

STATE OF ALASKA

THE LEGISLATURE

1990

Source

Legislative
Resolve No.

HCS CSSSSJR 62(Res)

122



Relating to the bycatch of herring in the Bering Sea groundfish trawl fisheries.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

WHEREAS herring are caught incidentally in the Bering Sea and discarded by fisheries targeting groundfish, and this incidental catch is known as bycatch; and

WHEREAS there is a significant relationship between the magnitude of the offshore harvest of herring and the conservation crisis facing discrete stocks of the western Alaska herring fisheries; and

WHEREAS the Alaska Board of Fisheries has identified a serious resource conservation problem with western Alaska herring stocks that are continuing to decline; and

WHEREAS two western Alaska commercial sac-roe fisheries, Nelson Island and Nunivak Island, are projected to be closed in 1990; and

WHEREAS closure of these fisheries will create an economic crisis in the affected communities; and

WHEREAS continued decline of herring stocks will result in restrictions or closures of the herring subsistence fishery which is a central component of the subsistence economies of the communities in the Nelson Island area; and

WHEREAS the anticipated stock decline of 43 percent in the Togiak area will reduce stock abundance to near harvest threshold levels in 1990 and below the threshold for commercial harvests in 1991 if no recruitment is observed in 1990; and

WHEREAS similar declines are occurring in other western

Alaska herring stocks; and

WHEREAS the bycatch of herring by groundfish trawlers in the Bering Sea is reported to amount to an exploitation rate of at least five percent, but it is believed that the data on which this estimate is based represents only a small proportion of the actual herring bycatch due to unobserved and unreported discharges of herring at sea; and

WHEREAS the amount and quality of data available about herring bycatch will improve when the National Marine Fisheries Service meets its goal in the Bering Sea of 30 percent observer coverage for vessels in the 60 to 150 foot class and 100 percent for vessels over 150 feet; and

WHEREAS even with this amount of observer coverage, a problem still exists in determining the herring bycatch and mortality in tows that are retrieved but released without ever being brought on board; and

WHEREAS these tows are not accounted for in current statistical data regarding herring bycatch and mortality; and

WHEREAS herring suffer significantly higher levels of mortality, as compared to other species, in encounters with trawl gear; and

WHEREAS the Board of Fisheries has removed provisions that would allow an increase in the Dutch Harbor food and bait herring fishery in the event that the harvest by the Togiak sac-roe herring fishery is below the allowable exploitation rate; and

WHEREAS the Board of Fisheries has directed the Department of Fish and Game to close the Dutch Harbor bait fishery if subsistence herring harvests are being affected anywhere in western Alaska; and

WHEREAS the efforts of the Board of Fisheries and the Department of Fish and Game to address this issue and to support trawl closures to improve the opportunity for resource recovery, including expanded state authority to close trawl fisheries within the territorial sea and increased state enforcement, are to be saluted and supported; and

WHEREAS the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, at its April 1990 meeting voted to request that the Secretary of Commerce put in place an emergency rule on herring bycatch beginning June 15, setting a bycatch cap of 2.5 percent of the observed Eastern Bering Sea herring spawning biomass; and

WHEREAS the council has also decided to address the herring bycatch issue during its 1990 regulatory amendment cycle;

BE IT RESOLVED by the Alaska State Legislature that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council respond to the concerns of the fishermen in western Alaska and of the State of Alaska during the 1990 regulatory amendment cycle as it addresses the herring bycatch issue; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council establish permanent herring bycatch controls as part of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Groundfish Fishery Management

Plan during the 1990 regulatory amendment cycle and that the bycatch controls take effect April 1, 1991, at a rate equal to or less than one percent of observed herring spawning biomass; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the Regional Director of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Alaska Region, and the Secretary of Commerce to implement the emergency action taken by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council in setting a cap on the bycatch of herring; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to take action to document the amount of herring bycatch and mortality from released tows and at a minimum provide for observers to document the number of occurrences and classify them by tonnage categories; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to consider implementing a level of observer coverage in the Bering Sea that is higher than the goal already set fleet-wide, including 100 percent coverage for all boats participating in zones and at times of high herring bycatch, as a way of obtaining even more accurate information about herring bycatch and mortality.

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Robert A. Mosbacher, Sr., Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce; the Honorable Don W. Collinsworth, Chair, North Pacific Fishery Management Council; the Honorable Steven Pennoyer, Regional Director, Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service; and to the Honorable Ted Stevens and the Honorable Frank Murkowski, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.