

# Alaska State Legislature

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## House Fisheries Committee

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair

### HR 6 CHINOOK BYCATCH LIMITS

#### Sponsor Statement

Alaska's recreational, subsistence, and commercial fisheries have faced dramatic shortfalls of Chinook salmon in recent years leading to fisheries closures and hardship for Alaskan residents. In the summer of 2012 Governor Parnell issued a disaster declaration for the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Cook Inlet regions due to low Chinook returns.

In the fall of 2012 the Department of Fish and Game convened a Chinook Symposium in Anchorage to identify king salmon knowledge gaps in order to maintain sustainable stocks. This is one of many efforts to learn more about this important fish and why there has been low abundance in certain areas. While long-term research is underway, it is essential to begin dealing with the problems facing Chinook salmon that we do know about.

One of these problems is salmon by-catch in Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska trawl fisheries. According to a 2013 report by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, the 5-year average for Chinook salmon by-catch in these fisheries was 40,621 fish. If not intercepted, many of these king salmon would have returned to Alaskan waters and provided harvest opportunities as well as much needed escapement.

This resolution asks the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to take action to reduce the level of Chinook salmon by-catch in Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska trawl fisheries to at least half of the current limits. In this time of low king salmon abundance, it is critical that unintended mortality be reduced. This resolution is an attempt to address a known cause of substantial mortality and help restore strong king salmon runs to our rivers.