

Chair Drobnica & Council Members

My name is Chris Cooper, and I am the Owner/Operator of the F/V Predator, which is a 90-foot catcher vessel, homeported in Newport, Oregon.

My family owns 2 vessels that fish for pollock in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. I am a 4th generation fisherman and have been running my family's vessels in the Bering sea for 23 years. While we may not be your typical pollock operation given our vessel size and our quota amount, I cannot stress enough how important this fishery is to us.

First off, I would like to give you all an idea of what it's like for a captain when we go out for a pollock trip. There are a few things at the top of our minds when we leave the dock, Weather and safety of the crew and the vessel, fishing area we will be going to based on salmon bycatch among other species, and for smaller vessels like mine how far I can travel and remain profitable. But, above every factor besides safety salmon encounters trumps everything that I consider by a large margin. This is at the top of my mind every time I decide where to set my net. Now we have had some big changes in the way we operate in the last few years we have new technology we are utilizing. The use of live feed cameras is becoming more common, and this gives us an idea of catch in real time before the fish is hauled aboard. For me this has been a real game changer for bycatch reduction, but this is an enormous cost and investment. I also have spent the last 3 years working with Dr. Craig Rose developing an active exclusion device that is controlled from the vessel in real time. I have invested hundreds of hours of my personal time and thousands of dollars to help make this project a success. I hope this shows you our commitment and want for doing a better job in our fisheries. With the current salmon conditions that western Alaska communities are facing and the cultural significance of salmon for them, I believe I should be doing all I can to avoid every single salmon – it is the only responsible thing to be doing, because every fish matters to someone somewhere.

A hard cap or large block area closures would be devastating for a vessel my size. I refer to these as large block area closures because they are so vast. I think we could be considerably more precise with locating problematic areas that will have an impact on western Alaska chum salmon. These corridors encompass over 90% of the grounds I have ever fished in B season, vessels my size just can't make the long travel for trips to the NW that larger vessels can. This was recognized under actions related to the Sea Lion Conservation Areas where a regulation was put in place giving vessels under 99' an exemption for not having to catch fish outside of the 56 deg latitude. I would ask that some sort of an exemption or concession be made if any restrictive action were taken for Chum salmon closure areas. A hard cap only protects hatchery fish from the western pacific and shutting down the pollock fishery to protect hatchery fish from Russia and Asia to me seems inappropriate. I think the use of IPA's have proven that they can be an effective tool to reducing salmon bycatch, I also think that Alternative 5 can be greatly improved. For example, I look at each of these Stat areas they may seem small on a chart or screen as you are viewing them but for example Stat area 655430 encompasses 4 distinct fishing areas, The north south tow, the horseshoe the east west and to the NE. This entire area could be closed when only the NE or the EW tow has Chum, and this would take away probably the most important and cleanest fishing spot for vessels like mine who can't travel long distances. I believe with IPAs we can make small closures, and we have the ability with self-reporting and precise vessel tracking to make these closures with scalpel like precision and I believe that will save western Alaska chum and still allow us to access important historical fishing grounds.

Thank you for your consideration.

Chris Cooper  
F/V Predator