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**PUBLIC TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ALASKA LEGISLATIVE FISHERIES
COMMITTEE**

Introduction of Dr. Thornton, Dr. Brown, and Dr. Patrick, and Mike Miller of STA

Thank you each for allowing us the opportunity to testify on the issue of depleted herring stocks throughout Southeast Alaska and other parts of the State. This issue is of grave concern to thousands of residents in our coastal communities. Scientists agree that along with Washington State and British Columbia, the entire ecosystem of Southeast Alaskan waters is dependent on the health of *local* herring stocks.

During the 1980s, many of us began to be concerned about local stocks targeted in unregulated bait fisheries and early sac roe fisheries that were not recovering. Our concerns grew when the large stock in Lynn Canal crashed in 1983 and did not recover. Later on in the 1980s, a pilot who owned a lodge near Kah Shakes expressed concern that what was once twenty miles of spawning grounds along the Kah Shakes shore was getting steadily smaller each year under pressure from the gillnet fishery. Letters were sent to politicians and meetings were held with ADF&G and assurances were given that the herring stocks were being well managed. After the crash of the *historic Kah Shakes* stock in 1990, we formed an organization called the Herring Coalition. By this time, it was apparent to everyone that herring populations were not recovering under ADF&G's management plan.

In 1993, we joined with the Annette Island Reserve in a law suit in an effort to prevent the state from targeting a herring stock that was also being targeted by the Reserve that had moved just outside the Annette Island boundary. This action was settled with the Reserve when the state offered them fishing jurisdiction over a disputed island not related to the case. Locals could not afford to continue the lawsuit on their own. Kah Shakes did not recover.

Since 1993, citizens not related to this fishery have participated in advisory committees and submitted numerous proposals to the Board of Fish in an effort to raise the level of conservation of our herring stocks. Although the mission of fish and game is supposed to be to "protect, maintain, and improve the fisheries" and

the Board's main role is supposed to be "to conserve and develop" fisheries resources, conservative herring proposals submitted by the public have been largely ignored. The "public participation" that ADF&G encourages on the surface only works well when the *public involved is a commercial interest* and is in agreement with the department. With many of board members being stakeholders in the fisheries who are appointed by the governor after a heavy lobbying effort financed by the industry, many Alaskans are concerned about the integrity of the Board. Fish and Game has failed to achieve the third goal in its mission statement which is to "increase public knowledge and confidence that wild populations of fish and wildlife are *responsibly* managed." In the case of herring management, there is no public confidence unless you are a herring fisherman.

Our herring stocks are but a fraction of historic levels. As a result, species that depend on them are showing signs of stress. There are both fewer and smaller halibut and king salmon in several consecutive years. Fifty-three percent of the diet of halibut and sixty-two percent of the diet of king salmon is herring according to research by the Canadian dept. of fisheries. Last year's winter king salmon fishery decreased by 53 ½% over the previous year. This might not be a cause for alarm were it not for the fact that king salmon are now listed as endangered in Washington, Oregon, and California. The fish from Washington spend a large part of their life cycle feeding in OUR waters. The herring stock in Puget Sound has crashed. The anchovy stocks that salmon fed on in California and Oregon were over-fished and crashed years ago. Prior to the crash of the New England Cod fisheries, Atlantic herring stocks crashed. The crash of the New England Cod fisheries put 20,000 people out of work. According to figures recently released by the Environmental Defense Fund, about 72,000 jobs have been lost because of dwindling salmon stocks in the Pacific Northwest alone.

Since the sac roe fishery began, the humpback whale population has increased from less than 1200 in the entire Pacific Rim, to about 4,000 whales migrating in just Southeast Alaska each year due to a federal recovery program. Fish and Game data shows that "Humpback whales in Alaska feed principally on herring, other small fish, and schools of krill." Each adult humpback consumes between 800 and 3,500 pounds of feed daily. Their total consumption of feed is between 3,200,000 and 14,000,000 lbs. daily. The steady decline observed in the herring population seems to correspond with the increase in the humpback whale population. Did the feds take this into consideration? We doubt it, and neither did ADF&G.

Had ADF&G and the Board of Fish listened to the public's concerns years ago, our fisheries resources might be much healthier than they are today. Instead, we are faced with the possibility of a federal take over of our fisheries. As we speak, the National Marine Fisheries Service is considering listing Southeast Alaska's herring stocks as threatened or endangered. This could be a catastrophe for our coastal communities. As Representative Paul Seaton said, this could affect mining, logging, and municipal wastewater discharge standards to the detriment of our economies at a cost of millions of dollars and a loss of hundreds of jobs in industries already

suffering from heavy-handed environmental restrictions. This threat is real and we cannot afford to ignore it.

In spite of all of this, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game is planning on yet another consecutive RECORD harvest of one of the *last great herring stocks left anywhere in the world*, near Sitka Sound this spring. The value of this fishery is less than 2% of the overall value of combined fisheries in the state and is providing a supplementary income for participants in these other fisheries. With the prices of herring roe falling, and herring stocks depleted throughout the world does this make any sense?

To illustrate why this is a bad idea, and how this problem can possibly be fixed, I yield the floor to my colleagues.

Andy Rauwolf
Ketchikan Herring Action Committee