

Senator Bishop and Senator Giessel, Co-Chairs and Senate Resources Committee members,

My name is David Martin from Clam Gulch, Alaska. I have been drift fishing in Cook Inlet for 51 years and have been very active in pursuing Scientific and biological salmon management in Cook Inlet for maximum sustained yields by adhering to the applicable laws to do so. I am also the President of United Cook Inlet Drift Association (UCIDA) that represents the majority of drifters in Cook Inlet. UCIDA has not taken an official position on the Cook Inlet set net buy back issue, but I can say that most all the commercial drift fishermen and set netters I have talked to are opposed to the buy back because it is strictly political and will do nothing to allow more fishing time or build back the chinook runs. The science and the data verifies this. The buy back boils down to the supporters wanting someone to pay them to get out of the fishery.

Many of us also contend that closing fishing areas is illegal under the Magnuson Stevens act and other applicable laws. It also circumvents CFEC and prevents future generation from participating. It is giving false hope by telling the remaining set netters that they will be able to fish more. Current management has closed the east side set net fishery for the last few years in the middle of the sockeye season to only put less than a hundred additional large chinook into the river resulting in the gross over escapements and the lost harvest of millions of sockeye, thus reducing future returns, economic harm to the fishery and impacting interstate commerce. The east side set net fishery was closed for the 2023 season in March.

The Department is violating the escapement goals by having a maximum sustained recruitment (MSR) goal instead of an optimum yield escapement goal. The current (MSR) goal is unattainable because the department is only counting the large chinook over 34 inches and not counting those under 34 inches. Studies and data have shown that the chinook statewide are smaller. The Kenai kings under 34 inches used to comprise 7% and now they comprise 70% of the total Kenai king run. Yet they are not counted. If all kings were counted, as per the escapement goal policy, then even the inflated chinook goal would always be achieved and the set netters and chinook sports fishermen would not be closed. Also Department data, from a study in the 80's, showed the east side set net fishery only caught 13% of the chinook bound for the Kenai River because the chinook swim in the deeper waters. This study was done when the set netters were allowed to fish a lot to harvested the surplus salmon. The lower number and percentage of big kings is not a harvest issue on kings, it is a fact that the kings are returning smaller. But then again it seems like the real goal is to close the set netters, to flood the river with sockeye, so the in river fishery will have a "fish in the barrel" experience, which is unsustainable and a huge waste from the high catch and release mortality and unharvested surplus.

The Department and Commissioner have been asked by the Cook Inlet Regional Planning Team to look into a rehabilitation program for Kenai River chinook and they have refused saying it is not necessary at this time. Meanwhile the sports fishery is closed for fishing Kenai kings and the east side set net fishery is closed for the 2023 season. The result will once again be gross sockeye over escapements, economic harm to the commercial fishing industry, communities and interstate commerce.

When the Cook Inlet was scientifically managed, to harvest the surplus salmon, Cook Inlet was a 50 to a 100 million dollar fishery, second only to Bristol Bay and created thousand of jobs and millions of dollars to the State from the raw fish tax. Today, under political / allocation management it has dwindled to around 10 million dollars and millions of harvestable salmon going to waste. There are plenty of salmon for everyone when managed scientifically. The buy back will not fix anything and will do nothing but create more problems.

Thank You,

David Martin

