ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES
February 19, 2013
10:05 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair
Representative Eric Feige
Representative Lynn Gattis
Representative Bob Herron
Representative Craig Johnson
Representative Kurt Olson
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Geran Tarr

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

OVERVIEW: CHINOOK SALMON BYCATCH

- HEARD

PRESENTATION: HERRING AND FISH PROTEIN MARKETING PROJECT

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

NICOLE KIMBALL, Federal Fisheries Coordinator
Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented the overview on Chinook salmon bycatch.

BOB CLARK, Fisheries Scientist
Research and Technical Services Staff (RTS)
Division of Sport Fish

Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G)
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented the overview on Chinook salmon bycatch.

DIANA EVANS, Fishery Analyst
North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC)
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented the overview on Chinook salmon bycatch.

STEPHANIE MADSEN, Executive Director
At-sea Processors Association (APA)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented the overview on Chinook salmon bycatch.

PETE WEDIN, Representative
Alaska Marine Conservation Council
Homer, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented the overview on Chinook salmon bycatch.

ART NELSON, Policy Director
Bering Sea Fisherman's Association
Anchorage, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented the overview on Chinook salmon bycatch.

BRUCE SCHACTLER, Global Food Aid Director
Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute
Kodiak, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented the overview of the herring and fish protein marketing project.

DR. NINA SCHLOSSMAN PhD, Tech. Assistance & Project Management
Global Food Aid Program
Washington, D.C.
POSITION STATEMENT: Co-presented the overview of the herring and fish protein marketing project.

ACTION NARRATIVE

10:05:44 AM

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Present at the call to order were Representatives Seaton, Kreiss-Tomkins and Gattis; Representatives Herron, Johnson, Olson, and Feige arrived as the meeting was in progress.

Overview: Chinook Salmon Bycatch

CHAIR SEATON announced that the first order of business would be an overview on Chinook Salmon Bycatch.

10:07:10 AM

NICOLE KIMBALL, Federal Fisheries Coordinator, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), said the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC), in conjunction with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), is responsible for managing the federal groundfish fishery, and ADF&G also plays a role in federal management via the commissioner's seat on the council. The issue is the pollock fishery, which utilizes a mid-water trawl to harvest the target species and results in an incidental catch of Chinook salmon. Under the authority of the Magnuson–Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) the council is charged with both minimizing salmon bycatch while achieving optimum yield in the pollock fishery. The pollock fleet operates under a cooperative structure that was setup by congress. It is not an open access fishery and there is no race for fish, hence the boats work cooperatively and in league. Initial bycatch minimization measures involved large fixed closure areas that applied to both Chinook and chum salmon. She explained that when the pollock fleet caught a given amount of salmon, in a specified area and time, a fishing closure was imposed. However, this approach did not limit the total amount of bycatch and it was evident that by having the pollock fleet vacate one area and move to another, salmon bycatch occurred at an even higher rate. The council then implemented the use of a rolling hot spot (RHS) program. Sea State Incorporated is an organization funded by the pollock fleet to track concentrations of schooling fish and provides details of discrete areas for closure or avoidance; based on bycatch information. In 2011, along with the avoidance strategies, the first hard cap restrictions on bycatch were established and imposed. When the cap is reached, she said, the pollock fishery is closed. In recent years, the bycatch rate has been variable, thus having a steady hard cap number does not offer protection during years when salmon numbers fluctuate downward. The council adopted a system that provides a range of caps depending on the fishery

performance. She reported that the overall, performance standard policy has a high cap of 60,000 and a low cap of 40,000 Chinook. The fleet is subject to the higher cap each year if they have incentive plan agreements (IPAs) in place that detail a means for remaining under the lower cap. She said that if the higher cap is attained in more than two out of seven years, the lower cap will become permanent; negating the dual cap system. The pollock fishermen are being cautious to remain under the upper cap limit, and management techniques have been adopted within the fleet with the lower cap as the target number. The incentive plans work hand in hand with the restrictive caps, she stressed, and Chinook bycatch has become a factor in every decision of the pollock fleet. The bycatch of Chinook, in 2012, was just over 11,000, and the council will receive the salmon avoidance reports in the April meeting. She anticipates that the department will take a keen interest in understanding how the fleet implemented avoidance strategies in a year when bycatch did not approach the low cap limit. The Gulf of Alaska (GOA) pollock fishery does not have a cooperative structure, and the trawl fleet is managed as a limited access fishery. She said this type of management results in a race to harvest target species in the time allowed. The council's target measure for this fishery is a hard cap; first implemented in August 2012. The cap was established at 25,000 Chinook and last year about 19,000 were reported. The vast majority of Chinook are taken in the pollock fishery, but the council may impose a hard cap on other target species trawl fisheries in 2013. Additionally, the council is working on a bycatch approach for the GOA trawl fisheries with the intent to provide a level of bycatch incentives and cooperative management strategies similar to the Bering Sea program, in order to realize more significant bycatch reductions.

10:13:53 AM

BOB CLARK, Fisheries Scientist, Research and Technical Services Staff (RTS), Division of Sport Fish, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), testified, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read [original punctuation provided]:

> In the Bering Sea, there is a very high level of fishery observer coverage of groundfish fisheries so that sampling of individual bycaught Chinook salmon is possible. These bycaught Chinook salmon are sampled for length, age, and genetic tissues. From these data, federal scientists have been able to tell in general what stocks of Chinook salmon are being caught

and are beginning to quantify the potential impact of this bycatch on our runs of Chinook salmon here in Alaska.

From records of bycatches, we know that most of the bycatch of Chinook salmon occurs during the “A” or winter season. We also know from genetics studies that the general composition of stocks bycaught changes from the winter “A” season to the later “B” season, with a higher proportion of Alaska stocks represented in the bycatch during the “A” season.

From genetic sampling we also know the general stock composition of the bycatch of Chinook salmon in the Bering Sea groundfish fisheries. For example from sampling conducted during 2010, the bycatch was made up of about 42% Coastal Western Alaska fish; which is a combination of Bristol Bay, Kuskokwim, Lower Yukon, and Norton Sound stocks; 20% Upper Yukon River stocks, 14% North Alaska Peninsula stocks, and 11% Middle Yukon River stocks. The other 13% of the bycatch that year was made up of a mix of Canadian, Lower 48, Russian, and Gulf of Alaska stocks.

This general composition of stocks in the Bering Sea bycatch during 2010 was similar to that seen during sampling in 2005-2009. Genetic sampling of this fishery is ongoing so we will continue to get estimates of the general stock composition of the bycatch into the future.

As part of the Governor’s Chinook Initiative and the Chinook Salmon Stock Assessment and Research Plan, Fish and Game is working to develop better genetic techniques so we can separate out the different stocks from the coastal Western Alaska grouping in the bycatch. We are also recommending higher levels of sampling of this bycatch so that more coded-wire tagged Chinook salmon can be recovered from this fishery and if possible to better resolve where and when bycatches of Alaska Chinook salmon are occurring and what individual stocks are being bycaught. The Research Plan also calls for new tagging programs for juvenile salmon in the Nushagak, Kuskokwim, and Yukon rivers so that we can find out when and where these individual stocks are bycaught in these groundfish fisheries.

The situation is very different in the Gulf of Alaska. There has been little to no sampling of Chinook salmon bycatch in federally managed groundfish fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska.

However, as part of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's work in minimizing Chinook bycatch in these fisheries and it's work in restructuring of the fishery observer program, they are also making it possible for fishery observers to sample Chinook salmon from these fisheries so that we can find out what stocks are being bycaught, and when and where they are being bycaught.

Although we do not yet have representative samples from these Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries, sampling of Chinook salmon that has been done from research vessels over the years tells us that, in general, bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries is likely to be composed of very few to no western Alaska fish and higher proportion of Gulf of Alaska, Canadian, and Lower 48 fish.

Fish and Game, as part of the Governor's Chinook Initiative and the Chinook Salmon Stock Assessment and Research Plan, is recommending that bycatch of Chinook salmon in the Gulf of Alaska be sampled for length, age, genetic tissues, and coded-wire tags. We are also working to better define the genetics of Gulf of Alaska stocks so we can identify individual stocks from samples of the bycatch. The research plan also calls for additional tagging of juvenile salmon in Gulf of Alaska rivers, so that we can see when and where individual stocks are bycaught in these groundfish fisheries. The research plan recommends new coded-wire tagging programs for juvenile Chinook salmon in the Copper, Susitna, Kenai, Karluk, and Chignik rivers in the Gulf of Alaska. The research plan also recommends continued funding of coded-wire tagging programs for four stocks of Chinook salmon in southeast Alaska (Unuk, Stikine, Taku, and Chilkat).

10:19:13 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked whether the reported Chinook bycatch percentages, on groundfish efforts in the Bering Sea, are only for pollock fisheries.

MR. CLARK responded that the percentages are for all groundfish fisheries and pointed out that primarily bycatch is from the pollock fishery.

CHAIR SEATON noted that the Gulf of Alaska (GOA) report is pending the processing of 4,000 fin clip and scale samples, and asked how the analysis backlog is being handled.

MS. KIMBALL confirmed that the laboratory has a one year backlog for processing samples, and said the next presentation to the committee should provide further analysis.

CHAIR SEATON queried whether any GOA stock estimates are available.

MS. KIMBALL said the stock analysis information available is from 2010 and the recent results can only provide information of the presence of stocks, not relative abundance.

10:22:11 AM

DIANA EVANS, Fishery Analyst, North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC), reviewed the five page handout out titled, "North Pacific Fishery Management Council - Update on Chinook Bycatch," dated 2/18/13, paraphrasing from the prepared document, which read [original punctuation provided]:

> The Council manages the Federal fisheries off Alaska in conjunction with National Marine Fisheries Service under the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which, among other things, includes ten national standards.
>
> As Nicole referenced earlier, this involves balancing the need to minimize Chinook salmon bycatch to the extent practicable, while also achieving optimum yield for target fisheries, and minimizing adverse impacts on fishing communities.
>
> The Council manages Chinook salmon bycatch that occurs in the trawl fisheries off Alaska. Salmon caught as bycatch are accounted for, but by law, they are a prohibited species in the groundfish fisheries, and

cannot be retained or sold. Chinook salmon bycatch occurs primarily in the pollock fishery, although in the GOA there is some bycatch in other target trawl fisheries as well.

The graphs show the inter-annual variability in Chinook salmon encounters in the fisheries, and note that the scale of bycatch in the GOA is much smaller than in the Bering Sea.

So what actions have the Council taken to address Chinook salmon bycatch?

10:26:07 AM

CHAIR SEATON asked about sale restrictions on bycatch.

MS. EVANS said salmon are treated as a prohibited species, when the fishery is targeted on groundfish. Regulation, and the groundfish management plan, requires avoidance strategies and generally the bycatch may not be retained or sold, although there are some measures that allow retention of a prohibited species for counting purposes. A bycatch food sharing program has been established, she said, which will be discussed later in the presentation.

10:27:15 AM

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON asked why it is unlawful for salmon bycatch to be retained and fully utilized; the restriction on product sale is understandable.

MS. EVANS explained that the species have been prohibited since the inception of the management plan, with the intent to create an avoidance incentive for the fishermen. The rationale is that if the product cannot be retained for sale, the fishermen will embrace every means for avoiding the bycatch. The management techniques have become more sophisticated and avoidance measures have been established, along with the hard cap rules now in place. Today, the salmon and halibut bycatch can be donated to a food bank.

10:29:38 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS without the requirement for full catch retention and given the limited observation coverage, he

asked about the confidence levels in the count based data for the bycatch in the GOA troll fishery.

MS. EVANS responded that scientific estimates are made through extrapolation of data gathered from observed vessels. The 2013 observation fishery should provide higher confidence intervals, as the council will have the opportunity to control the randomization of the observation practices throughout the fleet.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS explained his understanding that the observation program has not provided un-manipulated data, and asked for the current confidence intervals.

MS. EVANS said the current data does not allow estimation of confidence intervals; uncertainty exists for all the extrapolated values. Manipulating observer data is difficult in some fisheries more than others.

CHAIR SEATON concluded that fisheries with longer openings are easier to assess with and provide higher confidence levels, than those that open for a short span of effort time.

10:35:17 AM

MS. EVANS continued with page 3, paraphrasing from the previously cited handout, which read [original punctuation provided]:

> Well, the primary management action has been to put in place hard cap bycatch limits, that close the fishery once the limit is reached. Nicole has described these already; the next couple of slides summarize the Council's action. In the Bering Sea pollock fishery, the Council's hard cap was implemented in 2011; The GOA pollock limit was implemented in mid-2012, and the Council is currently considering a limit for the GOA non-pollock trawl fisheries (flatfish, cod, rockfish).
>
> Another important action that the Council has taken is to support stock of origin research. The purpose of this work is to understand the individual stock composition of Chinook salmon caught as bycatch in the trawl fisheries, in order to relate the impact of offshore bycatch back to the status of individual Chinook stocks.

So in the Bering Sea, the Council's action to establish a hard cap or PSC limit was based on genetic analysis of Chinook salmon caught as bycatch in the pollock fishery between 2005 and 2007. This was used to develop an adult equivalent model, which estimates when and how many salmon that were caught as bycatch in the pollock fishery would otherwise have returned to their river of origin. The analysis showed that for the Bering Sea pollock fishery, Chinook salmon from Coastal Western Alaska comprise the largest component of the bycatch.

Since the implementation of the hard cap, the Council also put in place measures to allow for a systematic sampling procedure for Chinook, which included monitoring requirements to allow a full census of salmon. These samples are analyzed, and a genetic breakdown will be presented to the Council each April. This coming April the Council will receive the complete report for 2011, which is the first year under the new program.

The background paper that I referred to earlier, which was prepared by our staff member Diana Stram, extended the earlier Council analysis with current data for a recent symposium. The paper approximates that in 2011, bycatch from the Bering Sea pollock fishery would have accounted for between 0.7 and 2.4% of the combined run sizes for western Alaska.

In the GOA, available information is much more limited than in the Bering Sea. There has been very limited sampling until recently, and so we primarily only have data to indicate that certain Chinook stocks have been documented to be present in the GOA bycatch, and no indication of their relative abundance.

Nonetheless, with the implementation of the hard cap in the pollock fishery, the Council put in place a similar systematic sampling procedure for Chinook that also uses a census approach, although observer coverage is lower here than in the Bering Sea. As with the Bering Sea, the genetic analysis will be presented to the Council each April, so we are awaiting 2011 results. In 2010, based on the limited samples available, stocks present were predominantly

from the Pacific Northwest, British Columbia, and coastal southeastern Alaska.

The Council is also considering how to put in place requirements in the non-pollock trawl fisheries to allow for stock of origin sampling. There are a couple of other actions that the Council has taken with respect to Chinook salmon bycatch. The Council developed an extensive outreach program for the Bering Sea chinook hard cap action, to dialogue with coastal and interior communities prior to Council action.

The Council has also had a longstanding amendment in place that allows bycaught salmon to be donated to food banks, and in recent years, voluntary participation in this program has increased substantially in both the Bering Sea and the GOA. The slide shows the combined total of salmon and halibut donated to the program in 2012 from the two areas.

10:42:09 AM

REPRESENTATIVE HERRON noted the council action indicates that it will "promote two way dialogue." He asked for the meaning of this phrase, and how it has been received.

MS. EVANS responded that the purpose was to allow communities to have direct contact with council members, who would personally visit villages. She reported that members have been well received, and the visits have resulted in meaningful conversations that otherwise might not have occurred.

10:44:51 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS queried why the council is still awaiting analysis of the 2011 genetic data from the GOA fishery. Also, he asked what percentage of the total bycatch is represented by the reported 73,000 pounds of Bering Sea and 30,000 pounds of GOA halibut and salmon donated to food banks.

MS. EVANS explained there is a 16 month analysis backlog, and offered to provide the food donation information to the committee when it becomes available.

10:48:21 AM

MS. EVANS began to summarize, paraphrasing from the previously cited handout, which read [original punctuation provided]:

> Finally, I would like to note that in addition to specific actions targeting Chinook salmon bycatch, the Council also considers how other actions will affect Chinook salmon. Two recent examples are the Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch reduction measures, where the Council has been working to identify management measures that will effectively reduce chum salmon bycatch, but not undermine existing Chinook bycatch measures.
>
> The second example is in the GOA, where the Council is now developing an action to provide bycatch management tools for the trawl fisheries, potentially including cooperative management and bycatch avoidance incentives, to help in the reduction of Chinook salmon, halibut, and crab bycatch.
>
> So in summary, Chinook salmon bycatch reduction is a continuing priority for the Council, and while management actions combine hard cap limits, incentive programs, and research to better understand the impacts of bycatch. Because this is such an important issue, the Council receives reports on Chinook salmon bycatch at each meeting, as well as annual reports on genetics and from the fleet.

10:49:10 AM

STEPHANIE MADSEN, Executive Director, At-sea Processors Association (APA), described the At-sea Processors Association (APA) as a trade association of six owner companies operating pollock catcher vessels, which fish solely in the Bering Sea, and are restricted from harvesting in the Gulf of Alaska (GOA). Partnerships exist with several of the community development quota (CDQ) groups. She continued her presentation, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read [original punctuation provided]:

> Amendment 91 is an innovative approach to managing Chinook salmon bycatch in that it combines a prohibited species catch (PSC) limit on the amount of Chinook salmon that may be caught incidentally by the fishery with an incentive plan agreement (IPA) and performance-standard requirement designed to minimize

> bycatch to the extent practicable in all years. The approach is designed to motivate fishery participants to avoid Chinook salmon bycatch at the individual vessel level under any condition of pollock and Chinook abundance in all years. The vessel-level incentives are created through contracts among the fishery participants.

MS. MADSEN directed attention to a committee packet handout, titled "Chinook Salmon Bycatch Reduction Incentive Plan," dated February 19, 2013, to point out the Amendment 91 limits under which that the APA operates. Four sectors are identified in the Bering Sea, each with a specific bycatch limit. The sectors are: Inshore, Mothership, CDQ, and Catcher Processor (CP). She stressed that the bycatch limits are upheld at the vessel/sector level versus the cooperative level, representing a major change in operation of the fleet. Detailed catch information is contained in the handout and accompanying report, she pointed out. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) required APA to devise an incentive plan agreement (IPA), which each vessel would operate under beginning in 2011 to reduce bycatch. The IPA governs all of the harvest vessels, in each of the sectors, including the CDQ groups, and includes 100 percent observer coverage. Additionally, video cameras are installed on vessels to ensure that all salmon are accounted for using census, actual counts, versus extrapolation methods; every tenth salmon brought on board is genetically sampled.

10:54:03 AM

MS. MADSEN described the development of the IPA, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read [original punctuation provided]:

> One of the most practical and direct methods to create incentives to avoid Chinook salmon bycatch is to limit the pollock fishing opportunities of a vessel when bycatch performance is poor. This simple approach works especially well for catcher-processors because efficient processing requires an uninterrupted flow of fish, and this can be achieved most reliably with unrestricted access to the grounds. Because experience has shown that high, local concentrations of pollock may often be found where concentrations of Chinook are also high (the vessels can "see" the pollock but not the Chinook), limiting access to local areas of relatively high Chinook bycatch is an

efficient way to create a financial incentive to avoid Chinook salmon bycatch. The reason for this is that losing access to good pollock fishing grounds increases vessel operating costs and reduces the amount of products that can be produced during a day of fishing. A vessel that retains nearly unrestricted access to good pollock fishing opportunities avoids costs associated with moving and finding pollock in other areas, and so the vessel can produce more products each day.

Primary IPA components include: (1) data gathering, monitoring, reporting, and information sharing; (2) identification of bycatch avoidance areas (BAA); and (3) fishing-area prohibitions for vessels with poor bycatch performance. Additional components include: (1) an A-season closed area of approximately 755 square nautical miles on the northern flank of the Bering Canyon; and (2) a set of conditional B-season closed areas of approximately 1,295 square miles along the outermost Eastern Bering Sea (EBS) shelf. Vessels are prohibited from fishing in the B-season areas beginning on October 15th and continuing through to the end of the season during those years when the aggregate bycatch of all plan vessels during the month of September exceeds a present threshold.

[She presented three slides, available in the committee handout, depicting the Sea State, Inc. maps, as generated from bycatch data, and used to describe discrete areas for determination of fishing strategies for the pollock fleet.]

10:56:06 AM

MS. MADSEN said that based on the four year history of the Sea State data, core trawling areas have been identified for avoidance due to the possibility of high bycatch rates. The avoidance areas are identified based on specific criteria and managed accordingly. The criteria and measures include: comparing pollock-fishery bycatch performance to a base rate of Chinook bycatch - areas, within the core areas, with bycatch rates higher than base rate may be specified as avoidance areas; the base rate is allowed to change over time to reflect changes in salmon abundance on the grounds; except at the start of the season, the base rate is calculated as a three week rolling average; a minimum value, or floor, is established at 3.5 Chinook per 100 tons of pollock catch; and vessels are

prohibited from fishing in the Chinook Salmon Conservation Area during the A season. She explained that a vessels bycatch performance is calculated using a two week rolling sum average of pollock catch and Chinook bycatch, and a vessel with a bycatch rate higher than 75 percent of the base rate must fish outside the bycatch avoidance areas during the current week. Additionally, the total numbers of Chinook counted can also create an x-rolling hot spot (X-RHS) closure. A benchmark of 8,500 salmon was chosen, and a vessel exceeding their share of the bycatch allowance, must fish outside of the bycatch avoidance areas for two weeks. She pointed out that a great number of details are involved in managing and operating the fleet, including internal rules and built in buffers to ensure share compliance. Finally, she said the draft report for 2012 indicates a total pollock harvest of 545,014 metric tons, and 2,933 individually counted Chinook salmon as bycatch.

11:00:31 AM

PETE WEDIN, Representative, Alaska Marine Conservation Council, provided testimony, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

> The Alaska Marine Conservation Council is a family of seafood harvesters from all over Alaska and is dedicated to protecting the long-term health of Alaska's oceans and sustaining the working waterfronts of our coastal communities. Our members include fishermen, subsistence harvesters, marine scientists, small business owners, and families. Our ways of life, livelihoods and local economies depend on productive oceans. We believe that coastal residents have a valuable and unique perspective on the marine ecosystem and have the right to meaningful and influential participation in decisions.
>
> I am here today to add our perspective to this discussion of Chinook salmon bycatch and bycatch in genera. Bycatch is simply that which is caught that is either unintended or prohibited. In the case of Chinook salmon, it is a prohibited species or PSC. Although there is a measure of observation on the mid-water and bottom trawl vessels that prosecute the pollock and other ground fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea, we believe the numbers are even higher than those reported. Some Chinook salmon are discarded over the side during "deck sorting," but

given the pace of the fishery, most are simply washed down the chute with the targeted-species catch. In the Gulf of Alaska, these fish are observed in the processing plant, where they are ground up and discarded after being counted and sampled. Under the old observer program, most vessels were observed 30% of the time, but some not at all. Under the new program, vessels under 60 feet will be observed, but coverage will be lower on the vessels that were covered 30% of their trips. It should be noted at that since 2011 all vessels in the Bering Sea have at least 100% observer coverage. Many of the Chinook and Chum salmon that are salvageable, are retained, processed, and distributed through a program called "Sea Share." Although we commend the effort and recognize the good of sharing the "waste," our goal is to reduce this waste of our most valuable resources.

The Gulf of Alaska non-pollock trawl fishery is operating without a cap on Chinook salmon bycatch. Alaska Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Campbell made a motion at the December North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting that would address this management deficiency. There is a range of alternatives included in the motion and two of the elements that we think are important are full retention of all PSC and a Chinook cap of 5,000 fish. This alternative represents the only choice for a meaningful reduction in Chinook bycatch. When the Council recently placed a cap on the pollock fishery i the Gulf, after a high Chinook bycatch of 54,000 kings in 2010, the cap was set higher than the 10-year average. This is not a meaningful reduction, but at least it prevents the waste of more than 25,000 Chinook. We do not know the proportions, but we do know that they are catching salmon from rivers that flow into the Gulf of Alaska. Some of these rivers include those in your district like, the Kenai, Kasilof, Ninilchik, Susitna, Karluk, and many others around the Gulf.

As you are aware, there are many rivers that the Department of Fish and game have listed as "stock of concern" both in the Gulf and the Bering Sea. In 2012, both commercial and recreational fishermen faced severe closure due to low Chinook returns. We would ask that the Council at this time would share this

pain and cap the Gulf of Alaska non-pollock trawl fisheries to a Chinook cap of 5,000. We do not believe that this bycatch of Chinook is the answer to all the problems facing this stock, but we do know that this is something we can and should do. Looking at the charts of catch vs. bycatch from various targeted fisheries and various vessels, we find that some are fishing cleaner than others. Given the present "race for fish" it seems that we will be rewarding those that have the highest bycatch with the most quotas.

The discussion has begun in the Council to pursue a Catch Share Program for the Gulf of Alaska Groundfisheries. This is the "tool" that the trawl industry says is essential to bycatch reductions. We must recognize the shortcomings of past programs and commit to doing things differently this time. All impacted community members should have an opportunity to provide meaningful input.

For any management program design, goals must include:

Significant and meaningful bycatch reductions with 100% observer coverage

Mechanisms to reduce capital flight of the fisheries resource

Direct allocations to community fishing associations

Avoid granting fishing rights into perpetuity

Maintain opportunity for crew, processing workers, and support industries

Maintain entry level opportunity

Limit excessive consolidation in the harvesting and processing sector

Promote active participation by vessel and quota owners

Provide ecosystem protections

We ask that the legislature speaks out and support these principles in order to maintain healthy fisheries and robust working waterfronts in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea coastal communities.

11:06:05 AM

MR. WEDIN stressed the need to continue the two way dialogue, as previously reported.

11:06:33 AM

ART NELSON, Policy Director, Bering Sea Fisherman's Association, provided testimony, paraphrasing from a prepared statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council adopted amendment 91 which was implemented in 2011. At the time of adoption, this coastwide-failure of Chinook stocks had not yet occurred, however, they were aware that the Yukon River stock was already trending downward significantly and the eastern Norton Sound kings had been in crisis for nearly a decade. According to the EIS at the time of Am91, stock composition estimates of chinook salmon taken as bycatch in the Being Sea showed that approximately 56-67% were from Alaskan rivers draining into the Bering Sea (CWAK, Yukon, North Pen) (NMFS, 2009). More recent information, while incomplete, indicate that it could be even higher – 87% from samples collected in 2010, as pointed out in earlier testimony from Bob Clark with ADF&G. As the Council moved toward final action on their plan, both the Alaska Board of Fisheries and the US Fish and Wildlife Service urged them to adopt a Chinook cap around 32,000 instead of the 60,000 cap they ultimately adopted. Since the Council's action, things have only gotten worse for Western Alaska king salmon, and the crisis has spread throughout southcentral Alaska. The Yukon River has been declared a fishery disaster for every single year since 2008 (US Dept. of Commerce) and has been listed as a stock of concern since 2000. Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, commercial harvest of Chinook salmon in the Yukon River were regularly over 100,000 fish annually and residents throughout the river drainage also enjoyed healthy and relatively stable subsistence harvests of king salmon. However,

the recent 5-year commercial harvests are down over 96% from the prior 28-year average (1980-2007) (Schmidt and Newland, 2012). The subsistence lifestyle has also been impacted by the poor runs. Subsistence harvests have failed to meet the minimum "Amount necessary for subsistence" in each of the past 5 years (ANS= 45,500-66,704, per 5AAC 01.236 (b)(1)…2012 estimated) (Brown and Jallen, 2012). Additionally, we have failed to deliver the minimum negotiated treaty amount of Chinook salmon into Canada in 3 of the last 5 years (Schmidt and Newland, 2012). Besides affecting harvest of king salmon by Canadian residents, this also fails to provide escapement needs when king salmon spawned in Canadian waters have historically represent about 50% of the entire Yukon drainage production. In Norton Sound, the Unalakleet and Shaktoolik Rivers are the major Chinook producing systems and have been listed as a stock of concern since 2004. The escapement goal on the Unalakleet River has only been met in three of the past 5 years, and when escapements were met, it was only due to significant subsistence fishery restrictions. There has not been a directed commercial harvest of king salmon since 2001. Using the most recent 5-year averages, commercial harvests are down 98% and subsistence harvests are down 67% from historical average (Kent and Bergstrom, 2012). The bycatch of Chinook salmon comes off the top of what subsistence, commercial and sport salmon fishermen get along the coasts and in the rivers. It is fortunate that bycatch in the Bering Sea has been relatively low for the past several years, but when you apply estimates of stock composition to the current bycatch amounts, even the current bycatch is taking almost as many Yukon kings than the terminal commercial fishery when inriver fishermen have been placed on incidental catch only and the sale is prohibited. While the pollock fishery celebrated a low bycatch of about 11,000 kings this last year (NMFS website), subsistence fishermen on the Kuskokwim river got tickets and their nets seized for trying to catch a few kings to put on their fish racks (KTUU, 2012). What's most alarming is the potential at any time for the pollock fishery to take a bycatch of 60,000 king salmon. By rough estimates, that would represent somewhere between 30,000-40,000 Alaska fish and perhaps as many as 13,000 Chinook

salmon from the Yukon alone. At current run strengths, western Alaska fishermen are already assuming that their commercial harvest of kings will be foregone, and that amount of bycatch would have dire consequences to in-river management, most likely resulting in even more restrictions to subsistence users who are already not meeting their needs at levels determined by the Alaska Board of Fisheries. Especially at these low levels of abundance, every king salmon counts. BSFA has and will continue to ask that the Council revisit their Chinook bycatch measures to account for the recent and much more dire stock statuses and shoulder a more equitable share of the burden of conservation. Aside from whatever action you may take regarding bycatch, I would urge you to also support the State's research initiative as well as Representative Herron's HB 49 which would create a research endowment for Chinook salmon research.

11:14:01 AM

The committee took an at-ease from 11:14 a.m. to 11:17 a.m.

Presentation: Herring and Fish Protein Marketing Project

CHAIR SEATON announced that final order of business would be a presentation on the Herring and Fish Protein Marketing Project.

11:17:17 AM

BRUCE SCHACTLER, Global Food Aid Director, Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, explained that the initial impetus began ten years ago when there was an over-supply of canned pink salmon. The marketing success resulted in reversing the situation and currently not enough canned pink salmon is available to meet the demand, thus making it necessary to consider other species to fill the void. Herring were identified as the answer. Approximately 4,000,000 tons of herring are harvested on a global basis and Alaska currently contributes about 10 percent. The herring roe fishery does not utilize the male herring, leaving a viable supply for new economic development. The herring fisheries in Alaska have been waning with little or no local market of interest. However, canned herring is a shelf stable, durable product, similar to canned salmon. Canned fish products are extremely popular on a global scale and with the food aid community, which represents a

$3 billion market. The approach to marketing herring has been designed along similar lines as the successful approach used for canned salmon. Launching the effort with a focus on food aid programs has paid off and additional requests are being received on a regular basis. Since the initial 10,000 surplus cases of pink salmon were sold, in 2004, sales have increased and reports for 2012 indicate that an excess of a million cases sold for about $10 million. Herring is expected to generate similar economic opportunity. In two years the herring project has been developing as planned. Existing salmon machinery is primarily being used, although the purchase of some herring specific equipment was necessary; Ocean Beauty Seafoods has partnered in the effort. He reported that in 2012, an appropriate can container was designed and an NGO (nongovernmental organization) contact was identified; Samaritans Purse partnered with ASMI to bring a pilot program to Africa. A barge container of canned herring was shipped to Liberia for distribution by the Samaritans Purse volunteers. He underscored that Alaskan canned fish products are the only animal protein products in the food aid arena. Each ready to each can of fish delivers 100 percent protein, making it unique and valuable.

11:30:30 AM

DR. NINA SCHLOSSMAN PhD, Technical Assistance & Project Management, Global Food Aid Program, said introducing new products can be a lengthy process, and many inquiries must be fielded such as taste and cooking possibilities. The fish products provide relief to the billion people who go to bed hungry or are undernourished and the ASMI partnership has allowed delivery of this nutrient rich product to a large populace; including many with HIV/AIDs. Fish represent the only source of marine protein and Omega III nutrients, which are known to be a key factor for good health. The Alaskan product has been well received, especially in Liberia where fish is a favorite aspect of any meal. The health impacts, on those receiving the product via Samaritans Purse, have been analyzed over the past nine months and shown remarkable results. In the five programs, 42 percent overall experienced improvement of health. In the HIV/AIDS community 80 percent improved to normal, in conjunction with the prescribed medicine.

MR. SCHACTLER added that the only dietary difference, during the studies, was the addition of four cans of herring per week.

DR. SCHLOSSMAN said that often the allotment was eaten continuously until it ran out and more was obtained in the next

month. Statistics for weights and measures were accurately gathered, and confidence in the data is high.

11:37:53 AM

MR. SCHACTLER said another program is planned for the spring of 2013, in conjunction with Ocean Beauty Seafoods, which will provide fresh product. The entire attention of the food aid community is on ASMI, and in the coming months Alaskan products will become an official purchase item on the USDA, world hunger/food aid buy list. Two other NGO's are prepared to purchase Alaskan products in quantity, as soon as they are available. The next shipping container will be filled with canned fillet products. The crosscut processing approach did not provide accurate weights and using herring fillets should remedy the discrepancy by creating a solid pack meat unit. Additionally, fresh frozen herring will be introduced to the global retail markets via the Boston and Brussels seafood shows this spring. The canned pink salmon demand cannot be met on a domestic level and herring are being requested.

11:43:12 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS asked what a fully developed market might generate.

MR. SCHACTLER said it could easily be $10 million in canned sales but the frozen market would be more difficult to estimate, primarily due to freight prices.

MR. SCHACTLER mentioned the canned salmon seafood powder and said next year will see the product being developed for sale in the summer of 2014. The food aid and world food programs are interested in powder products to minimize freight costs while still providing nutrient rich products. The powder was first produced 15-20 years ago, but this may be the best time for it to be marketed on a global scale. He said the prospects are exiting and purchasers are awaiting buying opportunities.

11:47:54 AM

REPRESENTATIVE FEIGE asked how the powder is produced.

MR. SCHACTLER explained the process briefly and offered to bring a chemist to next year's briefing. He then provided a brief video of images of the products being used in locales around the world. He said that once people have good nutrition, appetite

returns, and the body can once again benefit from prescribed medicinal products; general good health ensues. The programs ten year history has shown value added to the seafood industry and the stabilization of the pink salmon market. It is anticipated that, through similar marketing strategies, western Alaska herring fisheries will also benefit.

CHAIR SEATON acknowledged the positive work being accomplished by ASMI.

11:56:40 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 11:56 a.m.