ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES
Anchorage, Alaska
November 15, 2021
10:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Geran Tarr, Chair
Representative Louise Stutes, Vice Chair
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins (via teleconference)
Representative Andi Story (via teleconference)
Representative Dan Ortiz (via teleconference)
Representative Sarah Vance (via teleconference)
Representative Kevin McCabe (via teleconference)

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Mike Prax

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): BYCATCH IN ALASKA'S FISHERIES

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: As one of the three presenters addressing bycatch in Alaska's fisheries, discussed the poor 2021 chum salmon returns in Western Alaska.

DAVID WITHERELL, Executive Director
North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As one of the three presenters discussing bycatch in Alaska's fisheries, provided a PowerPoint presentation titled, "Bycatch Management in North Pacific Groundfish Fisheries," dated 11/2021.

GLENN MERRILL, Assistant Regional Administrator
Sustainable Fisheries Division
Alaska Region
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries
U.S. Department of Commerce
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: As one of the three presenters discussing bycatch in Alaska's fisheries, provided a PowerPoint presentation titled, "Bycatch," dated 11/15/2021.

ACTION NARRATIVE

10:04:31 AM

CHAIR GERAN TARR called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. Representatives Stutes, McCabe (via teleconference), Ortiz (via teleconference, Story (via teleconference), Vance (via teleconference), Kreiss-Tomkins (via teleconference) and Tarr were present at the call to order.

PRESENTATION(S): Bycatch in Alaska's Fisheries

10:04:54 AM

CHAIR TARR announced that the only order of business would be presentations on bycatch in Alaska's fisheries.

CHAIR TARR explained that outside of legislative proposals, two specific issues of interest to committee members are regulations for instream water reservations [proposed by the Department of Natural Resources] and bycatch in Alaska. She said a presentation on the proposed instream regulations was provided to the committee on [7/27/21], and today's presentations on bycatch are being provided by government agencies. She added that a future presentation will be provided by stakeholders. She invited Commissioner Vincent-Lang to begin his presentation.

10:07:33 AM

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), noted that the other two presenters will address bycatch in federal water fisheries, and he will focus on the

pressing management issue of what happened this year to Western Alaska's chum salmon. Bycatch is being identified as a culprit for low returns, he said, but the question is whether this is the case or whether it is a piece of the puzzle that must be put together to see the entire picture of what happened. Seeing the complete picture allows for focusing management and research efforts on what will make the biggest difference.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stated that this year's Western Alaska chum salmon returns were extremely poor, resulting in closure of in-river and coastal fisheries, including those for subsistence. He pointed out that Alaska's constitution and state statutes require that all salmon stocks be managed for sustained yield and benefits. When not enough fish return to the spawning grounds to ensure future generations of salmon, ADF&G is bound to restrict or close fisheries.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG pointed out that salmon productivity is generally cyclical and that low returns have been seen in the past. These are some of the lowest returns on record, he said, but there has been recovery from other previous low returns. For example, chum and chinook salmon in the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Region crashed in the 1990s but rebounded in the early to mid-2000s. However, he continued, the state is extremely concerned about this summer's low salmon returns in much of Western Alaska. He said ADF&G understands the importance of salmon to the AYK Region's 50,000 rural residents for food security, culture, and economies.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG told of a trip he made this past summer to several impacted communities along the Yukon and the words of distress were insightful and impactful to him. He said steps are being taken by the governor's office and ADF&G to mitigate some of these impacts, such as distributing salmon to impacted communities this fall, with additional distributions being considered to address food shortages. While nothing can replace the ability to participate in traditional subsistence activities, he continued, the hope is that these fish will at least partially offset some of the lost food. As well, ADF&G is extending hunting seasons where possible and where it does not impact the long-term sustainability of resources, and staff are exploring additional opportunities that are available.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stated that ADF&G is assessing the reasons, including bycatch, behind the poor chum returns to Western Alaska to better understand the root causes and what can be done from a management perspective. He said 1.5-2.0 million

chum salmon were missing from a pre-season projection for the Yukon River's summer and fall chum runs, and the question is where did these fish go? Many people think trawl bycatch in the Bering Sea is a likely culprit because chum salmon are caught as bycatch in the pollock and cod trawl fisheries. Most of the chum salmon incidentally caught are not adults, he specified, but rather juveniles that return in out years. So, it is more appropriate and accurate to look at what was caught two years ago as bycatch, he continued, because those are the fish that would have returned as adults this year. Two years ago, trawlers caught about 350,000 juvenile chum salmon. Genetic work shows that about 16 percent, or 60,000, of those chums were Western Alaska origin. Had they not been caught as bycatch, these subadults would have spent another two years in the ocean suffering natural mortality, he explained, so about 25,000-35,000 of them would have returned this year to Western Alaska rivers. Therefore, while 350,000 is large, and steps should be taken to reduce it, it alone does not explain the gap of 1.5-2.0 million fish.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG then asked the question of whether these missing chum salmon could have been caught in other fisheries. He said one place would be fisheries outside the US. Russian trawlers catch salmon, but it isn't known how many or what the origins of the caught salmon are as most do not have neutral observers onboard their vessels. As a member of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council ("the Council"), he related, [ADF&G] has written to the Secretary of State asking the secretary to work with [the Council] to get a better catch accounting and genetic analyses of Russian salmon bycatch. But, he continued, assuming the numbers are close to the Alaskan numbers, this alone does not explain what happened. He said Western Alaska chum salmon could also be caught in mixed stock salmon fisheries in state waters. From past work it is known that Western Alaska chum salmon are caught in Alaska Peninsula fisheries, and about 2.2 million chums were harvested this year in these fisheries. Past genetic work shows that about 30 percent, or 600,000 of these, are Western Alaska origin. Of these, about half are Bristol Bay origin, leaving about 300,000 that are likely of Yukon-Kuskokwim and Norton Sound origin. It is also known that most of the harvested Western Alaska chums occurs during the June portion of this fishery. But again, he pointed out, this alone does not explain what happened to the missing 1.5-2.0 million chums from the Yukon alone.

10:14:17 AM

The committee took a brief at-ease due to audio difficulties.

10:15:52 AM

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG continued his presentation. He noted that these estimates are based on data collected during the years of relatively high summer chum abundance in Western Alaska. So, he said, while it represents the best available information at this time, it may over-estimate the proportional harvest of Western Alaska stocks given that incidental harvest is generally related to abundance. He added that this reasoning is substantiated in that Alaska Peninsula fisheries do not harvest fall-run chum salmon, which also poorly performed this year. He related that his staff is putting together a study proposal updating the genetic composition information from the Alaska Peninsula fisheries during the month of June. He said his staff is also exploring options for what he could do this summer using his Executive Order (EO) authority to reduce intercept of Western Alaska summer chum salmon during June if low chum returns are experienced again and subsistence fishing is restricted or closed. The Board of Fisheries, he added, will be discussing these fisheries during its next cycle.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said it appears something is happening to Alaska's chums in the ocean because the missing 1.5-2.0 million chums cannot be explained with the intercept or bycatch fisheries issues. Several years ago, he stated, an exploration was begun of marine survival and how changing marine conditions are impacting the returns of salmon to Western Alaska streams. A multi-agency study is contributing to an understanding of factors driving survival and productivity at different life stages for Western Alaska chinook and chum salmon. These studies are providing clues about what may be happening in the ocean and are providing forecasting tools used in the management of Western Alaska fisheries. Preliminary findings, he reported, indicate that the first several months in the marine environment may be critical. Options are being explored to expand this work into other areas of the Bering Sea, southern Bering Sea, and the Gulf of Alaska.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stated that ADF&G is participating in various deep blue ocean surveys to better understand marine survival in the open ocean. Funds from the Pacific Salmon Commission and the North Pacific Research Board have been directed towards this effort and ADF&G staff have been assigned to research cruises. There is active communication with the Alaska Congressional Delegation on ways to secure more support

for these important efforts, he related. A governor's stakeholder taskforce will be convened to identify and understand the variables affecting the return of salmon, including bycatch, and what can be done in terms of research and management. This will involve fitting the puzzle pieces together to form a picture of the current situation from which a cross-jurisdictional management strategy can be developed, he said. Representatives of impacted communities, fisheries, and management agencies will be invited, with the goal of holding these meetings this winter and spring.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG concluded by offering sympathy to those impacted by this summer's low salmon returns. He said ADF&G is committed to finding the causes, taking the appropriate management actions to address it, and working with the appropriate management entities to cooperate on needed research and to address the causal issues. New information will be collected as part of an expanded science relationship, he added, and a stakeholder panel will be convened this spring.

10:20:08 AM

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES noted that the state manages all salmon fisheries, while the Council manages salmon bycatch in the federal groundfish fisheries. She asked how the state shares information or has a role with the Council.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that the state has a voting membership on the Council and participates in the management planning activities for federal water fisheries, including those for bycatch. Through that effort, especially with chinook salmon, he said, substantial progress has been made in reducing chinook salmon bycatch on the open ocean by setting hard caps that are indexed to the projected escapement ranges for Western Alaska streams.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES inquired about the kind of system that is set up for hard caps to limit salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that in the Bering Sea hard caps are set [for chinook salmon] that are dependent upon projecting the salmon returns in three river systems in Western Alaska; as a result, the chinook bycatch has gone down over time. There isn't a hard cap for chum salmon, he continued. A challenge with moving the trawl fleet around to manage for halibut, crab, and chinook salmon bycatch is that there is only

so much ocean and sometimes collateral impacts are had on chum salmon. Right now, chum salmon bycatch numbers are increasing. The Bering Sea is a dynamic system, he explained, and is managed on a latitude/longitude basis for bycatch, and on a depth basis for bycatch, and, as well, a temporal basis. So, when an effort is taken on "XYZ" and temporal timeframe, and the fleet moved around to reduce the bycatch of one species, it ends up having some impacts on the other species. It is very important, he added, that when making any corrective action in the Bering Sea, time is taken to figure out what is going to be the impact on other species and try to reduce the harvest on those species.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES noted that there are many questions about climate change and ocean acidification and how that is affecting things. She asked about the questions that are being focused on in the research.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered it has been concluded that ocean survival is having an impact on salmon returns across the state. While [ADF&G] has control over spawning numbers, what is going in the river, and the harvest that goes on, there is not a good understanding of what is happening in the near-shore environment after salmon leave the freshwater systems nor what is happening in the deep blue ocean. He said a scientist, Dr. Katie Howard, has been hired to look at marine survival conditions affecting salmon. Dr. Howard is currently working on near-shore survival of chum and chinook salmon as they emigrate out of the Yukon River, and it is being seen that the first 1.5 months out in the ocean can have a dramatic impact on the return of those fish in out years. The department has put together a couple of proposals and is working with the Alaska Congressional Delegation to potentially expand that work into the southern Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska. Near-shore survival is one piece, the commissioner continued; gaining a good understanding of what is happening in the deep blue ocean is another and is going to take work with other entities. As part of his job, he related, he sits on the North Pacific Research Board and the Pacific Salmon Commission, and some money has now been dedicated to work in the open ocean. Working with Russia and Canada, transects are being looked at from Vancouver to Russia, and staff time has been dedicated to start gaining a better understanding of movements, distributions, and the condition of salmon out in the open ocean.

10:24:58 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ recalled the commissioner's statement that an estimated 350,000 chum salmon were caught through bycatch. He asked what this number is based on and how accurate it is.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that the number is based on 100 percent observer coverage for the trawl industry in the Bering Sea. The genetic information is collected from the observer program, he stated, and then calculated by the federal government in the National Marine Fisheries Science Center. He said he is fairly confident of what that number is and what the genetic composition of those catches are. But, he continued, he is less confident of what may be caught across the international state line in the U.S.-Russian border, which is why a letter was written to the Secretary of State urging greater observer coverage on the Russian fleet and the collecting of information to identify the stock composition of those fish.

10:26:28 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ appreciated that the commissioner is less confident in the numbers for the international fisheries. He asked whether there is an observer program within the Russian fleet of trawlers.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that coverage on the Russian side of the border is very spotty. He said his opinion is that the estimates are not accurate for what is being caught and what the composition is of those catches.

10:27:38 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE inquired whether the bycatch cap is a quota for each individual boat or a global cap for everyone.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that it is a global cap for everyone, which forces the industry to work together because that fishery is fully rationalized in the Bering Sea for pollock and cod. He stated that it is making a difference in reducing the bycatch, at least of chinook salmon, given the chinook bycatch is below the annual caps.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked whether a global cap allows bad actors to increase the number and bring it right to the top, whereas an individual boat quota could determine which boat operators are attempting to reduce their bycatch and could find observers that are not diligently doing their job. He stated

that Canada has individual boat quotas and has seen its bycatch decrease significantly.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that if the other two speakers don't answer Representative McCabe's question, he will address it after their presentations.

10:30:10 AM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE noted that the commissioner spoke about salmon bycatch but pointed out that the upcoming action before the North Pacific Fishery Management Council is regarding halibut bycatch. She asked whether the commissioner has a position from the state's perspective on the Bering Sea bycatch.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that [ADF&G] is presently reviewing all the materials for the Council's coming meeting and at this time does not have a position on what it is going to do. [The department] is going to take a step to have a significant reduction in halibut bycatch, he stated, but it is premature for him to postulate which alternative ADF&G will ultimately support until all the materials have been read.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE recalled the commissioner stating that ADF&G is still trying to find an explanation for the missing 1.5 million chum. She further recalled the commissioner stating that there is no hard cap on chum bycatch.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG confirmed that that is correct.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked if the commissioner believes there is a correlation between not having a hard cap on bycatch and the unexplained reduction of 1.5 million chum in the Bering Sea.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that when the puzzles are pieced together, ADF&G doesn't think bycatch alone is the culprit that is causing the run failures in the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. That said, he added, ADF&G is exploring steps as to what can be done to reduce bycatch of chum in the Bering Sea trawl fishery.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE concurred with the commissioner's assessment and said she and other Alaskans are looking forward to a future follow-up on the management plan overall.

10:32:35 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS offered his understanding that the State of Alaska is still formulating its position on the four alternatives for trawl bycatch in the Bering Sea at [the Council's] December meeting. He asked what information the state needs to take a position that it doesn't currently have.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that, in terms of making a final decision, the documents before the department are vast and ADF&G is pouring through them. He stressed that a step is going to be taken at this meeting to reduce halibut bycatch in the Bering Sea trawl fisheries, and that [ADF&G] is committed to that. Which of those alternatives ADF&G ends up supporting, he explained, becomes a little more complex as the pluses and minuses to each alternative are considered, and the department is looking to the analysis to decide the proper path forward.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS presumed it is mostly alternatives two, three, and four that are being talked about, given alternative one is the status quo and would not be a reduction in the trawl bycatch. He asked what the pluses and minuses are that the commissioner and department are evaluating.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that one issue to sort through is how to link the abundance of halibut to a cap on bycatch – whether to use a model done by the International Pacific Halibut Commission, which has three Canadians voting on it, but this is really a U.S. domestic allocation issue, or whether to link it to a broader level system and incentivize industry to reduce it. Discussions are ongoing internally about which of those two approaches is best, but in his opinion U.S. domestic allocation issues should remain in the U.S.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS inquired whether the State of Alaska believes the Council should put a cap on the amount of chum bycatch taken by the trawl fleet in the Bering Sea.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered he thinks that is something the Council should look at, but he doesn't think it should be done without giving great thought as to what other implications that may cause. For instance, he doesn't want to put on a hard chum bycatch limit and inadvertently increase the chinook salmon bycatch since they both are in midwater trawl. He said he isn't necessarily opposed to a chum salmon cap, but an analysis must be done so there aren't unintended consequences moving forward.

10:36:46 AM

REPRESENTATIVE STORY said she has heard that incentives to the industry have been successful in other countries. She requested the commissioner to discuss incentives and how they work.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that if industry is incentivized to stay below the cap, rather than penalized for going above the cap, industry stays below the caps. Incentive programs have reduced the bycatch of halibut below the mandated hard caps, he said, and without an incentive program industry probably would be fishing up to the cap. With incentives industry looks for ways to keep its bycatch low. The Bering Sea has rationalized fishers, he stated, which allows the fishery to operate over a longer time and allows them to incentivize how they fish to reduce their bycatch on the ocean. There is no incentive to reduce bycatch when fishers are trying to catch all their pollock in a period of two or three weeks. When not rushing for fish, fishers have more incentive to move around to try to reduce bycatch in the open ocean. Incentive programs have been very effective at reducing bycatch, especially when combined with rationalized fisheries, he noted. The Bering Sea cod fishery was rationalized one and a half months ago at the Council's last meeting, and this is expected to reduce the bycatch of halibut by about 25 percent moving forward.

10:39:07 AM

REPRESENTATIVE STORY asked about this being an option for chum.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied he thinks something should be done for chum salmon bycatch but advised that it cannot be rushed into and must be evaluated carefully to ensure there aren't unintended consequences on other areas of bycatch; for example, a hard cap on chum could increase chinook bycatch. He related that some crab fishermen would like to see an expansion of the crab bycatch protection area on the bottom, but that could push the trawl industry farther north into halibut grounds. There must be a good understanding before an action is taken, he stressed. That doesn't mean an action shouldn't be taken, just that there be an understanding of the consequences of that action on other species.

10:41:09 AM

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES offered her understanding that, as opposed to the Russian trawl fleet, all of Alaska's waters mandate 100 percent observer coverage.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that that's his understanding.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked the commissioner what he sees as the legislature's role in helping ADF&G and other agencies determine why a reduction is being seen in chinook and chum salmon.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered it would be funding to start collecting information in the open ocean. He said it has been concluded that ocean survival is having impacts on salmon in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea. What is happening in freshwater environments can be controlled, but the variables affecting the survival of fish in the ocean are not understood. He said he hopes the legislature will support ADF&G's budget request to deal with answering those questions.

10:42:38 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ asked whether it is the Bering Sea or Gulf of Alaska that doesn't have 100 percent observer coverage.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that the Bering Sea trawl industry is 100 percent covered, but the longline and pot fisheries don't have nearly that much coverage. He said more details would be provided in the next two presentation.

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ recalled the commissioner stating there is not a hard cap on the chum bycatch numbers. He inquired about how a hard cap works for chinook salmon and whether the trawl fleet is shut down once that number is reached.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG deferred to Mr. Merrill to speak to that because it is a federal fishery. He said his understanding is that the fishery shuts down when the hard cap is reached.

10:44:29 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE offered his understanding that in a rationalized fishery there is an extended period to allow fishermen more time to properly manage their fishing and bycatch, rather than having a set length of time such as a week.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG explained that rationalized fisheries occur when individual boats, processors, or fishermen are awarded quotas based on their catch histories, and that allows them to fish their proportional catch of those fisheries over a longer duration. Because they aren't in a rush in a competitive

environment, they can choose not to fish during times when chum or halibut abundance is high or to fish other areas.

10:45:46 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE surmised that rationalized fishery is the modern term for individual fishing quotas (IFQs) that were done years ago and that were so controversial.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that there are different types of rationalized fisheries, with IFQ being one type. He said the term applies to different kinds of fisheries that are basically prosecuted in a more orderly manner to hopefully increase market value of the fish coming out of it, increase the safety of fishermen on the grounds, and reduce bycatch.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked whether the mortality of bycaught fish is 100 percent.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that some of those fish are not dead, and sorting is done to put back the live fish; some of the fish are dead and are retained or not retained. He explained that when industry has a longer time to catch fish in a rationalized manner, [incentive is provided to] do things like halibut excluders that reduce the number of halibut coming off the bottom of the ocean while trying to catch pollock or cod, and they can fish in areas that may have lower catch rates of pollock but also lower catch rates for halibut. The fishery can operate in a more planned manner that increases the safety of the fishermen and incentivizes fishermen to experiment with gear that reduces bycatch and to fish in areas where there is not a high bycatch of salmon, crab, or halibut on the grounds.

10:51:19 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS inquired whether the research that is underway on ocean survival of salmon is being funded through the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Sustainable Salmon Initiative. He further asked whether that funding is sufficient.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that an evaluation is being done on survival of chum and chinook salmon from the Yukon River in the north Bering Sea, with funding through initiatives. It is providing insights as to the importance of the first 1.5 months in the near-shore environment to the ultimate survival of both chum and chinook salmon. He advised that there is need to expand that work into the southern Bering Sea as well as into

the north Gulf of Alaska. Some near-shore work on pink salmon in Southeast Alaska is giving a better ability to assess the survival of those fish in a near-shore area. Study proposals are being put together for federal funding to expand those surveys into those new areas and to provide funding certainty for the north Bering Sea work. He said it is recognized that a better understanding is needed of what is happening in the open ocean, which is expensive and time-consuming work that requires international cooperation. The Pacific Salmon Commission and the North Pacific Research Board are dedicating money towards understanding that, he related, and [ADF&G] is putting in staff time and research vessels to start exploring and helping answer those questions. They won't be quick answers but without a start there won't be any answers at all. [The department] is working with the Alaska Congressional Delegation to find money to continue that work moving forward, he added.

10:52:30 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS requested the commissioner's and the state's perspective on habitat impact or damage that may occur in the Bering Sea with benthic and bottom trawling. He further requested the commissioner's comment on how habitat impact or damage interacts with crab stocks and other species that rely on that habitat.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that he hasn't given that a great deal of thought, so will defer answering. He said he will speak to his staff and get an answer to the committee.

10:52:58 AM

REPRESENTATIVE STORY requested an estimate of the expense.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that ADF&G is putting those proposals together as part of the governor's budget that will be released in December.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY explained she is trying to get a feel for the state's expense as well as the federal.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that about $400,000 has been dedicated by the North Pacific Research Board and hundreds of thousands of dollars are being looked at by the Pacific Salmon Commission for the deep ocean surveys. The overall effort in the North Pacific survey is tens of millions of dollars, he stated, with five ships doing different quadrants of the ocean

between Russian and Vancouver, BC. He allowed it isn't cheap but said piecing the puzzle together is important work.

REPRESENTATIVE STORY offered her appreciation for those numbers and said she thinks they are doable.

10:55:11 AM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether rationalized trawl fisheries have been successful at avoiding halibut bycatch.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said the forthcoming presentations will provide that answer but stated that significant reductions in halibut bycatch have been seen over the last decade.

CHAIR TARR asked how genetics for the origin of the fish has been incorporated into the current research.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that the genetic information for trawl industry bycatch in federal waters is conducted by the federal government and is ongoing. He said information for the Alaska Peninsula is based on the Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Program ("WASSIP Study"), which is now about 10 years old. He said he therefore has directed his staff to put together a research proposal for updating that information, given there are differences in run composition in that fishery.

10:57:53 AM

CHAIR TARR invited the second presenter, Mr. Witherell, to begin his presentation.

10:58:05 AM

DAVID WITHERELL, Executive Director, North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC), provided a PowerPoint presentation titled, "Bycatch Management in North Pacific Groundfish Fisheries," dated 11/2021. He turned to the second slide titled, "The Guiding Law for U.S. Marine Fisheries." He stated that the primary law for managing marine fisheries in the U.S. is the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act ("Magnuson-Stevens Act"), adopted in 1976 and amended many times since then. He explained that the Act established the 200-mile limit known as the exclusive economic zone (EEZ); established national standards to guide the development of fishery management plans; and established eight fishery management councils to provide an opportunity for the affected public and

fishermen to have a say in the conservation and management of fisheries in their region.

MR. WITHERELL proceeded to the third slide titled, "Magnuson-Stevens Act - National Standards," which listed the ten national standards. He said the Council balances these objectives in developing the fishery management plans and regulations. For example, to meet national standard 9 and reduce bycatch to the extent practicable, the Council must also ensure that optimum yield will be retained from each fishery in the U.S. fishing industry using the best scientific information available; also, the Council must consider the other national standards including communities.

11:01:11 AM

MR. WITHERELL discussed the fourth slide titled, "North Pacific Council Membership." He related that the Council has 11 voting members consisting of four agency representatives including ADF&G. He noted that Rachel Baker is Commissioner Vincent-Lang's designee and Ms. Baker's alternate is Karla Bush. The seven other voting members are appointed by the governors of Alaska and Washington, with Alaska's governor appointing five members and Washington's governor appointing two. He further noted that there are also four [non-voting] members from federal agencies. Mr. Witherell stated that as executive director he sits at the table to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly. He oversees the secretary and staff of 15, including the administrative assistant who facilitates the meeting and the fishery analysts who prepare the discussion papers and economic and environmental assessment documents that are used by the Council for decision making.

MR. WITHERELL moved to the fifth slide titled, "Council Meetings." He said the Council meets five times a year in conjunction with two of its advisory bodies - the Scientific and Statistical Committee, which provides peer review of the scientific information used, and the Fishing Industry Advisory Panel, which provides recommendations on policy. He pointed out that all meetings are public; people can attend, provide testimony, and listen to the proceedings as they are webcast.

MR. WITHERELL continued to the sixth slide titled, "Who Manages What Fisheries off Alaska?" He referred to the chart outlining the roles that each agency has in managing of specific fisheries. The Council, he explained, develops the conservation and management measures for the groundfish fishery which are

approved by the Secretary of Commerce and implemented by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries. He said the state manages many of the groundfish fisheries in state waters.

11:04:30 AM

MR. WITHERELL spoke to the seventh slide titled, "What is bycatch." He pointed out that the Magnuson-Stevens Act defines bycatch as those fish that are not retained; in other words, bycatch is discarded fish. He said fish are discarded for two reasons - either they are not economically marketable, or regulations prohibit fishermen from keeping the fish. Economic discards might be fish like sculpins that are not able to be sold and regulatory discards are outside of the regulated size limit or are prohibited from retention. He noted that one special type of regulatory discard is prohibited species catch (PSC), which is valuable species that are targeted in other fisheries and includes halibut, salmon, and crabs.

MR. WITHERELL showed the eighth slide titled, "Total Bycatch by Gear Type in the Groundfish Fisheries," and discussed the amount of bycatch occurring in federal fisheries. He said the two graphs on the left depict the catch and discards by trawl gear, and the two graphs on the right depict the catch and discards by fixed gear; the upper graphs are for the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands, and the bottom graphs are for the Gulf of Alaska. He pointed out that, overall, the majority of fish are retained and only a small proportion of the catch is discarded. Trawl fisheries can be characterized by higher catch volume with relatively low bycatch rates, he stated. Fixed gear, or longline and pot gear, has lower catches overall but with higher bycatch rates. He noted that, overall, catch is down in the Gulf of Alaska with the decline of the Pacific cod stock that resulted from the warm water blob that persisted from 2014 through 2016.

11:06:38 AM

MR. WITHERELL drew attention to the chart on the nineth slide titled, "PSC Limits and Catch." Drawing attention to the catch limits by gear type depicted for halibut, chinook salmon, herring, and crab, he stated that limits are designed to constrain the catch of these species such that obtaining the limit can close the entire fishery of vast areas with higher densities of those species. Because the fleet wants to continue to fish and catch the groundfish quota, he continued, the limits

provide real incentive for the fleet to avoid the bycatch of prohibited species. He pointed out that the recent catches are well below the limits in most cases.

MR. WITHERELL turned to the tenth slide titled, "Measures to Minimize Salmon PSC in the BSAI [Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands]." He specified that chinook and chum salmon are caught incidentally primarily in the pollock fishery. Regarding regulatory measures, he stated that the overall limit on chinook salmon constrains the pollock fishery which would be shut down for the remainder of the year if that level was attained. To provide further incentives to the fleet to avoid chinook salmon at all levels of abundance, a lower limit or performance standard, was established by Amendment 110. Both the overall limit and the performance standard are reduced the following year if the index for Western Alaska's chinook salmon falls below 250,000 fish. Regarding voluntary measures, he said these are also used by the fleet to avoid chinook and chum salmon and includes hotspot closures. These are implemented through incentive plan agreements (IPA) signed onto by the cooperatives. In rationalized fisheries it is the cooperative level that manages the bycatch for all the fleets and provides penalty and other incentives to keep that level as low as possible.

11:09:00 AM

MR. WITHERELL proceeded to the eleventh slide titled, "Bering Sea Salmon PSC trends and genetic breakouts." He stressed that the numbers on the graphs and pie charts for the chinook and chum salmon taken in the Bering Sea are very precise because all the vessels carry 100-200 percent observer coverage. These salmon are observed and sampled on the boats in a rigorous scientific way for the genetic composition. He explained that the figure for chinook salmon also shows the capture of chinook relative to the overall limit and the performance standard, which have zig-zagged in the last couple of years as the chinook salmon runs in the Western Alaska three rivers index have dropped below 250,000 fish. A portion of the chinook and salmon bycatch is from coastal Western Alaska and a small proportion is from the middle and upper Yukon. He emphasized that only 17 percent of the chum salmon that are taken as bycatch comes from Western Alaska and Yukon River, meaning very few of the chum salmon taken as bycatch are Alaska bound. The most recent impact analysis, which considers the age of return and other factors of mortality, indicated that when the bycatch taken is compared to relative run size, bycatch has reduced the aggregate

run sizes by less than 2.5 percent in Western Alaska and by less than 1 percent in upper Yukon runs.

11:11:28 AM

MR. WITHERELL displayed the graph on the twelfth slide titled, "Halibut Mortality – Coastwide," which depicts the time trend of halibut fishing mortality from different sources [discard mortality (nontargeted/nondirected), subsistence, recreational, discard mortality (targeted/directed), commercial landings]. He noted that catches of halibut have declined since the early 2000s, and that discard mortality is much lower in recent years.

MR. WITHERELL continued to the two graphs displayed on the thirteenth slide titled, "Halibut PSC Trends by Area and Gear Type." Drawing attention to the left graph depicting the halibut PSC in the Bering Sea and the right graph depicting the halibut PSC in the Gulf of Alaska, he noted that bycatch has been greatly reduced by both trawl and fixed gear fisheries operating in both areas. Current halibut bycatch is less than half of what it was in 1990s, he pointed out.

MR. WITHERELL moved to the fourteenth slide titled, "Measures to minimize halibut PSC." He stated that the fleet works to avoid catching halibut during operations at sea so as to not reach the fishery specific PSC limit which shuts down the fishery. He reported that the Amendment 80 trawl sector, the 20 or so Bering Sea bottom trawl catcher/processors, account for about 50 percent of the halibut PSC limit. When a net is hauled aboard these vessels and dumped on deck, the fishermen quickly sort out the halibut so they can be released alive, while an independent at-sea observer is always collecting measurements and condition data. As an accountability measure, he added, the Amendment 80 sector also provides an annual report to the council on its halibut bycatch performance for the previous year and on its avoidance program for halibut in the coming year.

11:13:56 AM

MR. WITHERELL spoke to the fifteenth slide titled, "Halibut PSC Measures Over Time." He said halibut has been a vexing problem for groundfish fisheries management starting with the foreign fisheries that were operating in the Bering Sea through 1990. Halibut bycatch limits were placed on foreign and joint venture fisheries, he explained, and the limits were carried forward into the management of domestic fisheries operating under fishery management plans. The halibut PSC limits have been

adjusted downward several times with a 21 percent overall reduction implemented in 2016; this was 25 percent for trawl gear and a lower percentage for fixed gear. For the past several years the Council has been evaluating how to tie halibut bycatch limits in the Bering Sea to abundance of halibut in that management area.

MR. WITHERELL displayed the sixteenth slide titled, "Halibut PSC Alternatives." He stated that at its coming meeting in December [2021] the Council is scheduled to take final action on a plan amendment to establish abundance-based halibut PSC limits for the Amendment 80 sector. Development of this approach has taken years due to the issue's complexity and that the two indicators of halibut abundance show different trends, he explained. The Eastern Bering Sea Trawl Survey (top left graph) conducted by the National [Marine] Fisheries Service provides an index of halibut on the Continental Shelf, which are mostly smaller fish. The setline survey (bottom left graph) conducted by the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) surveyed areas of deeper waters near the slope where generally only larger halibut are caught. Given this data, the Council developed alternatives that utilize both sets of data to determine an annual halibut PSC limit such that when both surveys are high the PSC limit would remain the same or be slightly increased from the status quo. When both surveys are low the PSC limit would be greatly reduced below the current limit. He said the resulting PSC amounts differ among the alternatives, shown on the right of the slide, with the two far right columns being the trawl survey and the single column on the left being the setline survey. Alternative 1 is the status quo, he said. He explained that the status is indicated by these two surveys to determine what the PSC limit would be. Under Alternative 4, for example, if both surveys are low then the bycatch PSC limit for halibut is reduced by 45 percent. He noted that the analysis of the alternatives is posted on the Council's agenda.

MR. WITHERELL showed the seventeenth slide titled, "Council addresses PSC/bycatch minimization at most meetings." He said the sample issues outlined on the slide provide an example of the types of bycatch issues that are being addressed and evaluated by the Council. Bycatch is not a "one and done" issue that gets resolved, he pointed out, it is something that takes continuous monitoring and evaluating ways to minimize bycatch. The Council, he stressed, is always working to minimize bycatch.

11:16:55 AM

MR. WITHERELL drew attention to the eighteenth slide titled, "How to Participate in the Process." He noted there are several different ways for people to participate and learn about the Council and the issues being addressed. All Council meetings are broadcast, and people can provide written comments and testify on any issue.

MR. WITHERELL turned to nineteenth slide titled, "Navigating the Council Website: npfmc.org." He said the Council's home page has information on coming meetings with hyperlinks to the agenda and schedule for the meeting as well as to the various committee and plan team meetings. He brought attention to the Council's December 2021 meeting.

MR. WITHERELL proceeded to the twentieth slide titled, "How to be Heard," and reviewed the procedures and portals for providing testimony at the meeting and written comments. He noted that during the meeting, portals are posted for the public to sign up for testimony. He pointed out that each agenda item also includes the background documents and analyses, which allows the public to read and become informed before making comments or providing public testimony.

MR. WITHERELL concluded with the twenty-first slide titled, "Additional Resources." He thanked the committee for the opportunity to provide information on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's bycatch program.

11:19:29 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ asked whether it is accurate to say that significant coverage, or full observer coverage, is lacking in the Gulf of Alaska.

MR. WITHERELL replied that there is 100 percent coverage in the Bering Sea on the entire fishery for the most part, and on many catcher/processors there are two observers. The Gulf of Alaska has a different system, he said; the coverage is about 15 percent and Mr. Merrill's presentation will provide details.

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ asked how much of a problem it is to assess bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska with only 15 percent observation.

MR. WITHERELL responded that the observer program in the Gulf of Alaska is structured to provide a statistically accurate estimate to catch and bycatch, so it is a random assignment of observers. He said Mr. Merrill's presentation will provide

details on how the data is aggregated across specific areas, time, and fisheries.

11:22:12 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE drew attention to the eighth slide and offered his understanding that bottom trawling has 100 percent mortality of the bycatch while pot fishing has less. He asked why the eighth slide does not differentiate between mid-water and bottom pollock trawling given that bottom gear is a much dirtier trawl and the bycatch different.

MR. WITHERELL responded that with respect to halibut all bycatch is considered dead for purposes of counting against the quota. He explained that with halibut the catch and discard mortality rate are based on various studies and assumptions. The discard mortality rates are set by fishery and are established by the Council every three years. He confirmed that the pelagic trawl fisheries and bottom trawl fisheries have different bycatch composition and bycatch rates; similarly longline gear and pot gear have different catch composition, bycatch composition, and discard rates. He stated that the figures in the eighth slide are not split out because the slide is a "10,000-foot view" for getting at the accusations about one gear type or another having different effects on bycatch.

11:25:58 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE referred to the example of herring on the seventeenth slide and recalled Mr. Witherell's statement that when a fishery reaches the bycatch limit the fishery is shut down. He asked whether he is correct in understanding that that wasn't true in the case of herring in 2021.

MR. WITHERELL answered that the herring PSC limit is established at 1 percent of the estimated or projected herring biomass. When those limits are attained it closes a specific area on a seasonal basis in the Bering Sea. He related that when the data were examined by the National [Marine] Fisheries Service it was felt that there would be challenges to shutting down the fishery and closing that area to the pollock fishery as it would exacerbate bycatch of salmon and other species. He suggested the question be directed to Mr. Merrill.

11:28:30 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS asked how many vessels participate in the Bering Sea crab fish trawl fishery.

MR. WITHERELL estimated there are about 20 catcher/processors in the bottom-trawl fishery, about 20 catcher/processors in the pollock fishery, and about 100 catcher bottom trawl vessels.

11:29:27 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS noted the Bering Sea Amendment 80 bottom trawl, groundfish trawl fleet, is the fleet in question at next month's Council meeting. He asked about the ownership of the 20 vessels and where their home ports are located.

MR. WITHERELL offered his belief that they all are home ported in Seattle.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS referenced the economics of the entirety of that fleet being home ported out of Seattle. He asked many companies own those 20 vessels, how consolidated that fleet is, and where those companies call home.

MR. WITHERELL offered his belief that six or so companies own those vessels, and that some of those vessels are probably not home ported in Seattle but are in Alaska. He said he or Mr. Merrill will get that information to the committee.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS remarked that while there is a biological and ecological question regarding impact to habitat and bycatch, there is also an economic layer when people are unable to fill their freezers. He stated that when more than 99 percent of the GDP of a fishery is not coming to the state to which that fishery is adjacent, people react to that in a certain way. It would be helpful to get clarity and granularity on that economic data, he continued, as it is a relevant consideration in making policy.

MR. WITHERELL responded he is sure all that information is contained in the analysis for the halibut abundance-based management evaluation, but he is still working his way through the document.

11:33:46 AM

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG added that this ownership question is interesting because while the vessels may be home ported in Seattle, they pay significant fishery taxes in the state of

Alaska as part of landing taxes. Also, he noted, the ownership of these vessels is increasingly becoming Alaska-based with the community development quota (CDQ) organizations in Western Alaska buying into these industries. When looking at where they may be home ported, he advised, one needs to also look at the benefits of fish taxes and CDQ ownership that may be coming back into local communities as an important factor.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS stated his appreciation for those points and agreed there are many interconnections. He noted that one of the companies in the Bering Sea groundfish trawl fleet has sued the State of Alaska over the fishery resource landing tax, alleging it is unconstitutional and seeking to strike down the tax levy. He inquired about the status of that litigation and the state's perspective on that company trying to strike down the tax as far as economic benefit to the state.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that [the state] is actively engaged in this and believes the company should be paying fish taxes into the State of Alaska. He said he will get the committee an update on those legal proceedings.

11:36:33 AM

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES, regarding when the hard cap bycatch is reached and the fishery gets closed, asked which federal fishery sectors in the Bering Sea have halibut bycatch and which ones actually have a hard cap.

MR. WITHERELL referenced the slide he showed with halibut bycatch limits by gear type and boat. He said those limits are allocated by directed fisheries apportioned out, and since halibut are taken in virtually every fishery there are always some fisheries affected. For example, the jig fishery and sablefish fishery are not affected, but all trawl fisheries are limited and the hook-and-line fisheries for cod are limited by caps. In further response to Representative Stutes, Mr. Witherell explained that all halibut bycatch limits are a hard cap which shuts down that fishery for the rest of the year [if the hard cap is reached].

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked whether Mr. Witherell is saying that all fishing gear types in all sectors in the Bering Sea have a hard cap for halibut, including the longline and pot fishermen.

MR. WITHERELL responded that all the trawl fisheries do because the cap is apportioned by specific trawl fisheries, and the

catcher/processor longline cod fishery has a hard cap. The pot, sablefish, and jig fisheries are exempted from the caps.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES requested clarification on whether the longline has a hard cap or is exempt.

MR. WITHERELL clarified that the sablefish longline fishery is exempt, and the Pacific cod longline fishery has a cap.

11:39:51 AM

REPRESENTATIVE STORY stated she is interested in learning more about the different fisheries and methods.

CHAIR TARR asked Mr. Witherell whether he could do this.

MR. WITHERELL replied that it would take several data runs but he will get something to the committee.

11:41:00 AM

CHAIR TARR invited the third presenter, Mr. Merrill, to begin his presentation.

11:41:16 AM

GLENN MERRILL, Assistant Regional Administrator, Sustainable Fisheries Division, Alaska Region, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, U.S. Department of Commerce, provided a PowerPoint presentation titled, "Bycatch," dated 11/15/2021. He proceeded to the second slide titled, "Value and Volume of Fisheries [Off] Alaska," and highlighted the importance of fisheries to the state of Alaska. He noted that the information on this slide was drawn from information produced by the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI). He related that these fisheries support over 30,000 jobs, of which about 16,000 are within Alaska. Fisheries in Alaska represent roughly $2 billion in ex-vessel value, or dockside sales, and roughly 5.5 billion pounds of fishery product. That represents over half of all the fishery resources in the U.S. He further related that salmon, which is managed by the State of Alaska, is an important contributor economically and in total amount of harvest that occurs off Alaska. He said the other fisheries are managed in conjunction with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) ("the Council") or through delegated co-management agreements with the State of Alaska, which is particularly applicable to the crab fisheries in the Bering Sea.

So, he continued, a considerable amount of the overall revenue within Alaska is coming from federal fisheries that are managed through the Council process in conjunction with the State of Alaska.

MR. MERRILL turned to the third slide titled, "What Is Bycatch?" He noted that these fisheries are important economic and cultural drivers throughout the state of Alaska. Bycatch, he explained, are fish that cannot enter commerce due largely to two reasons - economic discards and regulatory discards.

11:43:54 AM

MR. MERRILL moved to the fourth slide titled, "Why Does Bycatch Occur?" He noted that while his slides do not specifically call out the proportion of bycatch that is regulatory discards versus economic discards, a large proportion of the discards are the bycatch that occurs due to regulatory reasons. He said this can be due to the limitations on the specific gear that can be used. Many times, there are specific markets established for specific fisheries, or long-standing gear requirements that have been put in place and those can require the discard of fish that are captured by other fisheries using other gear types. There can also be specific seasons that are established, he continued, or other requirements in the complicated federal management system that may require regulatory discards. He stated that economic discards can occur if fish do not have available markets or poor-quality conditions that affect those fisheries.

MR. MERRILL displayed the fifth slide titled, "How Do We Receive Perspectives on Managing Bycatch?" He said the Council process is essential for the management system. The Council conducts outreach efforts that are separate from Council meetings to gather additional information. The Council, through federal government, undertakes Tribal Consultations in a government-to-government consultation process. The Council also has extensive input into management systems through its rule making process. He related that there are many views on balancing bycatch with other legal requirements, so the Council strives to ensure it provides multiple opportunities for engagement.

11:46:07 AM

MR. MERRILL spoke to the sixth slide titled, "What Do We Consider When Managing Bycatch?" He pointed out that managing bycatch is done in the context of the many other requirements that are had. There are 10 national standards, he explained,

and these are requirements that must be met for any regulatory action the Council is seeking to take, and those 10 national standards sometimes are at odds. Sometimes there are differing ways that the balance can be achieved between the Council's efforts to minimize bycatch and bycatch mortality to the extent practicable while, for example, also achieving the optimum yield for each fishery. He said the Council must consider fair and equitable allocation but must be careful not to discriminate between the residents of different states, a provision of the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution. The Council must also provide for the sustained participation of communities. He stated that all 10 of these national standards are important factors for the Council to consider as it proceeds through its management actions. When examining bycatch, he continued, the Council is examining it within the context of that regulatory and legal framework.

MR. MERRILL discussed the seventh slide titled, "What Are The Main Types of Bycatch?" He stated that there is bycatch of groundfish, which is everything that isn't halibut, salmon, herring, and shellfish. He pointed out that the focus bycatch species are halibut, salmon, and crab, which are subject to specific additional requirements in recognition of the tremendous importance that these species have from economic, cultural, and recreational standpoints.

11:48:13 AM

MR. MERRILL reviewed the eighth slide titled, "Groundfish Bycatch by Gear in Federal Fisheries Off Alaska (2020)." He noted that 2020 is the last year for which there is complete data, but said it is representative of the amount of bycatch that is seen in various fisheries over time. He advised that most important to gather from this slide is that the majority, roughly 90 percent, of all the harvests that occur off Alaska in the federal fisheries are undertaken with trawl gear and the majority of all the harvested groundfish that occurs is retained. There is bycatch of various groundfish species, many of them due to regulatory requirements that require the discards of those fish. He stated that the next largest component of fishery harvests occurs by vessels using hook-and-line gear, longline gear. This includes jig gear and other gears that are using hooks, he continued, and about 84 percent of the groundfish that are harvested using this gear type are retained. He specified that roughly 97 percent of the catch that occurs in the pot fisheries is retained, with these fisheries primarily

active in the Pacific cod and sablefish fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea

11:50:01 AM

MR. MERRILL addressed the nineth slide titled, "Halibut Bycatch off Alaska (2004 - 2021)." He related that there has been much interest in looking at ways to address or improve the amount of bycatch that can occur in various fisheries off Alaska. He explained that the graph on this slide provides a high-level overview of the amount of halibut bycatch that has occurred in fisheries in all areas off Alaska from 2004-2021. He noted that there are bycatch limits for specific components of Alaska's groundfish fishery and those have decreased over time. He highlighted that there has been a 70 percent reduction in the amount of halibut bycatch that has occurred between the years 2004 and 2021. The reasons for those reductions, he explained, include that there have been efforts to undertake revisions in management so that catch share management, also commonly known as rationalization programs, can be provided. These programs can provide some opportunity for additional reductions in the amount of bycatch that occurs in fisheries. As seen on the graph, he continued, reductions in the caps have been instituted. Also, a program called deck sorting has been implemented, which allows for halibut to be returned to the sea as quickly as possible under careful observed conditions. Those halibut that have a high probability of surviving can be returned, thereby reducing the overall mortality.

MR. MERRILL proceeded to the tenth slide titled, "Halibut Bycatch as a Percentage of All Halibut Catch (2020)." He stated that as a proportion of bycatch, halibut bycatch represents roughly 13 percent of the amount of total catch that occurs from all sources from halibut. He noted that the pie chart shows the amount of bycatch in all fisheries in Canada and the U.S.

11:52:32 AM

MR. MERRILL turned to the eleventh slide titled, "Chinook Salmon Genetic Composition Areas." He explained that this slide only provides an overview of the broad geographic areas that are used to identify specific genetic compositions of chinook salmon, a critically important bycatch species that [the Council] is trying to minimize to the extent practicable. All the information seen on the slide identifies these areas, he said, and comprehensive genetic reviews of both chinook and chum salmon have been undertaken since 2011.

MR. MERRILL moved to the twelfth slide titled, "Gulf of Alaska Chinook Salmon Bycatch (2003-2021)." He noted he didn't provide a similar slide for chum salmon bycatch because those numbers are very low as far is known, so there is no indication that it is currently a substantial issue in the Gulf of Alaska. He explained that this slide provides an overview of the total amount of chinook salmon bycatch that occurs in the Gulf of Alaska. Drawing attention to the pie chart, he highlighted that a large proportion of the chinook salmon bycatch that is occurring off Alaska are chinook salmon that are bound for river systems outside of Alaska. He said the genetic sampling program is undertaken on an annual basis and the numbers are constantly revised as the understanding of genetic information improves. Overall, the trends have been maintained over the years, which is that a minority of the amount of chinook salmon bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska is bound for Alaska river systems.

MR. MERRILL discussed the thirteenth slide titled, "Bering Sea Chinook Salmon Bycatch (2003-2021)." He pointed out that several contributors to chinook salmon bycatch are outside of Alaska or in Asia.

11:55:13 AM

MR. MERRILL displayed the fourteenth slide titled, "Chum Salmon Genetic Composition Areas," and noted that genetic sampling is also undertaken for chum salmon. He stated that the fifteenth slide titled, "Bering Sea Chum Salmon Bycatch (2003-2021)," is for the overall amount of chum salmon bycatch.

MR. MERRILL showed the sixteenth slide and related that based on current understanding, chinook salmon bycatch and chum salmon bycatch [in the Bering Sea] represent less than 3 percent and less than 1 percent, respectively, of the total returns for Western Alaska rivers. Although it is understood that the percentage of returns is low, he continued, bycatch amounts remain a concern and the Council is continuing its efforts towards a better understanding.

MR. MERRILL reviewed the seventeenth slide titled, "Bristol Bay Red King Crab Bycatch (2016-2021)." He said there has been substantial concern about the status of Bristol Bay red king crab. Addressing the graph on the left, he stated that the bycatch of Bristol Bay red king crab remains a very small proportion of the total amount of crab that are harvested within the fishery. He said the graph on the right provides an

overview of the amount of red king crab that occurs in various fisheries and noted that it can vary from year to year. In some years pot gear has had the highest proportion of bycatch and in some years trawl gear has had the highest proportion.

11:57:15 AM

MR. MERRILL addressed the eighteenth slide titled, "How Do We Measure Bycatch?" He pointed out that [Alaska] has the largest at-sea monitoring program in the nation, with over 40,000 observer days of observation. He said there is 100 percent observer coverage on vessels that are engaged in catch share, or rationalization, programs to ensure careful monitoring of the amount of bycatch that occurs in those fisheries. All trawl catcher/processors are subject to these requirements as well. In the Gulf of Alaska, programs require 100 percent observer coverage, he stated. A Gulf of Alaska trawl rockfish fishery is subject to 100 percent observer coverage. All trawl catcher/ processors in the Gulf of Alaska are subject to 100 percent observer coverage. An extensive electronic monitoring (EM) program is applicable for both pot and hook-and-line vessels and the information obtained through this EM program is used to distinguish specific species that are being discarded with a high degree of reliability. This successful program addresses concerns about having observers on smaller fixed gear vessels. A 100 percent EM monitoring program is currently under development for pollock vessels, he continued. It is being deployed through "inventive" fishing permits and is another mechanism to ensure that there is not discard occurring of bycatch species at sea and allows for a comprehensive overview of the amount of bycatch that occurs in those fisheries. It is applicable to both the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea. A portion of the fishery is not subject to 100 percent observer coverage, but protocols are in place to provide statistical reliable samples and that is done through an annual review process where each of these programs is reviewed.

11:59:34 AM

MR. MERRILL turned to the nineteenth slide titled, "How Do We Control Bycatch?" He reviewed the ways used to control bycatch: caps, limits, closure areas, gear requirements, catch share or rationalization programs, experimental fishing permits, constant communication with the fleets, and facilitation of industry efforts. He said extensive improvements in bycatch can occur as the industry seeks to avoid bycatch. Bycatch is not desired in any fishery, he stressed, and the industry undertakes numerous

efforts to reduce that through voluntary stand downs or other protocols that NOAA Fisheries helps facilitate.

MR. MERRILL proceeded to the twentieth slide titled, "What Will We Be Doing in the Future?" He related that in the future NOAA Fisheries will continue to examine all these issues for continuing to improve communication. Programs are currently underway to re-evaluate and establish new bycatch limits for halibut in the Bering Sea, and NOAA Fisheries will continue to encourage and facilitate those efforts. As well, NOAA Fisheries will constantly review performance, will provide updated data to the industry overall, and will enhance the ability to ensure the most reduction possible with these industries.

MR. MERRILL concluded by displaying the twenty-first slide titled, "More Information & Contacts."

CHAIR TARR, on behalf of Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, inquired about the survival rate for halibut that are returned to the ocean after deck sorting by the trawl fleet. She further inquired about the survival rate for halibut caught as bycatch via longline or fixed gear.

MR. MERRILL offered his understanding that that can vary from year to (indisc. -- audio technical difficulties).

12:03:34 PM

The committee took an at-ease from 12:03 p.m. to 12:06 p.m.

12:06:10 PM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE recalled it being stated in today's presentations that there is a 100 percent observer coverage requirement in the Gulf of Alaska. However, he related, he has heard from people in the fishery that 15 percent of the boats have observers on them. He asked whether, given the 100 percent observer coverage requirement, the fishery or a boat in the trawl fishery is stopped from going out when there isn't an observer for it.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE expressed his concern with the nineth slide in Mr. Merrill's presentation. He asked why there isn't a line on the graph that depicts the halibut biomass because if the biomass is declining then the bycatch would be declining. He said it seems there is no baseline, and he would like to the baseline biomass instead of percentages; for example, this

bycatch is 1 percent of the fish that went up the river, but what was the total number of fish? He said he and the public would like to see the total number of fish caught in the bycatch and going up the river.

MR. WITHERELL, regarding observer coverage, replied that the Bering Sea fisheries are 100-200 percent coverage, meaning there is at least one observer on [each] of those boats. The Gulf of Alaska has a slightly different observer program, he stated. This past year, coverage in the trawl catcher vessel fleet was about 25 percent coverage, with a projection of about 28 percent for next year. Catcher/processors in the Western Gulf of Alaska that fish for rockfish have 100 percent trawl coverage. He said the observers collect the data, and if it isn't a 100 percent coverage fleet that data becomes a sample that gets used to statistically increase the data across the entire fishery.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE stated that it might be a semantics issue with catcher/processors and catcher boats. He maintained that Mr. Merrill said there is a requirement in most fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska for 100 percent coverage; he therefore asked whether a catcher boat still gets to fish without an observer. Given what he is hearing from fishermen on the grounds, he said he is concerned that some of the statistics are being left out for what is actually happening, so the entire picture is not being provided.

MR. WITHERELL deferred to Mr. Merrill to respond.

MR. MERRILL explained that larger vessels, catcher/processor vessels, or vessels actively engaged in the catch share or rationalization program are one category; the vessels in this category are subject to full coverage, so are observed 100 percent of the time. He further explained that a portion of the fleet - some catcher vessels in the trawl fleet that operate in the Gulf of Alaska and all catcher vessels that are operating in pot gear and hook-and-line gear - are subject to a partial observer coverage program requirement. In that requirement, vessel operators must log their trips when they are going out and a random selection of specific trips will be subject to observation based on the proportion of the trips that are available for coverage. He said the amount of observer coverage is varied on those three different categories of vessels. Higher levels of observer coverage are provided on trawl gear and there are slightly less observer coverage requirements on pot and hook-and-line gear. He allowed there has been concern about whether that random selection process is providing a

wholistic or accurate view of what's happening out on the water. That the process is reviewed on an annual basis to see whether there are indications that that level of sampling is not representative of what is believed to be occurring out on the water. A wide variety of different aspects of information are looked at, but particularly examined is whether there are differential harvesting locations or patterns for vessels that are engaged with observers onboard and for those fisheries where they are not subject to observation. That has been a concern in the past, he continued. However, those levels of concern have not been seen in terms of the amount of observer coverage within the various fisheries. Through the annual review process, modifications or improvements can be made to the observer program to avoid getting unreliable or unrepresentative samples. Several committees are engaged directly with stakeholders to better improve and enhance observer coverage and monitoring requirements. He pointed out that in addition to the active observation process, an extensive electronic monitoring system is in place that covers about 165 vessels in the pot and longline fleet, and roughly 5-100 vessels in the pollock fleet are participating in the electronic monitoring program.

12:15:56 PM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked whether any of the aforementioned involves a captain self-reporting.

MR. MERRILL answered that the observations made onboard the vessel are made by the independent observer; the captain's report of catch is not fed directly into the independent observations that are made onboard the vessel.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE surmised that none of the 100 percent observer coverage involves the captain self-reporting as part of coverage.

MR. MERRILL replied that for the full coverage fleet the observer is onboard the vessel the whole time and is sampling onboard that vessel, and that information goes to the observer program. He posed an example for a vessel subject to coverage in the partial coverage category - a vessel subject to a 28 percent observer requirement would mean that 28 percent of that vessel's trips are chosen at random for observation. An observer assigned to a trip is responsible for collecting that biological data and then reporting it directly to the National Marine Fisheries Service. He said there isn't a stage where the

captain is modifying those data, those data are going directly from the observer to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said he is being told by Kodiak fishermen that the partial observer coverage is not working. He stated, "Coverage for the Kodiak bottom trawl fleet is so low that crew now makes accusations that it is more cost effective for captains to throw the trip by trawling in different areas and in different ways while an observer is onboard than it would be to let the observer actually see how dirty the fishery is and risk being shut down earlier in the season."

MR. MERRILL answered that those concerns have been expressed in the past and that is part of why the program has been designed with an annual review of how observations are being conducted. He said the extensive information had by [NOAA Fisheries] does not indicate that biasing of data.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG pointed out that there is a difference between the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska. He said the Bering Sea is 100 percent coverage and basically 100 percent rationalized, while the Gulf of Alaska is not rationalized so does not that same level of observer coverage. Whether to rationalize Gulf of Alaska fisheries is being contemplated. It has been attempted several times without success and work with stakeholders is occurring right now to figure out whether that's the next step for providing some stability into that fishery in terms of market as well as the benefits of bycatch reduction as seen in the Bering Sea.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE reiterated his interest in the data depiction on Mr. Merrill's slides. He drew attention to the nineth slide and noted that it shows the decreasing bycatch and the cap of the bycatch, but it doesn't show how much the biomass has gone down. It stated that the bycatch as a percentage of biomass would be an important data point, and that he and the public would like to know how many fish and how many pounds of bycatch, not what percent escaped up the river.

MR. MERRILL replied that he and Mr. Witherell were trying to provide a quick, short summary of issues related to the complicated issue of bycatch, and additional information can be provided. He offered his belief that Mr. Witherell presented some indication of the overall trends in halibut biomass of the last 100 years, which is information drawn from the IPHC. He stated that for 2021 the overall amount of bycatch in these fisheries is estimated at roughly 18,000 metric tons or 4

million pounds. The total amount of removals in the fishery for 2021 is likely to be around 40 million pounds, so 4 million pounds represents around 10 percent of the total removals, but final figures are not yet had. In past years, he continued, the proportion of halibut taken as bycatch has been higher, so at least in recent years this represents relatively low levels of bycatch.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG added that another consideration with halibut is that the halibut caught as bycatch are mostly small, so not all those halibuts are going to recruit into the commercial fishery because the commercial fishery's minimum size limit is 32 inches. Plus, over 95 percent of the commercial fishery is composed of female halibut, so a very low percentage of males taken as bycatch would have recruited into that commercial fishery.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said the commissioner is now getting into his next area of concern, which is high grading, and he won't go to that today.

12:24:04 PM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE commented that some of the overages seen on the weekly catch sheet seem to be re-occurring in the sablefish and Pacific cod trawl sectors. While notes of these overages are taken, she asked whether the Council has addressed mechanisms to curtail these sector overages given the trawl fisheries are having allocation overages with fully rationalized fisheries that have 100 percent observer coverage. She said these overages have resulted in the preemption of small boat direct fisheries that are seeing a reduction.

MR. MERRILL responded that there is a variety of categories within the management system. He said a complicated issue within the fisheries management system is that there are certain allocated species and other species that are not allocated. Notes can be allocated through rationalization or catch share programs, he explained, and within that management context care is taken to ensure that those fishery limits are not exceeded because they are specific allocations to specific vessels or cooperative. Then, there are several different other fishery categories where allocations are made to the sector overall - for example, an allocation that's made to trawl vessels that are active in specific areas – and those provisions are monitored at the larger sector level. A series of different management measures are undertaken when allocation limits at the sector

levels are approached and whether those are for vessels that are active in longline fisheries or pot fisheries or trawl fisheries, and that can include the prohibition of the retention of that catch and its inability to turn into commerce.

MR. MERRILL continued his response. He said the hundreds of different categories are a challenge, and so on an annual basis there can be situations where a specific sector allocation is exceeded. A careful look is taken at the potential biological impact of those exceedances and whether there are concerns at a species level that could result in additional management actions on that fishery or revisions undertaken through the regulatory process. Another way of looking at this, he stated, is whether a fishery is getting close to approaching an overfishing limit. That has substantive management implications where a wide range of measures can be taken, such as closing specific sectors or specific areas. Overall, within the North Pacific, an overfishing level has not been reached for at least 10 years.

MR. MERRILL confirmed it is correct that throughout a year there can be times when a sector may exceed a specific amount of the harvest. He said a concern with sablefish is the amount of sablefish that can be taken by trawl gear. He noted that over the past four or five years some very large recruitment events, or very large amounts of new young sablefish, have been observed in a fishery and some of those are incidental and caught within the trawl fishery. It is believed that a very successful recruitment, or large year classes, are coming through the fishery right now, and that can be contributing to part of the concern. Also being looked at is whether an exceedance in one sector will affect the likelihood of reaching the annual catch limit within a sablefish fishery for this year. Mr. Merrill said the only exceedance he is aware of is some exceedance within the Bering Sea trawl sector. He offered his belief that in the commercial harvest overall there is still roughly 15 million pounds left, so it is highly unlikely that the annual catch limit for sablefish will be exceeded this year, but it will continue to be tracked.

12:30:01 PM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked Mr. Merrill to speak to the overall need of the halibut abundance-based management action, given these overages look at how the fishery has been managed overall and one species is affecting the other.

MR. MERRILL answered that this is an action being taken through the Council process under its Magnuson-Stevens Act authority. What is specifically trying to be accomplished with this action is to better link halibut abundance with those specific bycatch limits that are applicable to the Amendment 80 sector in the Bering Sea - these are vessels that are primarily engaged in blackfish fishing within the Bering Sea. It is hoped that with abundance-based management, bycatch limits can be provided that will more closely match the way in which the halibut resource is occurring or the availability of that resource within the Bering Sea area. There are indications that undertaking this action would result in a lower bycatch limit than the current limit, and those additional savings could then be used to provide additional harvest opportunities. A particular challenge with halibut management, Mr. Merrill pointed out, is that it is also done in the context of an international agreement, a convention that is in place with Canada. So, savings in bycatch in the U.S. are fed into this overall amount of halibut that can be made available and distributed among various U.S. (indisc. -- audio malfunction) Canada. The action being considered at the Council's December meeting, he continued, stands to potentially reduce the bycatch limits that are currently in place, but it does not necessarily result in a specific amount of reallocation to a specific area because it is still managed within this international agreement.

12:33:26 PM

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG added that reducing bycatch is what is being strived for, nobody wants to throw away a dead fish unutilized. Linking bycatch levels to the amount of biomass out there is wanted, but that must be done carefully so as not to cause other impacts. The analysis is complex and being reviewed, and because things are currently in a deliberative state [Council members] cannot talk a lot about what is going to be happening at the coming Council meeting. But, he stressed, clearly there is an interest in reducing bycatch and clearly there's an interest in linking it to the general levels of abundance out there, and he is pleased that there are several alternatives that accomplish that. He said he is unsure which alternative is going to be selected but at the outcome in December it is going to be something that gives a reduction in halibut bycatch, which is the goal moving forward, and that is going to be linked to some level of abundance that's out there.

12:34:57 PM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE noted there has been an incredible amount of overage of bycatch in the trawl sector this year and last year. She inquired about the consequence of this overage and the impact on the fisheries. She further inquired about the mechanism in place for when a sector goes over its allocation. Everyone wants all fisheries and sectors to be healthy, she stated, but everyone also wants to ensure that the fisheries are sustained for the future.

MR. MERRILL answered that a variety of mechanisms can be put in place. He said the conservation impact of a potential overage will be looked at, tools are available to close specific areas or times of fishing, and there will be coordination with fishermen throughout the year to ensure they are receiving information and are aware of potential overages. He stated that some of this can be due just to the way that catch limits are established within a fishery that may not necessarily be linked to biological concerns. For example, on a regular basis there are concerns about exceeding the amount of skates allocated to fisheries in the Bering Sea. One reason for that exceedance is that there is a limited amount of catch limit assigned to that fishery; there is not necessarily any conservation concern with going over that limit. That is an exceedance that occurs primarily in the Bering Sea longline fisheries. He added that other sectors can be in that situation and a complexity is where we set those annual catch limits, which may be well below any kind of conservation concern; catch limits may be particularly low to accommodate harvest for other species. Mr. Merrill further pointed out that a challenge in the Bering Sea is that the total amount of catch limit that can be established for all fisheries is set at 2 million metric tons. Within that limit there are often fisheries where there is a large biomass, but low limits are set to provide other harvest opportunities for other commercial fisheries. That can result in an exceedance of specific fisheries in specific years due to that interplay between those regulatory requirements.

12:38:29 PM

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG added that it can be seen in the presentation that progress has been made in reducing halibut bycatch. He allowed that some of those numbers are related to fewer halibut and therefore less bycatch. A lot has to do with how the tools are being used, such as bycatch caps and closure areas. What is being talked about in the Council's December meeting, he noted, is further reducing bycatch at the lowest levels of halibut abundance out there. It is not that bycatch

limits are being routinely exceeded, but rather constantly adjusting the fishery to try to maximize the amount of bycatch reduction without having bycatch of other species become an issue while doing that.

MR. WITHERELL clarified that no bycatch limits have been exceeded.

12:40:12 PM

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ drew attention to the fourth slide in Mr. Witherell's presentation depicting the Council's membership. He asked whether it is problematic that there is no Indigenous representation on the Council, which would affect the issue of subsistence before the Council.

MR. WITHERELL replied that the appointments for membership are made by the governor of Alaska and the governor of Washington. If the governor of Alaska wanted to appoint someone to the Council who is Native, the governor could do so. He noted that the Council has had Native members.

CHAIR TARR noted that the federal Magnuson-Stevens Act created the Council and designated the seats.

MR. WITHERELL confirmed that that is correct.

CHAIR TARR pointed out that the Act would be the avenue for changing the seats.

CHAIR TARR, on behalf of Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, asked what percentage of halibut survive after deck sorting and being returned to the ocean by the trawl fleet. She further asked about the percentage of halibut that survive from longline or fixed gear bycatch.

MR. MERRILL replied that roughly 50 percent of the discarded halibut survive under the current deck sorting program that is now widely used in much of the fishery. He offered his belief that for pot and longline gear, a 16 percent mortality rate is assumed for the discarded fish in that fishery. For longline vessels that are active in other fisheries, he said he thinks the assumed mortality is around 10 percent. For pot gear he stated he thinks it is less than 10 percent. He said he will provide further information to the committee.

CHAIR TARR summarized what the committee has requested for follow-up: hearing back from Commissioner Vincent-Lang about habitat impact and damage from trawling as it relates to crab fisheries; receiving additional information from Mr. Witherell about ownership of vessels and the landing tax issue; receiving more data from Mr. Merrill on breaking out the data for the deck sorting program in terms of mortality rates, as well as breaking out the data on biomass.

12:45:28 PM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked whether any of the alternatives to be discussed at the Council's December meeting will save more halibut compared to what was caught last year. It is frustrating, he opined, because Alaska has abundant resources and there just needs to be good stewardship.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded, "It's our interest to reduce bycatch and you do that through limits; but hopefully as we reduce limits, we get the fleet operating as we go more and more towards rationalized fisheries to cooperative type management that even stays below the caps and that's what we're seeing right now." The goal is to keep moving downwards in these bycatch caps, he added. Analysis and care must be taken to not set them so low that other fisheries cannot occur, or the fleet is moved into other areas that cause other bycatch issues.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE surmised the commissioner doesn't have an idea of the halibut that would be saved with any of the four alternatives.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied he is perplexed by the question but said reductions in bycatch depend on the levels of halibut that are out there. He said he will get back with an answer.

12:48:22 PM

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES expressed her appreciation for the informative presentations and the good questions that were asked. She said bycatch in all of Alaska's fisheries is a critical issue and she supports new and emerging science on what is occurring in the oceans, as well as needed policy action on bycatch. Bycatch must be continually re-evaluated to be good stewards of Alaska's fisheries. She cautioned that the reason Alaska wisely created the Board of Fisheries process was to separate the legislature from the allocation of Alaska's

fisheries resource, as is the case with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. History has proven this model allows the process to focus on science and not politics or sensationalism. There is a scientifically based regulatory process in place - the Council - and the state has voices through its designated seat as well as other Alaskans who serve on the body. She said she shares the concerns of commercial fishermen across Alaska, many of whom are in her district. She is greatly concerned for Alaska's fishing stocks, not least of which are the collapse of the western crab, the chum salmon on the Yukon, as well as the ailing chinook and halibut stocks. She urged concerned stakeholders to stay tuned to the science and engage with the public process at Council meetings but cautioned not to get ahead of this process that is addressing bycatch in an aggressive manner. Alaska has a voice at the table through the appointee process and the process itself has robust public engagement. Fishery politics can be terribly divisive, she continued, and she doesn't want this committee to add to that ahead of the process, given it's already occurring. She said the state has a role in ensuring that bycatch and allocative issues are addressed. She therefore urged that ADF&G's budget be fully funded so appropriate surveys can be made to ensure there is science behind any regulatory decisions that are made relating to Alaska's fisheries and bycatch.

12:51:36 PM

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE thanked the chair for holding this meeting and getting the insights from the different leaders involved. She offered her hope that it will be taken into account that this meeting was held because the people brought this forward to the committee. She said the perspectives of the fishermen and stakeholders need to be heard through public comment.

REPRESENTATIVE ORTIZ offered his appreciation for the presentations.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS stressed the importance of this issue and noted that everybody in Southeast Alaska - tribes, charter, sport, and commercial fishermen, is concerned. He offered his appreciation for the presentations. He said the State of Alaska has a leadership position in the Council's December meeting and many eyes across Alaska will be on the state's vote cast by Rachel Baker.

CHAIR TARR stated that the committee will find time to hear from fishermen and stakeholders. She thanked the presenters and shared that she has 14 pages of notes from the presentations.

12:56:02 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 12:56 p.m.