



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service  
P.O. Box 1668, Juneau, Alaska 99802

July 6, 1979

Mr. Jim Branson  
North Pacific Fisheries Management Council  
P.O. Box 3136 DT  
Anchorage, Alaska 99510

Dear Jim:

On July 31, Dr. Alverson and I will be participating in a meeting with the NMFS directorate and our counterparts from other regions and centers to define areas of program emphasis for the FY 1982 budget cycle. We intend to include in our presentation the following proposed courses of action of importance to Alaska's fisheries:

1. Operational Base at Dutch Harbor -- An Operations Base, constructed on NMFS property at Dutch Harbor, is needed for a variety of FCMA functions facilitating fishery management, enforcement, and the logistical activities needed for the observer program and the Bering Sea resource surveys.

Dutch Harbor became the number one fishing port in the Nation with landings worth \$100 million in 1978. A NMFS presence is required at that strategic yet remote port for licensing, monitoring, and regulating fishing activities in close association with counterpart State personnel. Already more fishery observers (40/month) transit through Dutch Harbor enroute to and from foreign vessels than at any other point of embarkation on the west coast. Resource survey scientists and vessel crews working the Bering Sea and North Pacific board and disembark research vessels that routinely enter Dutch Harbor for water, fuel, or shelter.

Proposed facilities would consist of two offices and family residences; dormitory for observers, port samplers, researchers and vessel crews transiting through Dutch Harbor; rudimentary laboratory facilities, a small vessel that would be adequate for transporting observers and capable of runs to Akutan in good weather.

2. U.S.-Canada Salmon Interception Issue -- A bilaterally sponsored program of research is needed between U.S. and Canada to determine the places, times, and extents of interceptions of salmon bound for one country by fisheries of the



other. In the north, the area of mutual concern is in the coastal waters north of Vancouver Island and Alaska south of Ocean Cape.

This issue has been of increasing concern to our two nations for more than two decades and it has become more complicated since extension of fisheries jurisdiction by both Nations, by attempts to renegotiate treaties, and by increased salmon enhancement efforts in Alaska and British Columbia.

Negotiators have had to rely on information from tagging programs that occurred as long as 22 and 50 years ago and that were designed for other purposes. Little new information has evolved since then and the problem has become more critical as both U.S. and Canadian governments seek a mutually satisfactory agreement to strike a balance on interceptions.

The program would involve mark-and-capture project conducted in cooperation with ADF&G focussing on both adult and smolt to increase precision of interception estimates. The recoveries would be from Alaskan and Canadian fisheries, survey sampling cruises, and in Alaskan and Canadian spawning streams.

3. Observer coverage needs to be intensified -- The Northwest Alaska Fisheries Center goal to place observers on 20 percent of the vessels is not being met. Observer evidence and recently detected violations suggests that foreign catch reporting may lack the reliability required for effective resource management. The domestic fishery will require some observer coverage, which will thus further strain the program.

4. Stock assessment and other biological information for Fishery Management plans needs strengthening -- Better information is especially needed for setting MSY, OY and allowable biological catch (ABC).

a. Bering Sea Herring - Draft FMP dated March 1979 states that the "overall quality of research data is fair to poor ... early life history data for assessing year class strength are very weak ... Relationship of stocks to fisheries is unknown due to an absence of data on offshore distribution and migration patterns".

b. Precision of Bering Sea Pollock assessment needs improving. According to the Fishery Management Plan the stock may have an MSY as low

as 1.1 million tons or as high as 1.6 million tons. This range represents a billion pounds of raw fish product worth close to \$100 million. Although we have not been criticized for this broad assessment, it is an example of how much confidence we have in our data.

5. Habitat Protection -- Information on critical habitats for spawning and pre-recruits of commercial target species is inadequate for review of impending oil and gas leases on the Outer Continental Shelf. Bristol Bay may be scheduled for leasing in 1985. The State's action in buying-back the \$23 million oil lease in Kachemak Bay in 1976 was justified by information on crab and shrimp larval distributions. Generally, the Center considers the acquisition of such information as part of its MARMAP role.

6. Intensity and Scope of Marine Mammal Research is not in balance with Federal Responsibilities -- On October 21, 1972, the Marine Mammal Protection Act pre-empted State management of marine mammals. In the intervening period the NMFS and the FWS began moving toward a waiver to return responsibility for management of most marine mammals to the State of Alaska. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game continued to maintain its research program.

While Federal research on bowhead whales and Dall porpoise has intensified, research on sea lions and seals is insufficient to meet responsibilities of the MMPA in determinations of optimum sustainable population, harvest levels, and interactions between marine mammals and fisheries and oil explorations. In recent weeks the State of Alaska has declared its intention to curtail its marine mammal research programs until management of certain species is returned to them. In addition, they have cancelled their contract with NMFS to conduct marine mammal and endangered species enforcement. We consider expanded marine mammal research to be an emergency need even in terms of FY 82 being an austere budget year.

7. Construction Items:

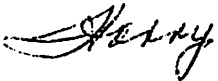
a) Design and Construction of a wing onto the Auke Bay Laboratory and replacement of the condemned dock at the Little Port Walter Salmon (aquaculture) Research Station were considered as high priority among construction items for FY 81 but they were subsequently dropped from the budget. We have instructions to resubmit these items again in FY 82.

b) The Sashin Creek Weir at Little Port Walter has been engineered for upgrading to increase its utility in counting up and downstream migrants and to make its operation safer and less labor intensive. Construction of the weir upgrade will be submitted as a budget item for FY 82.

Dr. Alverson will seek an increased research allocation for the Center because it (1) serves two Regions, (2) deals with an immense geographical area, (3) covers a large share of the U.S. continental shelf, and (4) is responsible for Federal fisheries research in North Pacific and Bering Sea areas having the richest potential fishing grounds with the greatest opportunity for development of U.S. fisheries.

The above items were discussed at the NPFMC meeting of the finance committee in Homer last month but time did not permit discussion before the Council. I would appreciate receiving any comments Council members may have on these suggested areas of NMFS budget during the next meeting on July 26-27.

Sincerely,



Harry L. Rietze  
Director, Alaska Region