgowski – USCG Attaché, US Embassy Moscow
Captain Jason Brennell