



# North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Simon Kinneen, Chair | David Witherell, Executive Director  
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October 29, 2021

Secretary Antony J. Blinken  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

**I am writing to request that the State Department, through bilateral and multilateral diplomatic channels with Russia, request information on the bycatch of Chinook salmon and chum salmon taken in Russian domestic fisheries (specifically, the number of salmon caught in their groundfish and salmon fisheries, and the genetic origin of these salmon).**

At its October 2021 meeting, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council received a tremendous amount of heartfelt public testimony on the impacts of historically low Chinook salmon and chum salmon runs in recent years (particularly in 2021) to the people living along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, and in other western Alaska communities, and the importance of salmon resources for food security and maintaining their culture. Many of those testifying raised concerns about the bycatch of salmon that occurs in ocean fisheries inside and outside of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

It is likely that several factors are affecting salmon returns to western Alaska rivers, and the Council has stated its intent to evaluate the best scientific information available to inform management decisions for fisheries inside the U.S. EEZ and within its jurisdiction. In conjunction with that effort, the Council requests additional information on the levels of catch and stock of origin of salmon species, particularly Chinook and chum salmon, taken as bycatch in North Pacific and Arctic waters outside of the jurisdiction of the United States. In the North Pacific region, we have invested considerable resources in recent years to systematic enumeration and genetic sampling of Chinook and chum salmon species taken as bycatch in our groundfish fisheries. The Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands pollock fishery, the largest fishery by volume in the United States, is fully observed. We also have protocols for a census of all salmon species taken as bycatch and as such extremely precise accounting for the numbers taken as bycatch in our fisheries. Additionally, our systematic genetic sampling of these bycaught salmon allows for annual updates to the Council of the genetic stock of origin of these species and a periodic update of the impact this bycatch has on rivers of origin particularly in western Alaska where Chinook salmon runs remain low and chum salmon stocks have precipitously declined in recent years. A summary of the information on salmon bycatch in U.S. fisheries, and the genetic composition of the bycatch can be found here:

<https://www.npfmc.org/wp-content/PDFdocuments/bycatch/BeringSeaSalmonBycatchFlyer.pdf>

Although we have this information available for U.S. fisheries operating off Alaska, we lack any data needed to understand the impacts of salmon originating from U.S. rivers that are caught in the western Bering Sea in Russian waters.

The North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission has curbed the interception of salmon in international waters, and annually reports on the commercial, recreational, and subsistence catch of salmon and hatchery releases within the countries of Canada, Japan, Korea, Russia, and USA. Unfortunately, the Commission does not report on salmon taken as bycatch in domestic fisheries in these countries.

Because Chinook salmon and chum salmon originating in western Alaska inhabit the entire Bering Sea during their ocean phase, our primary interest is getting information on the catch of these salmon in Russian fisheries.

To better understand the impacts of bycatch to our river systems, it is critically important to understand the levels of bycatch of salmon species and their rivers of origin both within the U.S. EEZ as well as outside of it. We request your assistance in obtaining this additional information on the levels of catch and stock of origin of salmon species taken as bycatch in Russian waters.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Simon Kinneen  
Council Chair

cc: Mr. David Moore, State Department, Office of Marine Conservation (OES/OMC)