

Summary of statewide teleconference on proposed alternatives to limit non-Chinook (chum) salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fisheries

North Pacific Fishery Management Council February 24, 2012

Purpose

In May 2010, North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) staff held a statewide teleconference to inform rural stakeholders of the alternatives that were being considered to limit non-Chinook (primarily chum) salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fisheries, and to help the public understand the Council process and ways to provide formal input to the Council. Additionally, the public was given opportunity to express concerns and ask questions of the Council analysts. A report of that call was presented at the June 2010 Council meeting in Sitka, AK.

A second statewide teleconference was held on February 24, 2012, as requested by the Rural Community Outreach Committee, and directed by the Council. The purpose of this second call was again to inform the public of the alternatives under consideration to reduce non-Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fisheries, to help the public understand the Council process and ways to provide formal input to the Council, and provide opportunity for the public to express concerns and ask questions of the Council analyst. Any comments and questions that resulted from this call are intended to become part of the official public record for the non-Chinook salmon bycatch action taken by the Council. Comments are incorporated into this report, which will also be provided to the Council as part of the overall outreach report at a future Council meeting.

Logistics and participation

Notice of the teleconference was announced in several ways, including email notices, postings on the Council website, direct mailings to stakeholders, and announcement on Alaska Public Radio Network community calendars and public service announcements. The mailing was sent to over 150 individuals and entities, including community governments, regional and village Alaska Native corporations, regional non-profit Alaska Native organizations, tribal entities, Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council coordinators, Community Development Quota corporations, ADF&G Regional Coordinators, and other community and Alaska Native entities.

An announcement that contained a brief summary of the alternatives and provided call details was emailed to the Alaska Public Radio Network and news or station managers of several public radio stations including:

KSKA	Anchorage
KNBA	Anchorage
KYUK	Bethel
KOTZ	Kotzebue
KNOM	Nome
KSDP	Sand Point
KUHB	St. Paul Island
KUCB	Unalaska
KMXT	Kodiak
KDLG	Dillingham

The teleconference was open to the public, and hosted by the Council. The call was moderated and recorded by EventBuilder.¹ A toll-free number was provided, and an unlimited number of lines could be accommodated.

The call took place from 9 am – 11 am on February 24, 2012. Council analyst, Dr. Diana Stram, provided a 30 minute presentation on the proposed action and Council process, with 90 minutes remaining for questions and comments from the public. Callers provided their name and location. The presentation was posted on the Council website two weeks prior to the teleconference, and is attached as **Appendix 1**.

The call log, which indicates the number of callers, their location, and the amount of time they participated, is provided as **Appendix 2**. A total of 49 unique lines called in, which effectively means a minimum of 49 people participated, as there were several sites with more than one person on the line. Note that the call log lists a total of 67 calls, but several of those were from the same number, resulting in a total number of 49 individual lines (e.g., a person called in for a portion of the call, hung up, then called back in later). Individual phone numbers of participants are not provided in the call log to protect confidentiality. Nineteen different communities were represented, including 12 small Alaskan communities, and Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.

Summary of questions and comments

The following provides a brief summary of participants' questions and comments, and a summary of staff response, where appropriate.

Emmonak – Nick Tucker

Caller questioned whether outreach meetings such as the statewide call contributed more to affected communities than regular meetings. Does the Council believe that they are helping more than hindering affected communities?

Staff responded that public participation is an important part of the Council process and that the Council hopes that the calls and other outreach efforts provide an opportunity for more effective two way communication.

Caller noted that the declines seen in Chinook salmon in the river are starting to be seen in chum salmon. Villagers currently have no control over in-river fisheries and intense in-river conservation measures are pitting one region against another for fish (upriver vs. downriver). He noted that preventative measures against chum salmon bycatch are needed now, although he has not yet formed an opinion on the alternatives for Council action.

Nome – Roy Ashfelter, Kawerak

Caller questioned which alternative of the three being considered called for the greatest reduction in chum bycatch.

Staff responded that Alternative two contained the most restrictive hard cap, 50,000.

Caller noted that there has not been a commercial fishery for chum salmon for the last 20 years, and noted that the chum fishery is a tier 2² fishery, meaning that mandatory escapement numbers must be reached before a commercial fishery occurs. He also noted

¹ EventBuilder is a provider of online event technology and conferencing services that provides event management, online registration and web and audio conferencing. www.eventbuilder.com.

² The Norton Sound chum salmon fishery has not been a Tier 2 fishery since 2005.

that recent escapement numbers are up. However, there is still concern for chum salmon escapement for three rivers in the Nome area. Caller stated that balanced decisions must consider the needs of people in Norton Sound, and recommended that the Council implement a hard cap for chum salmon bycatch.

Caller also requested clarification on the Council's role in tribal consultation.

Staff responded that the Council's understanding is that NMFS is the executive agency responsible for tribal consultation under EO 13175, but that the Council supports the consultation process through providing data, presentations, and/or staff. The Council has also made a motion to request tribal consultation reports, when available, from NMFS as early as possible in the Council's decision-making process. In June 2011, the Council also requested clarification from NOAA General Counsel as to whether the current understanding regarding the Council's role in tribal consultation is correct.

Fairbanks – Orville Huntington, Tanana Chiefs Conference

Caller asked when there are opportunities for public comment in the Council process.

Staff suggested written or oral testimony prior to or during Council meetings, and noted that there are fax, letter, or new email options for submitting public testimony up to a week before the Council meeting.

Hooper Bay – David _____, Native Village of Hooper Bay

Caller asked if Area M fishery was open.

Staff responded that the area fishery was open, and that there was concern over a higher proportion of chum salmon bycatch from Western Alaska in the June fishery.

Emmonak – Dora Moore, Tribal Council

Caller recognized that chum salmon bycatch is a sensitive issue and different stakeholder groups have different concerns and views. Caller asked how the alternatives being considered affect the escapement agreement between Canada and the U.S.

Staff responded that it is difficult to predict how alternatives will affect upper Yukon River chum salmon escapement, but Council staff has regularly met with the Yukon River Panel to keep them involved and engaged on the issue of chum-salmon bycatch. Staff noted that it is possible to review alternatives for their effects on upper Yukon (fall) chum salmon, but those estimates should not be considered an estimate or prediction for meeting treaty goals.

Nome – Rose Fosdick, Kawerak

Caller noted the high chum salmon bycatch years in 2004 – 2006 were likely connected to low escapement years in 2008 – 2009. Caller also commented that there are little data to review the effects of the alternatives on subsistence. Caller asked who is doing the research, and what information they are using. Caller also stated disappointment that the WASSIP genetic studies aggregated western Alaska chum salmon, and feels that the analysis fails to recognize the importance of Norton Sound chum salmon.

Staff responded that limitations in genetic resolution preclude analysis of genetic data at scales finer than current aggregations. Staff also responded that subsistence data come primarily from published reports from the Division of Subsistence division at ADF&G.

A literature review was also conducted, and the information provided cites research from Wolfe, Magdanz, Moncrieff, and others.

Nome – Tim Smith

Caller noted that local groups from Norton Sound have recommended that the Council consider lower hard caps than are currently in the alternatives, and asked whether the Council can consider other alternatives.

Staff responded that the Council can modify alternatives for analysis and reiterated that the caller should send formal comments to the Council with that suggestion.

St. Mary's – Michael James

Caller stated that he would like to see more salmon escapement devices for chum salmon in use in the Bering Sea pollock fishery, more fishery observers in place fleet-wide, more stand-down periods, and suggests a hard cap lower than 50,000 to allow better escapement for chum salmon in western Alaska rivers and to meet treaty obligations.

Emmonak – Michael _____, Tribal Council

Caller expressed concern about the Northern Bering Sea Research Area and its important habitat for marine mammals, migratory species of mammals and birds, anadromous fish (including whitefish, eels, smelts, tomcod), and suggested that the NBSRA should be considered for permanent protection.

Staff responded that the Northern Bering Sea Research Area is currently closed to all non-pelagic trawling, and Council plans are to keep the closure in place at least until sufficient knowledge exists to understand and mitigate impacts from trawling on benthic habitats of the northern Bering Sea.

Nome – Roy Ashfelter

Caller asked whether alternatives being considered by the Council could be combined, for instance combining a hard cap with other measures to reduce bycatch.

Staff responded that the alternatives for analysis can be combined by the Council and encouraged the caller to send formal comment to the Council with specific suggestions. The Council would need to identify the combination of alternatives in order for an analysis of combined alternatives to be provided

Caller asked whether the Council could consider different measures for different years because of differential chum salmon returns in even and odd years.

Staff responded that the current alternatives do not consider transfer of bycatch or other measures to address even/odd year differences. The Council could consider such measures, but a mechanism to identify appropriate measures would be necessary.

Hooper Bay – David _____

Caller asked whether there were current concerns about herring bycatch.

Staff responded that a herring cap already exists on the groundfish fisheries in the Bering Sea, but that herring bycatch was not a focus of the current analysis.