

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES**

February 12, 2003
8:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair
Representative Peggy Wilson, Vice Chair
Representative Cheryll Heinze
Representative Ralph Samuels
Representative Ethan Berkowitz
Representative David Guttenberg

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Pete Kott

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME, COMMERCIAL FISHERIES DIVISION BY DIRECTOR DOUG MECUM

TAPES

03-5, SIDE(S) A & B
03-6, SIDE(S) A

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the meeting of the House Special Committee on Fisheries to order at 8:02 a.m. Present at the call to order were Representatives Seaton, Wilson, Samuels, and Guttenberg. Representatives Heinze and Berkowitz arrived as the meeting was in progress.

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

DOUG MECUM, Director, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), gave a PowerPoint presentation and answered questions from the committee related to the basic structure and function of the division.

MR. MECUM stated that the mission of the division is "to manage, protect, rehabilitate, enhance, and develop the fisheries and aquatic plant resources in the interest of the economy and general well-being of the state, consistent with the sustained yield principle and subject to allocations established through public regulatory processes." Mr. Mecum explained that while

ADF&G is the state's primary fisheries management authority, the federal National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are also involved with Alaska's fisheries management. At the state level, ADF&G shares management duties with the following agencies: the Board of Fisheries, a seven-member board that deals primarily with management plans and allocation issues; the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission, the agency that distributes and manages limited entry permits for certain fisheries; and the Department of Public Safety, Division of Fish & Wildlife Protection, a law enforcement division charged with protecting Alaska's natural resources from illegal uses.

MR. MECUM outlined the organizational structure of the division. Currently the division employs approximately 300 full-time and 550 seasonal employees who work in approximately 40 different area offices in the state. These offices are organized under four regional offices, with headquarters in Juneau.

MR. MECUM discussed the actual value of the different fisheries and provided the following preliminary statistics for commercial harvest and ex-vessel value for 2002: groundfish is valued at \$553 million, which is 57 percent; salmon is valued at \$141 million, which is 15 percent; shellfish is valued at \$130 million, which is 14 percent; halibut is valued at \$121 million, which is 13 percent; and herring is valued at \$10 million, which is 1 percent.

MR. MECUM focused much of his presentation on the commercial salmon industry in particular, due to the desperate state of the industry. He explained the different types of harvesting methods - seine, drift gillnet, set gillnet, troll, and beach seine - and the 13 different salmon harvest districts, or regions, in the state. He talked about the historic catch and value figures for all salmon species, noting the historic highs of the late '80s and early '90s and the recent decline to record lows. He also spoke to the marked increase in Chilean farmed salmon imports into U.S. markets and discussed the price-depressing effect these imports have had on Alaska salmon prices and permit values.

MR. MECUM next discussed the Alaska herring industry, explaining the different methods of harvest - drift gillnet, seine, pound, and kelp - and noting the different historic market uses and trends, such as roe, bait, food, and reduction. He also stated that the herring fishery in the state was suffering from decreased prices and decreased stocks, with some regional

fisheries not having any commercial harvests in the last eight years.

MR. MECUM continued his presentation with a discussion of the shellfish fisheries. The breakdown of the different shellfish species by ex-vessel value was reported to be: King crab, valued at \$65.3 million, which is 48 percent; snow crab, valued at \$36.2 million, which is 27 percent; other, valued at \$14.1 million, which is 11 percent; Dungeness crab, valued at \$7.8 million, which is 6 percent; shrimp, valued at \$2.5 million, which is 2 percent; scallops, valued at \$1.6 million, which is 1 percent; sea cucumbers, valued at \$2.7 million, which is 2 percent; clams, valued at \$.04 million, which is less than 1 percent; geoducks, valued at \$.2 million, which is less than 1 percent; and sea urchins, valued at \$.9 million, which is 1 percent.

MR. MECUM next focused on the groundfish fisheries, stating that they were by far the most valuable fishery in the state. The breakdown of the different groundfish by ex-vessel value was reported as follows: pollock, valued at \$328.9 million, which is 50 percent; Pacific cod, valued at \$124 million, which is 19 percent; halibut, valued at \$111.5 million, which is 17 percent; miscellaneous groundfish, valued at \$56.3 million, which is 9 percent; sablefish, valued at \$22.2 million, which is 3 percent; rockfish, valued at \$14.7 million, which is 2 percent; and lingcod, valued at \$.2 million, which is 0 percent [less than 1 percent].

MR. MECUM briefly discussed the new and emerging dive fisheries in the state, such as geoduck, abalone, sea cucumber, and red sea urchin. Due to time constraints, Mr. Mecum cut his presentation short, leaving his discussion of mariculture and aquaculture for another time.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no announcements.

COMMITTEE ACTION

The committee took no action.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 9:55 am.

NOTE: The meeting was recorded and handwritten log notes were taken. A copy of the tape(s) and log notes may be obtained by contacting the House Records Office at State Capitol, Room 3, Juneau, Alaska 99801 (mailing address), (907) 465-2214, and after adjournment of the second session of the Twenty-Third Alaska State Legislature this information may be obtained by contacting the Legislative Reference Library at (907) 465-3808.