

# North Pacific Fishery Management Council

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## SUMMARY

### SALMON TROLL PLAN

#### HEARINGS

Nov. 14-18, 1977

Public hearings on the Commercial Troll Fisheries Off the Coast of Alaska were held in five Southeastern Alaska communities during the period Nov. 14-18. The hearing schedule was started in Juneau and concluded in Pelican, with hearings held also in Ketchikan, Sitka and Petersburg.

Good attendance was recorded in each location and a great number of comments were passed praising the Council for the hearing schedule.

A log was kept and is a record of all who attended the meetings. A separate log was kept and consists of names of those who offered oral or written testimony; all comments, oral and written, will be compiled and included as a portion of the final plan.

Chairman Lokken convened and adjourned all hearings. Other Council members present at all or a portion of the hearings included Gordon Jensen, Charles Meacham, Clem Tillion, Henry Wendler, Kirk Beinegen (alternate for Jack Donaldson), Admiral Hayes, USCG, and Dick Goldsmith, (alternate for John Harville. Keith Specking (AP chairman), Gary Gundstrom (writing team leader) Bill Heard (Auke Bay lab) and Paul Kissinger (ADF&G) also attended a number of the meetings.

A fair assessment of the testimony offered indicates it was led by Scott Stafne, legal counsel for the Alaska Trollers Association. Stafne's presentations on behalf of the trollers association were made in stages, with the

final presentation, the so-called "Sitka Plan," being offered during the hearing in Sitka. Stafne's efforts had much to do with the relatively smooth course of the testimony during the entire hearing period, and kept to a minimum any discord or argument between individual fishermen and the Council panel.

As a consequence, individual testimony tended to center around the economics of each individual who was threatened with a loss of fishing time on the Fairweather Grounds. Any closure, real or anticipated, was considered a threat to personal income.

The testimony, collectively, was valuable for the insights provided on the amount of fishing effort on the Fairweather Grounds, the amount of catch, the "shaker" problem and the effects closure of any portion of the Fairweather Grounds would have because of the shift of boats from outside to coastal waters. A repeated theme in the testimony was the "crowding" which would occur inshore as a consequence of closures offshore.

As the hearings progressed, it became obvious that the data base used in preparation of the plan was in error. Valuable information surfaced from reports based on logbook information kept by the trollers. These reports indicated that errors occur in information concerning the amount of effort, fishing areas within the FWG, catch statistics, average weights, total catch, shaker problem areas and other problems related specifically to the FWG.

The problem in the data base used for the Troll Salmon Plan is not that it is wrong so much as that it is not complete, nor, until now, available.

THE TROLL SALMON PLAN AS IT IS PRINTED IS CORRECT AND  
DRAWS CORRECT CONCLUSIONS FOR MANAGEMENT OF THE FISHERY.

Official reports from the Canadians show that there was no effort by Canadian vessels in the 1976 fishery; testimony from American trollers indicates that three Canadian freezer boats were on the grounds and presumably made deliveries to Canadian ports. How these fish were reported is not known, but they were apparently not reported as having come from the FWG.

A similar problem was uncovered with reported landings from Washington. The State of Washington reported a total of 3,000 fish landed during the 1976 season; testimony

from the skipper of the SEA MINER, a Washington-based refrigerator boat, indicates that in one trip in 1977, he delivered more than 2,000 fish himself. He made three such trips in 1977 and indicated he made the same number in 1976. If what he says is correct, he delivered two-thirds of the total reported Washington catch in one trip. The inescapable conclusion is that the fish were either not reported as being caught in Alaska, no report was made of where the fish were caught, or information about where the catch was made was not taken at the time of sale.

Time and again this problem of fish being reported as caught in places other than where they were actually taken came through the testimony. Apart from the natural inclination of all fishermen to guard jealously where they caught fish is the fact that where the fish were caught is of little consequence or interest to the buyer; the result is that the tendency is to attribute the catch entirely to the area fished last; that is, a fisherman runs to Area 157 (Fairweather Grounds), fishes, catches fish, moves inside to ride out a storm, fishes another area or two, and then runs for home. In reporting his catch, it is sufficient to give the number of the last statistical area fished.

In truth, many fishermen are unaware of the dividing line between Area 157 and another area and report the wrong area through lack of knowledge or, as is probably the case, lack of interest.

The bulk of the testimony indicated the inaccuracy of the fish ticket as a means of gathering information. It is thought that the logbook program now being conducted by the trollers will give accurate information for future use in forming a management plans for the salmon troll fishery.

The problem of sub-legal fish ("shakers") apparently is agreed upon by the trollers and from testimony appears to be a problem only on the Inner Bank area of the FWG. Granted that small fish can be found everywhere, apparently small fish are relatively few on the Outer Bank and the Hambone. Weight averages from those areas tend to bear out this conclusion.

Testimony also indicated that the amount of effort on the FWG is not accurately assessed at this time. Fishermen speak of fishing the grounds in company with as many as 150 vessels.

Other areas of disagreement between fisherman and the Council view of the plan center on the rationale for closing any portion of the FWG (inaccurate or incomplete data on the numbers of fish present); shaker mortality (1:1 is deemed too high) and the percentage of native chinook present in the entire fishery (many fishermen tend not to think there is a problem or if there is, the solution lies in controlling the net fishery inshore).

It is interesting to note that trollers tend to feel that "fixing" the problem in the fishery rests with the State and its ability to regulate terminal fisheries near natal streams.

There was general agreement among the trollers that fish taken on the FWG do not necessarily become available as larger, more mature fish at some other point in the offshore fishery. At least, they do not consider that fish not taken on the FWG will be available to THEM in the fishery somewhere else. This feeling accounts for the resistance to any FWG closures, as the fish not taken would eventually enter the Canadian or Northwest Pacific (Washington-Oregon) fishery.

The prevailing view is that the salmon offshore is a prime fish, the highest quality fish that can be taken anywhere. To not take this fish offshore in the FWG would be a mistake, according to trollers, because the fish gets thin-bellied as it matures and forms roe or milt in preparation for spawning.

There was more or less agreement among the trollers that single hooks would be acceptable; there was less agreement on barbless hooks as coho, when caught, tend to twirl and roll. The barbless hook was said to cause a retention problem when fished for coho.

The 28-inch legal limit is generally agreed upon as a good measure. That limit has been in effect for one season.

The trollers agreed that an observer program would be acceptable at any time.

There was also an implied awareness that information gained from the trollers (log book and fish ticket sources) in the past has not been accurate. They agree that if a system can be devised to safeguard information given from being used by a competitor in the same season, they will

cooperate in obtaining information from the fishery, even to the extent of keying catch efforts and results to Loran fixes.

With respect to the above, fish numbers are seldom shown on the fish tickets; this is critical for the establishment of average weight data and seems to be something that can be made available through the logbook program or re-emphasis on the fish ticket.

Fishermen agree that offshore fish are on the move and are seldom if ever found in the same place on successive fishing days. This indicates that specific catch sites can be given with little danger that another fisherman can benefit by it, at least immediately and almost certainly not in any future season.

The question of limiting entry into the fishery seems to be an area of agreement among trollers. They generally supported the State Limited Entry scheme and would do the same offshore.

While there was near-unanimous agreement among trollers that no problem exists in the fishery, at least to any appreciable extent (some fishermen indicate their catches are increasing, which may be an indication of getting better as they gain experience on the FWG) there was total agreement that no closures should be made and that stocks are in good shape; one processor who offered testimony disputed this on the basis of declining poundages being processed in his plant. A partial explanation for that could be that deliveries from fishermen made in the past are being diverted to other places.

A total of 102 fishermen, processors and interested Alaskans offered oral testimony during the course of the hearings. All but one objected to closing the FWG for any reason OR cited the fact that any closure would only create problems elsewhere.

The data in the plan supports the conclusion of FWG closures; it is the contention of the trollers that the data in the plan is incomplete, incorrect and does not reflect the condition of the FWG fishery. The trollers are confident that when all available information is taken into account, it will show no justification for FWG closures.

Time and again throughout the testimony there was repeated the theme that not enough (if any) consideration had been given to the economic impact of FWG closures. An economic impact statement is being prepared by the

ADF&G, but will probably be general in nature and applicable for an area of Southeast Alaska rather than specific as to individual fishermen and individual communities.

There is no doubt that any fisherman fishing the FWG and being restricted from that area in a future season will lose that portion of income represented by his catch on the FWG. Such fishermen are not alone in their problems, as closures anywhere, for any reason, cost fishermen in those areas money they would have made had they been able to fish.

The economic consequences of closures on the FWG start with the fisherman and extend to the port of landing to the processor, then to normal retail outlets where the fisherman might trade. The amount of economic dislocation is directly proportional to the amount of time or percentage of fish the fisherman either spends or takes on the FWG. In the majority of instances, this will rarely exceed 25 percent, but the few fishermen (out of the 950 possible) who fish the FWG exclusively, it means total economic disaster.

In retrospect, the hearings were anticipated by the fishermen as an object of attack. This was due to the comment based on rumor about what the plan intended to do. True enough, the draft plan circulated intends to close some or all of the FWG based on the information on which the plan was based.

During the course of the first public hearing it was made plain that the plan is not a Council plan, it was submitted to the Council for consideration and that the hearing process was the next step in gathering public input to either reinforce the plan as designed or re-direct the plan based on new, useful information. Because of the unanimity of the trollers, the fact they were totally organized by association and the fact that spokesmen traveled with the Council from hearing site to hearing site, the news spread rapidly that what the Council wanted was cooperation and help. Because of that, the overall tone of testimony was generally straightforward and attitudes among fishermen were attitudes of cooperation rather than opposition.

Presenting the Salmon Troll Plan in its present form may well have been the method by which finally the trollers of Southeastern Alaska became organized and concerned about the fishery in which they participate. It undoubtedly is the cause of genuine concern among the fishermen about the state of the fishery and how they can participate in making a plan that regulates their fishery based on good information.

This may be the first instance where fishermen put aside selfish interests and work for the good of a fishery over an extended period of time. If so, this Council can take credit for a giant stride in achieving the cooperation between fishermen and regulatory agencies that traditionally has been lacking.