

Salmon Bycatch Listening Session

January 11th, 2022, 11am-3pm AKST

Attendees: 80 participants called in. Below is a list of those that introduced themselves:

Mary Peltola (Executive Director, Kuskokwim Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Jaylene Wheeler (Kawerak, Inc.), Julie Raymond-Yakoubian (Social Science Program Director, Kawerak), Jennifer Hooper (Director, Natural Resources Department at the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP)), Dr. Lauren Divine (ECO Director, Aleut Community of Saint Paul Island (ACSPI), Shawna Jackson (Bethel), Martin Andrew, James Paul, Karen Gillis (Bering Sea Fishermen's Association), Page Jones, Serena Fitka (Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association), Catherine Moncrieff (Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association), Brook Wright (Tanana Chiefs Conference), Brendan Raymond (Kawerak, Inc.), Freddie Olin, Bruce Irvin, Theresa E, Elizabeth McDonald (Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee), Terese Schomogyi (Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission), Kevin McCabe (AK Rep. District 8), Robert Hoffman, Anthony Lindock (First Alaskans Institute), Kevin Whitworth (Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission), Becca Robbins Gisclair (Ocean Conservancy), John Lamont, Maggie Massey (Native American Rights Fund), Victor L., Joe A., Rose Fosdick, Dan Ortiz (AK Rep. District 1), Carl W., Yvonne, Louis Green, Renee Rocky, Mercer M. (ACSPI)

NMFS/NPFMC Staff: 17 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) or North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) staff listened in on call. Below is a list of those who were introduced:

Glenn Merrill (NMFS SF ARA; IPHC Commissioner), Obren Davis (Tribal Engagement Team member), Demian Schane (NOAA GC), Mabel Baldwin Schaeffer (NMFS AFSC), Kate Haapala (NPFMC Staff)

Purpose of Meeting: An opportunity for NMFS to listen to concerns on salmon bycatch issues and to provide the time for Tribal representatives and NMFS to get to know each other. The intent of this listening session was to provide a space to listen and better understand the concerns and issues surrounding salmon bycatch and to allow participants to understand what actions the NPFMC is taking on salmon bycatch and to learn about other engagement and outreach opportunities. This was not a formal government-to-government consultation. Instead this was an opportunity for Tribal governments, organizations, and representatives to provide perspectives and concerns directly to the agency.

Notes prepared by NMFS staff with review by participants. The finalized version will be posted to the [NMFS Alaska Region webpage](#).

Background: This listening session was scheduled in response to extensive testimony heard at the October 2021 NPFMC meeting. The testimony centered on salmon bycatch concerns in the

Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Delta, specifically for concerns about Chinook and chum salmon abundance and bycatch in the pollock trawl fishery.

Discussion

The discussion summary is a high-level topical overview of comments made. The rich and deep sharing of participants is not fully encapsulated by a bulleted topics list. Many participants shared deeply personal stories and passionately communicated the importance of salmon to their communities, identity, and ways of life. Participants expressed a variety of perspectives, including sadness at the loss of subsistence opportunities, anger at perceived conflicting fisheries, and fortitude in continuing to advocate for their Tribal rights.

Salmon Bycatch

- Participants expressed that salmon bycatch issues are not new issues.
- Participants were unclear about what NMFS was looking to learn from this event.
 - NMFS stated that the goal of the session was to allow for direct communication with tribal groups, to hear a wide array of perspectives, to allow for communication outside the NPFMC process, and to be responsive to concerns that NMFS does not engage with tribal groups frequently enough.
- Tribal groups have been highlighting concerns with chum and Chinook since the 1980's (bycatch, climate concerns, regime shifts, hatcheries, nutrient transport, socio ecological changes).
- Tribal members have been testifying at Board of Fish (BOF) and NPFMC meetings on these issues since then. Despite testifying consistently since the 1980's, they expressed that they have not been heard and that very little has been done to address their specific concerns.
- Tribal groups have vested interest in salmon bycatch issues and believe they do not have access to meaningfully contribute to actions early or as issues come up because they are not consulted with and do not have established representation in federal management bodies, including the NPFMC.
- Participants expressed that salmon runs are frequently so low that subsistence fisheries are reduced or closed altogether.
 - Participants highlighted inequalities and concerns about fairness with allowing the pollock trawl fishery to occur while subsistence fisheries are closed.
 - Low Chinook and chum abundance affects thousands of peoples' livelihoods, their cultures and the ability to feed families.
- Participants stated that salmon is a cornerstone species for communities in the AYK Delta.
 - Salmon provide cultural significance and are tied to identity. This is not captured or well understood by agencies making management decisions.

- Without the ability to harvest salmon, communities experience a significant cultural loss. As abundance decreases, communities are losing out on opportunities to practice their culture, language, and ways of life and pass these traditions on to the next generations.
- Low salmon abundance and significant harvest reductions also contribute to food security issues. Although there are other species to harvest in the region, they do not provide the same quantity or nutrients that salmon do.
- NMFS mentioned that on December 21, 2021, Kawerak, Inc., the Association of Village Council Presidents, the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, and the Bering Sea Elders Group submitted a petition for emergency action to the Secretary of Commerce requesting to eliminate Chinook salmon bycatch and implement a limit on chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery beginning January 20, 2022.

Status-quo for Salmon Bycatch Management

- NMFS provided background information on a few salmon bycatch management items.
 - There is an annual bycatch cap for Chinook salmon. The upper limit is 60,000 and the lower limit is 45,000 during years of low abundance.
 - There is currently not a limit on the amount of chum salmon bycatch that can occur, particularly in the Bering Sea pollock fishery.
 - There are also incentives for the fleets to reduce their bycatch for both chum and Chinook salmon under all conditions of abundance.
- Participants stated that subsistence is a priority for the State of Alaska and should be prioritized more at NPFMC and by NMFS.
- Participants urged the addition of Tribal seats and representation on the NPFMC to include Alaska Native voices in marine fisheries management.

Salmon Research and Coordination with other Agencies

- NMFS has a fairly extensive scientific research program that undertakes a variety of different efforts to try and better understand issues that are affecting both Chinook and chum salmon returns.
 - A lot of this work is performed in coordination and consultation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game
 - This meeting was not intended to be a discussion of specific scientific research programs that NMFS is undertaking, and NMFS will certainly be providing more information throughout our processes with the NPFMC and can also share work with Tribal groups.
- Salmon management is complex and divided between Federal, State, and international agreements. Participants expressed confusion about how to engage with each management agency and that there is specifically a disconnect between Federal and State management.

- Participants reminded NMFS of their duty to fulfill the federal trust responsibility to Tribes, as a federal agency under NOAA and the Department of Commerce.

NPFMC Actions

- In an October 2021 [motion](#), the NPFMC requested:
 - An updated bycatch impact (Adult Equivalency or AEQ) analysis for Chinook salmon;
 - Information about available data sources for completing a chum salmon AEQ analysis; and
 - A stock status update of Western Alaska Chinook and chum salmon stocks.
 - According to the NPFMC's three meeting [outlook](#), salmon issues are to be discussed at the June 2022 NPFMC meeting.
- The NPFMC also wrote a letter to the Department of State asking for information about Alaska salmon bycatch in foreign fisheries.

International Considerations

- Participants stressed the importance of honoring transboundary agreements with Canada.
- Participants expressed concern over foreign nations intercepting salmon species destined for Alaskan rivers, especially China and Japan.
- Participants also expressed concern that high seas fishing is detrimental to Alaska salmon runs.

Participant Recommendations for Improving Tribal Engagement

- Listening sessions should be scheduled for longer than 2 hours.
- NMFS should provide more outreach about the listening sessions in advance. Some participants only learned about the listening session shortly before, and some participants noted that there were many others who could not attend.
- NMFS should explore other virtual meeting platforms. Several people were disconnected from the listening session by Google Hangouts.
- There is a disconnect between State, Federal, and NPFMC processes on Tribal issues
 - Better coordination between agencies and strategic outreach to Tribes (i.e. host listening sessions/workshops/meetings that are hosted and attended by multiple agencies).
- Multiple participants invited NMFS staff to visit their villages.
 - Offers were extended to build relationships between NMFS and Tribal communities and also so NMFS staff can have a better understanding of the importance of salmon to communities.
 - Visits to communities should be longer than a single day visit, ideally three days.
- Participants suggested State of Alaska political delegates (i.e. senators, governor) should be listening in and coordinating on future meetings.
- Some participants appreciated the listening session space, whereas other participants

prefer formal consultations over listening sessions.

- Participants recommended that NMFS should be more proactive in reaching out with targeted offers of Tribal Consultation.
 - Participants clarified that sending a letter out describing an issue is not the same as an offer of Tribal consultation.

Overall Summary

- Salmon is a cornerstone species for communities in the AYK delta.
- Salmon bycatch issues are not new issues.
- Tribal groups have vested interest in salmon bycatch issues and believe they do not have access to meaningfully contribute to actions early or as issues come up because they are not consulted with and do not have established representation in federal management bodies.
- Sacrifices to prevent collapse of salmon fisheries should not fall solely on communities in the AYK delta; international, Federal, and State fisheries should also be accountable.
- NMFS should continue to improve Tribal outreach and consultation efforts.