United Cook Inlet Drift Association

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2025 SAFE REPORT

HARVEST SPECIFICATIONS 2024 AND 2025

A. Introduction – List of Topics Covered

Summary of Issues, Dates and Legal Deficiencies (not in order of presentation)

1. The proposed amendment is attempting to enshrine the State's non-compliant MSA management practices and harvests into Federal Regulations (FMP) for the third time.

2. Any proposed TAC will not achieve MSY in this salmon fishery.

3. Using catch history is not an appropriate metric to achieve MSA and the National Standards.

4. The 2025 SAFE Report is for the drift fleet only, not the entire fishery.

5. The 2025 SAFE Report includes harvests from 2020-2024, which did not meet MSY /OY standards.

    a. The State has, for many years, placed time and area restrictions on the commercial industry resulting in large reallocations and overescapements.

    b. The State, and now NMFS, intentionally restricted the commercial fishery, impacting interstate commerce and allowed millions of salmon to go unharvested and wasted.

6. The 2025 SAFE Report includes four years, 2020, 2022, 2023 and 2024, which were economic disasters. 2024 is in progress.

7. The proposed 2025 SAFE Report references harvest of all salmon between 2020 and 2024. Overescapement occurred in 4 out of those 5 years. In the Kenai River (late run sockeye) alone, in some years had an overescapement of over 1,000,000.

8. Based on ADF&G studies, many other salmon stocks have been overescaped (underharvested) in those years.

9. The proposed TAC does not meet MSY/OY MSA mandates. No discussion of large pink returns >20 million.

10. The 2025 SAFE Report still assumes the State of Alaska can put parochial interests ahead of the National interest.

11. The proposed TAC does not discuss a range criteria that will be used to close the fishery. The single criterion that is presented is if a single stock/complex exceeds a TAC the entire fishery is closed. This single criterion does not meet MSA and the National Standards requirements.

12. Days Fished in the State portion and the EEZ portion in 2024. Table 1 enclosed. Chinook escapement goals are a blend of > and < 75cm MEFL metrics.

B. Harvest Specifications, 2024 and 2025

Amendment 16 to the Salmon Fishery Management Plan for Alaska (FMP) does not apply to the entire 'fishery,' as defined in the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). The 9th Circuit Court ruled in 2016 and found Amendment 12 to be contrary to law. In the second attempt, by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC), to produce an FMP for Cook Inlet, the US District Court Judge, 2022, ruled that Amendment 14 was arbitrary and capricious and was not in accordance with the law. Amendment 14 was vacated. The proposed FMP Amendment 16 is largely a repeat of the last two illegal attempts to produce an MSA-compliant FMP. Additionally, Amendment 16 and the harvest specifications are the subject of current litigation.

In the Draft for Initial Review, Environmental Assessment for Harvest Specifications of the Cook Inlet Salmon Fisheries in the EEZ of Alaska, January 2025, in Section 3.7, Essential Fish Habitat, pp 48-50, the following is quoted:

> *Section 303(a)(7) of the MSA requires all FMPs to describe and identify EFH, which it defines as "those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding or growth to maturity." In addition, FMPs must minimize effects on EFH caused by fishing and identify other actions to conserve and enhance EFH. These EFH requirements are detailed in Amendment 17 to the Salmon FMP, the EFH EIS (NMFS 2005), and subsequent 5-year review documents.*
>
> *EFH designations are done through a prescribed process and EFH can be designated in both Federal and State waters depending on the habitat needs for each life history stage of each FMP species. Because of habitat characteristics, salmon EFH is (1) Federal and State waters (0–200nm) covering juvenile and adult maturing life history stages and ranges from Dixon Entrance to Demarcation Bay (Arctic) and (2) all freshwaters listed as*

anadromous for mature, juvenile, and egg stages of the five salmon species. Cook Inlet is identified as salmon EFH for all 5 species of Pacific salmon during their marine life history stages (NPFMC 2024). Habitat descriptions for each salmon species can be found in Appendix A of the Salmon FMP. A catalog of all freshwater bodies connected to CI and identified as anadromous streams is updated regularly by ADF&G (Giefer 2024).

This Section 303(a)(7) of MSA makes it very clear that an FMP includes both Federal and state waters. Essential Fish Habitat is an element required by MSA. To include: "those waters and substrate necessary to fish for spawning, breeding, feeding or growth to maturity…. identified as anadromous streams is updated regularly by ADF&G."

Artificially bifurcating the fishery into Federal and State fisheries has resulted in an incoherent management scheme that does not and cannot comply with the requirements of Federal Law.

Amendment 16, the 2024 Harvest Specifications and potentially the 2025 Harvest Specifications violate every one of the 10 National Standards (NS1-10) as it does not apply to the entire 'fishery'.

Setting a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the Upper Cook Inlet EEZ salmon fishery is entirely inconsistent with managing the fishery based on Maximum Sustained Yield (MSY). Optimum Yield (OY) is a subset of MSY. If NMFS, Amendment 16 or annual harvest specifications are not managed based on MSY, OY cannot be achieved on a continuing basis, as NS1 requires.

Anything below in *italics* is a direct quote from the MSA or NS1-10

(2) Overview of Magnuson-Stevens Act concepts and provisions related to NS1 –

(i) MSY. The Magnuson-Stevens Act establishes MSY as the basis for fishery management and requires that: The fishing mortality rate does not jeopardize the capacity of a stock or stock complex to produce MSY; the abundance of an overfished stock or stock complex be rebuilt to a level that is capable of producing MSY; and OY not exceed MSY.

(ii) OY. The determination of OY is a decisional mechanism for resolving the Magnuson-Stevens Act's conservation and management objectives, achieving a fishery management plan's (FMP) objective, and balancing the various interests that comprise the greatest overall benefits to the Nation. OY is based on MSY as reduced under paragraphs (e)(3)(iii) and (iv) of this section. The most important limitation on the specification of OY is that the choice of OY and the conservation and management measures proposed to achieve it must prevent overfishing.

B) Overfishing (to overfish) occurs when a stock or stock complex is subjected to a level of fishing mortality or annual total catch that jeopardizes the capacity of a stock or stock complex to produce MSY on a continuing basis.

A biological fish stock is a group of fish of the same species that live in the same geographic area and mix enough to breed with each other when mature.

With salmon fisheries, the science is clear, both overfishing (too much harvest) and underfishing (too little harvest) can jeopardize the capacity of a stock or stock complex to produce MSY/OY on a continuing basis.

Amendment 16 and the 2024 or 2025 Harvest Specifications do not set OY as described in NS1, based on MSY. Instead, it uses a range of state managed, historical harvests from 1999-2021. The 2025 SAFE document uses purported EEZ harvests from 2020-2024 as the basis for OFL and ABC. The State and Secretary of Commerce have not been managing the fishery based on MSY, therefore the OY range in the proposed amendment has no relationship with MSY. The range of harvest that NMFS uses is not a factual data set and is the result of management practices by the State of Alaska which resulted in large sockeye overescapements in both the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers during that period, salmon harvesting in the EEZ was restricted for most openings and the drift fleet was prevented from harvesting the surplus salmon to achieve MSY. Now, NMFS intends to use those reduced, non-compliant, harvest levels to guide future management. NMFS now wants to enshrine these arbitrary, non MSY, management practices by the State of Alaska and turn it into Federal law.

Therefore, the OY range for the Cook Inlet 2024 EEZ salmon fishery was specified as the range between the average three lowest years of total estimated EEZ salmon harvest and the three highest years of total estimated EEZ salmon harvest from 1999 to 2021. (Amendment 16 and the 2024 Harvest Specifications).

The 2025 SAFE Report proposes to use the harvests from 2020-2024. There is no explanation why this time was utilized for the analysis. (2025 SAFE Report.)

The 2025 proposed harvest specifications purport to use the one life cycle. However, one life cycle varies by the 5 salmon species occurring in Cook Inlet. Pinks are 2 years, Chum and Coho are 4-5 years, Sockeye are 2-5 years and Chinook are 2-7 years (returning spawner to returning spawner) from a single brood.

The State of Alaska, NMFS and the stakeholders previously agreed that using TACs do not work in salmon management. See Denby Lloyd's letter to the NPFMC. NMFS is insisting that they are required to set a TAC, but alternative approaches to satisfying NS1 requirements are allowed under MSA. Alternatives such as abundance-based management or in-season escapement goals.

(2) Exceptions from ACL and AM requirements - -

(3) Flexibility in application of NS1 guidelines. There are limited circumstances that may not fit the standard approaches to specification of reference points and management measures set forth in these guidelines. These include, among other things, conservation and management of Endangered Species Act listed species, harvests from aquaculture operations, and stocks with unusual life history characteristics (e.g. Pacific salmon, where the spawning potential for a stock is spread over a multi-year period). In these circumstances, Councils may propose alternative approaches for satisfying the NS1 requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act than those ser forth in these guidelines. Councils

must document their rationale for any alternative approaches for these limited circumstances in an FMP or FMP amendment, which will be reviewed for consistency with the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Biological reference points estimated for many salmon stocks demonstrate that salmon populations are extremely productive, with the limit return per spawner (a) averaging 3.7, 4.0, 3.7, 6.0, and 6.9 for pink, chum, coho, sockeye and Chinook salmon, respectively. MSY exploitation rates (i.e. the average harvest rates employed to maintain constant escapement in the escapement goal range) are high, averaging 0.53., 0.56, 0.63, 0.65 and 0.68 for pink, chum, coho, sockeye and Chinook salmon, respectively. The overfishing exploitation rate (i.e., the fishing rate if continuously applied will deplete the stock) is also very high, averaging 0.72, 0.74, 0.80, 0.81, and 0.83 for pink, chum, coho, sockeye and Chinook salmon, respectively (Eggers and Clark in prep).

C. Total Allowable Catch

Problems:

In the proposed 2025 harvest recommendations, the TAC would be based on a range of historical catch data, provided by the state, that NMFS is calling OY. NMFS is proposing that the OY range for the Cook Inlet EEZ sockeye salmon fishery is specified as the range between the average harvest of the last five years, one life cycle of total estimated EEZ salmon harvest from 2020-2024. This would result in an OY and ABC range of approximately 538,302 or 1,3322,261 depending on the use of SMSY or the lower bound of the escapement goal. The TAC would be set annually for each species or stock and would be a specific number within that OY, OFL and ABC range.

There are numerous problems with this **non-abundance-based management** approach.

1. National Standard 1 requires that the fishery be managed based on MSY and requires that fishing mortality does not jeopardize the capacity of a stock or stock complex to produce MSY. National Standard 1 also requires that OY be based on MSY, and that OY be achieved on a continuing basis.

   Five Years, One Life Cycle (except pinks, which are 2 years):

   a. All the years to develop the TACs, there were time and area fishing and harvesting restrictions that reduced the commercial harvests.

   b. All 5 years, 2020-2024, used to develop the TACs had over/surplus escapements, sockeye only.

   c. All 5 years had over/surplus escapements for at least one salmon stock in UCI;

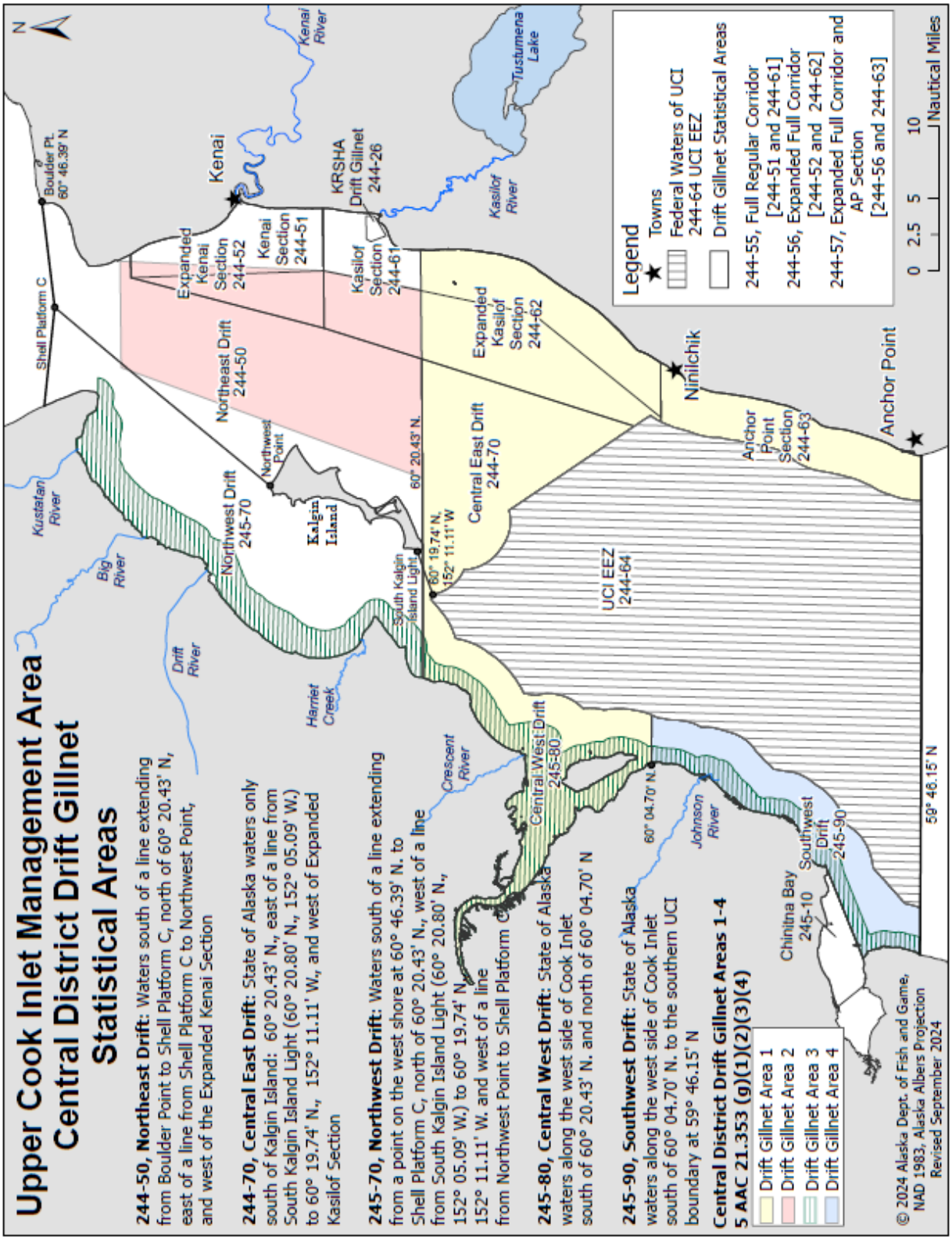
   d. Federal fishery disasters in 2020, 2022 and 2023, all salmon stocks included. The 2024 disaster request is in process.

e. Kenai River Chinook populations participated in all disasters.

f. From 2020-2024, no scientific analysis was done, by NMFS or the state, only restrictions on harvests. Assumed the Chinook issues are only harvest caused. During this time the state, and NMFS, indicated that the lack of Chinook salmon due to poor ocean survival. The harvest restrictions and management practices were never linked to the stated causal effects or achieving MSY/OY requirements.

g. Escapement goals do not exist for Pink or Chum and very few for Coho or Chinook stocks (Tier 3 stocks). This conflicts with both the SMSY and lower bound of the escapement goal methodologies.

Figure 1


Upper Cook Inlet Management Area
Central District Drift Gillnet
Statistical Areas
244-50, Northeast Drift: Waters south of a line extending from Boulder Point to Shell Platform C, north of 60° 20.43' N, east of a line from Shell Platform C to Northwest Point, and west of the Expanded Kenai Section
244-70, Central East Drift: State of Alaska waters only south of Kalgin Island: 60° 20.43' N., east of a line from South Kalgin Island Light (60° 20.80' N., 152° 05.09' W.) to 60° 19.74' N., 152° 11.11' W., and west of Expanded Kasilof Section
245-70, Northwest Drift: Waters south of a line extending from a point on the west shore at 60° 46.39' N. to Shell Platform C, north of 60° 20.43' N., west of a line from South Kalgin Island Light (60° 20.80' N., 152° 05.09' W.) to 60° 19.74' N., 152° 11.11' W. and west of a line from Northwest Point to Shell Platform C
245-80, Central West Drift: State of Alaska waters along the west side of Cook Inlet south of 60° 20.43' N. and north of 60° 04.70' N
245-90, Southwest Drift: State of Alaska waters along the west side of Cook Inlet south of 60° 04.70' N. to the southern UCI boundary at 59° 46.15' N
Central District Drift Gillnet Areas 1-4
5 AAC 21.353 (g)(1)(2)(3)(4)
Drift Gillnet Area 1
Drift Gillnet Area 2
Drift Gillnet Area 3
Drift Gillnet Area 4
© 2024 Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game,
NAD 1983, Alaska Albers Projection
Revised September 2024
N
Boulder Pt.
60° 46.39' N
Shell Platform C
Kenai
Kenai River
Tustumena Lake
Kasilof River
KRSHA
Drift Gillnet
244-26
Expanded
Kenai
Section
244-52
Kenai
Section
244-51
Kasilof
Section
244-61
Expanded
Kasilof
Section
244-62
Northeast Drift
244-50
Northwest Drift
245-70
Northwest
Point
Kalgin
Island
60° 20.43' N.
60° 19.74' N,
152° 11.11' W
South Kalgin
Island Light
Central East Drift
244-70
UCI EEZ
244-64
Ninilchik
Anchor
Point
Section
244-63
Anchor Point
Kustatan
River
Big
River
Drift
River
Harriet
Creek
Crescent
River
Central West Drift
245-80
60° 04.70' N.
Johnson
River
Chinitna Bay
245-10
Southwest
Drift
245-90
59° 46.15' N
Legend
Towns
Federal Waters of UCI
244-64 UCI EEZ
Drift Gillnet Statistical Areas
244-55, Full Regular Corridor
[244-51 and 244-61]
244-56, Expanded Full Corridor
[244-52 and 244-62]
244-57, Expanded Full Corridor and
AP Section
[244-56 and 244-63]
0 2.5 5 10
Nautical Miles

The range of harvest that NMFS is calling 'the OY range' has no relationship to MSY or stock abundance. Instead, it is based on five years of State of Alaska management practices and harvests that resulted in large overescapements of sockeye in 5 of the last 5 years in the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers and tremendous underharvest of all other stocks during that same time.

For the last 30+ years the State of Alaska has restricted the commercial fishery (both time and area restrictions) in Cook Inlet and has failed to manage the fishery based on MSY/OY. Fishery has been in decline (due to bad management and underharvest) since 1990, yet NMFS wants to enshrine these past non-compliant MSA management practices to form the basis for 2025 harvest specifications into Federal law/Regulations.

2. With salmon fisheries the science is clear, both overfishing (too much harvest) and underfishing (too little harvest) can jeopardize the capacity of a stock or stock complex to produce the MSY/OY on a continuing basis. Amendment 16 and the 2024 Harvest Specifications violate NS1 as they don't manage the entire fishery based on MSY and specify a TAC, for the EEZ, both of which effectively eliminate the possibility of achieving OY for the fishery on a continuing basis. Setting a TAC for just a part of the Cook Inlet salmon fishery, the drift fleet only, is entirely inconsistent with managing the fishery based on MSY as required under NS1. Optimum Yield is a subset of MSY; if the entire fishery is not managed based on MSY then OY for the fishery cannot be achieved on a continuing basis as NS1 requires.

3. The proposed OY and the calculation of the 2025 TAC is based on a range of harvest of all stocks between 2000 and 2024. Overescapement of sockeye in the Kenai River occurred in 5 of the last 5 years, some years had overescapements of over 1,000,000 sockeye.

4. Significant overescapements of sockeye during this period also occurred in the Kasilof River. According to ADF&G reports, the harvest of other stocks was well below MSY/OY exploitation rates. MSY harvest rates for coho, pink and chum stocks should be between 53% and 63% and the actual harvest rates were 2% -10% when the study, Regional Information Report 2A03-20, published 2003. The proposed OY range and the calculation of the TAC have no relationship with and no basis to produce MSY for Cook Inlet salmon stocks.

5. Historical harvests are not associated with salmon stock abundances. Harvests of UCI salmon stocks are a result of the State restrictions on season opening, closing dates, time and area restrictions on fishing time in specific corridors or districts.

6. The early and late run stock., early Chinook and sockeye, occur in mid-May. The late run stocks, coho, pink and chum, occur from August through the remainder of the year. Neither are identified or discussed in Amendment 16 or the 2025 harvest specifications.

7. In even years, the pink salmon returns can exceed 20 million fish, but this stock is underfished and wasted. According to the 2002 ADFG mark-recapture population estimate study (Regional Information Report 2A03-20, published 2003) on coho, pinks and chums, the Upper Cook Inlet commercial fishery harvest rates on coho were about 10%, pinks were around 2% and chums were around 6%. With the imposition of numerous time and area restrictions, since 2002 the harvest rates have declined to less than 1-2%. Many spawning systems have no yields or harvests. All salmon stocks don't come close to meeting the MSY exploitation rates for the fishery. The 2025 SAFE Document does not even consider this profound error.

8. The proposed OY range and the calculation of the TAC includes four years, 2020, 2022 and 2023, which were all declared to be economic disasters by the Secretary of Commerce. Consideration is pending regarding a 2024 disaster declaration.

9. The proposed 2025 Harvest Specifications, TAC, will not meet the requirements of the MSA and the Ten National Standards. Using a TAC is not appropriate in salmon management. Both the State and the stakeholders have repeatedly informed NMFS and the NPFMC that TACs are not appropriate for salmon management. In a letter dated August 31, 2010, from then ADF&G Commissioner Denby Lloyd to the NPFMC, he states "Because salmon run sizes are highly variable and unpredictable, specifying a catch quota based on pre-season abundance forecasts is a much inferior approach to salmon management than actively managing for monitored in-season abundance." He went on to say that "Management of Alaska salmon fisheries call for an alternative approach to that taken for other stocks under a federal fishery management plan for the following reasons:

    a. Unlike groundfish stocks, salmon are semelparous, reproducing once in the life cycle.

    b. The harvestable surplus is entirely new recruits, and the catch comprises almost exclusively mature salmon.

    c. The productivity of a specific year class cannot be improved by limiting harvest in subsequent years.

    d. Foregone harvest cannot be recaptured in future years; and

    e. Since abundance cannot be estimated effectively in advance, in-season estimations of abundance using contemporaneous data, with appropriate management actions taken to assure escapement and optimum production in future years, is the most effective way to avoid the risk of overfishing."

D. Total Allowable Catch Methodology

Deficiency Issues - The 2025 Preliminary Salmon SAFE Report to the SSC, AP and Council

1. The proposed amendment is attempting to enshrine the State's past non-compliant MSA management practices/harvests into Federal Regulations (FMP) for the third time. (Effective Deferral)

2. Any proposed harvest specification, based on historical harvests, or TAC will not and cannot achieve MSY/OY in this salmon fishery.

3. Using a truncated catch history is not an appropriate metric to achieve MSA mandates and the National Standards.

4. The 2025 Harvest Specifications are for the drift fleet only, not the entire fishery.

5. The 2025 Harvest Specifications include harvests from 2020-2024, years which had millions of surplus salmon/overescapements going to waste.

    a. The State placed time and area restrictions on the commercial industry beginning in 1990.

    b. The State, in the last 10 years, intentionally increased the restrictions on the commercial fishery, including interstate commerce, and allowed millions of harvestable salmon to go to waste.

6. The proposed calculation of the 2025 Harvest Specifications includes four years, 2020, 2022, 2023 and 2024, which were declared economic disasters by the Secretary of Commerce, and 2024 was a repeat of the 2023 season. The 2025 season and beyond will be a repeat of the 2023 and 2024 wasted salmon.

7. The proposed 2025 Harvest Specifications references the harvest of all salmon between 2000 and 2024. Overescapements occurred in all those years. The Kenai and Kasilof Rivers had combined annual overescapements of well over 1,000,000 sockeye.

8. The proposed TAC does not meet MSY/OY MSA mandates. No discussion or concern of large pink returns of up to 20 million fish.

9. The 2025 SAFE Report does not address early salmon runs prior to June 19 or runs after August 15. Currently, recreational, subsistence and other commercial users begin in mid-May and end in late October.

10. The 2025 SAFE Report still relies on the State of Alaska applying parochial interests ahead of the National interests.

11. The 2025 SAFE Report assumes a 10% to 90% buffer applied to harvest rates for the EEZ harvests as a percentage of total harvest by the drift fleet. There is no data to support this wild assumption.

12. The 2025 SAFE Report does not discuss the criteria that will be used to close the fishery. The only criterion that is presented is achieving a minimum threshold on one or more species. This single criterion does not meet MSA and the National Standards requirements for the fishery. It is vague and arbitrary. Does not present or discuss a range of alternatives.

MSY Issues

1. The proposed harvests depicted in Table 1 and 2 of the 2025 SAFE Report, as described, do not meet MSA or the 10 National Standards. Achieving MSA and the 10 National Standards is rarely mentioned or discussed in the document, nor how they would be achieved in 2025. However, on page 26 of the 2024 SAFE Report, the stated purpose is:

> *"Given the considerations above, and the fact that recent estimates of harvest of this stock in the EEZ have been below the recommended 2024 preseason ABC during recent years under SOA management (i.e., would appear to provide for sufficient harvest opportunity in the EEZ), and that the Federal management framework largely preserves the State management framework on which the SAFE estimates are based, it is the recommendation of the NOAA SAFE Team that the 2024 preseason ABC be set at 652K sockeye salmon for this stock."*

   Similarly, the 2025 Preliminary SAFE Report preserves the State management framework. This is in bold defiance to numerous Federal court orders. Note: over 30 Federal judges have ruled that the National interests such as MSA, 10 National Standards and other Federal laws shall come first, and any self-proclaimed State or parochial interests must follow all Federal laws and court orders.

   With these court orders, all parties are expected to manage fisheries following Federal laws and National Standards. Modeling any TAC that codifies arbitrary and capricious management or harvest frameworks are in and of themselves arbitrary and capricious.

2. Harvests are not representative of stock assessments. There is no stock assessment on pinks chum or most coho stocks. The current 5-year harvests, as presented, do not identify:

   a. Early run sockeye from the Kenai, Kasilof and Russian Rivers, Wolverine Creek, or other populations. These populations enter and occur in UCI from mid-May through mid-to-late

June, prior to the opening of the commercial drift fishery. However, other commercial and recreational seasons begin in May, except the drift gillnet portion of the fishery; or

b. Early Chinook populations from the Kasilof, Susitna, Yentna, Matanuska Rivers, the Susitna above the Yentna confluence or others. Approximately 135,000 Chinook migrate annually through the EEZ prior to the drift fleet season opening date. It is pointed out that other commercial fisheries, Federal Subsistence, and recreational seasons open in May.

c. Historically, more than 75% of the chum population arrives in mid-August through September. Coho populations often follow the same pattern. To a lesser extent, the even-year pink runs occur after August 1. Currently, the drift fleet is not allowed to harvest these Chinook, sockeye, chum, coho or pinks while they are present in the fishery, The EEZ is restricted or closed, for the year, to commercial harvesters between August 1st and 15th. The sport fishery remained open 24 hours 7 days per week until the end of October.

3. The current State management practices are focused on Large Chinook, larger than 75 cm, or 31 inches MEFL. Small Chinook, less than 75 cm, or 30 inches, have historically had a 10-fish recreational limit per day, with no reporting requirements and are not included in the annual sportfish seasonal reports. The commercial fishery, however, must report ALL Chinook of ALL sizes on fish tickets. This partial reporting by the recreational users versus the mandatory reporting of ALL Chinook by the commercial users produces a greatly distorted data set. State reporting does not reflect the differences in reporting harvests. The State stock assessments totally ignore the Small Chinook in the sport fishery, even though these Small Chinook (males), less than 75cm, currently make up 60-70% of the entire run.

4. Lastly, the Small Chinook are not included in any escapement numbers for the Kenai River or used in the forecasting of future runs.

E. 2024 Fishery Harvests and Performances

1. The enclosed Table 1 reflects the number of fishery openings and the number of deliveries by vessels by dates, harvest data by species and the total harvest in the EEZ and State water portions of the fishery. Please note the following:

a. In “state” waters there were 29 openings in July, while the EEZ portion had 7 openings. Overescapements of over 1,500,000 salmon for the Kenai Late-Run sockeye and Kasilof River sockeye runs occurred in 2024. The economic and interstate commerce losses equate to over $25 million dollars, with the loss of over 10 million meals, contributing to lost economic benefits. taxes and food INSECURITY.

b. The local area state managers opened 22 additional 12 to 15-hour fishing periods by Emergency Order Authority. Otherwise, the overescapements would have easily doubled to over 3,000,000 sockeye wasted.

c. After the July 11th and 15th openings, the drift fleet virtually abandoned fishing in the EEZ portion of the fishery. Due to the limited fishing opportunities in the EEZ, excessive and unnecessary (vms and logbook) requirements and not being able to fish in both the 'EEZ and 'State' waters on the same day.

d. In the EEZ portion of the fishery, there were 358,988 salmon harvested. All species were significantly below the 2024 Harvest Specifications.

e. The lack of Chinook, chum, coho and pink harvest form the basis for the 2024 fishery disaster.

f. The 2025 forecasted run (6.93 million) for sockeye salmon entering UCI is one million more than the 2024 forecasted run.

Table 1. – Forecast of the 2025 Upper Cook Inlet sockeye salmon run, escapement, and harvest in millions of fish. Forecast range is indicated in parenthesis.

Production component	Forecast estimate
Total run	6.93 (5.41 – 8.45)
Escapement	2.00
Available harvest	4.93

Table 2. – Categorical ranges of Upper Cook Inlet sockeye salmon runs 1986 to 2024 and the 2025 forecast in bold.

Category	Range (million)	Percentile
Poor	Less than 4.2	Less than 20th
Weak	4.2 to 5.2	20th to 40th
Average	5.2 to 5.9	40th to 60th
Strong	5.9 to 6.5	60th to 80th
Excellent	**Greater than 6.5**	**Greater than 80th**

OTHER SALMON SPECIES

Table 5. – Recent average commercial harvest for other salmon species in Upper Cook Inlet, 2025.

Species	5-year average
pink salmon	86,800
chum salmon	79,800
coho salmon	99,600

Table 1. 2024 Upper Cook Inlet harvest openings by date

Batch Year	Gear Code	Date Fishing Began (MM/DD)	Ticket Count
2024	03	06/20	13
2024	03	06/22	5
2024	03	06/24	8
2024	03	06/27	22
2024	03	06/29	20
2024	03	07/01	15
2024	03	07/02	14
2024	03	07/03	16
2024	03	07/04	16
2024	03	07/06	28
2024	03	07/07	14
2024	03	07/08	61
2024	03	07/09	92
2024	03	07/10	93
2024	03	07/11	44
2024	03	07/12	58
2024	03	07/14	24
2024	03	07/15	83
2024	03	07/16	212
2024	03	07/17	190
2024	03	07/18	216
2024	03	07/19	77
2024	03	07/20	123
2024	03	07/21	101
2024	03	07/22	210
2024	03	07/23	199
2024	03	07/24	197
2024	03	07/25	170
2024	03	07/26	60
2024	03	07/27	148
2024	03	07/28	105
2024	03	07/29	34
2024	03	07/30	116
2024	03	07/31	57
2024	03	08/01	31
2024	03	5-Aug	37
2024	03	08/08	* (2)
			(0)
2024	03	08/15	* (1)
2024 SOA	**Number of Deliveries**		**2,909**
	2024 Fishery Openings		**38**
	2024 Harvest - All Species		**1,403,219**
	CPUE		**482.4**

Batch Year	Gear Code	Date Fishing Began (MM/DD)	Ticket Count
2024	03	06/20	14
2024	03	06/24	14
2024	03	06/27	49
2024	03	07/01	104
2024	03	07/04	81
2024	03	07/08	148
2024	03	07/11	193
2024	03	07/15	161
2024	03	07/18	29
2024	03	07/25	47
2024	03	08/01	56
2024	03	08/05	36
2024	03	08/08	18
2024	03	08/12	7
2024	03	08/15	10
2024 FED	**Number of Deliveries**		**967**
	2024 Fishery Openings		**15**
	2024 Harvest - All Species		**358,988**
			371.2

Batch Year	Gear Code	Date Fishing Began (MM/DD)	Ticket Count
2024	03	06/20	27
2024	03	06/22	5
2024	03	06/24	22
2024	03	06/27	71
2024	03	06/29	20
2024	03	07/01	119
2024	03	07/02	14
2024	03	07/03	16
2024	03	07/04	97
2024	03	07/06	28
2024	03	07/07	14
2024	03	07/08	209
2024	03	07/09	92
2024	03	07/10	93
2024	03	07/11	237
2024	03	07/12	58
2024	03	07/14	24
2024	03	07/15	244
2024	03	07/16	212
2024	03	07/17	190
2024	03	07/18	245
2024	03	07/19	77
2024	03	07/20	123
2024	03	07/21	101
2024	03	07/22	210
2024	03	07/23	199
2024	03	07/24	197
2024	03	07/25	217
2024	03	07/26	60
2024	03	07/27	148
2024	03	07/28	105
2024	03	07/29	34
2024	03	07/30	116
2024	03	07/31	57
2024	03	08/01	87
2024	03	08/05	73
2024	03	08/08	20
2024	03	08/12	7
2024	03	08/15	11
2024 ALL	**Number of Deliveries**		**3,876**
	2024 Fishery Openings		**53**
	2024 Harvest - All Species		**1,762,207**
			454.6

Upper Cook Inlet Commercial Fishery Season Total Harvest to Date

Upper Cook Inlet

Fishery	Deliveries	Chinook	Sockeye	Coho	Pink	Chum	Total
Central District Drift - Federal Waters (EEZ)	878	29	319,395	4,470	6,703	28,391	358,988
Central District Drift - State Waters	2,789	49	1,324,484	7,607	31,196	39,883	1,403,219

F. Discussion

SOCKEYE STOCK

2024 EEZ harvest rates as a percentage of total run and stock abundance:

- Sockeye – Kenai River Late-Run 7.2%
- Sockeye – Kasilof River 3.1%
- Sockeye – Other Stocks not enumerated

During the 2024 CI EEZ salmon fishery a total of 324,837 sockeye salmon were harvested in the CI EEZ drift gillnet fishery (Appendix 1, Table 3), with a postseason estimate of 189K Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon (Appendix 1, Table 4). The total Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon harvests in the CI EEZ salmon fishery was calculated using the estimated 2024 proportion of Kenai River sockeye salmon harvested from tissue samples collected from commercial catches in the State's Central District (Barclay 2017 and Barclay 2020). The estimated harvest rate of Kenai River late-run sockeye salmon in the CI EEZ salmon fishery over the most recent generation (five years; FEEZ) of 0.072 was less than the MFMT of 0.204, indicating that overfishing did not occur in 2024 (Appendix 1, Table 3). The cumulative spawning escapement of this stock over the most recent generation of 8.3 million was greater than the MSST of 3.03 million, indicating that the stock is not in, or approaching, an overfished condition. Zaleski, et.al. (January 2025) *DRAFT FOR INITIAL REVIEW, Environmental Assessment for the Harvest Specifications of the Cook Inlet Salmon Fisheries in the EEZ Off Alaska.*

This is to indicate that these are the average harvest/exploitation rate for this one stock. These values are far below the 65% harvest/exploitation rates indicated by the State.

AGGREGATE CHINOOK STOCK COMPLEX – ALL SIZES AND AGE GROUPS

The average harvests in the EEZ were less than 1%. This harvest/exploitation rate is laughable. For the readers' information, the state does not enumerate Chinook less than 75cm in the Kenai River to establish the escapement goals or the reported recreational harvests. However, the state does require all Chinook be reported in commercial landing reports.

During the 2024 CI EEZ salmon fishery, 31 Chinook salmon were harvested, which was below the TAC of 240 salmon (Appendix 1, Table 3). Under the Tier 3 guidelines, the UCI Chinook salmon stock complex was not subject to overfishing because the total EEZ harvest for this stock across the most recent generation (406 Chinook salmon) was below the postseason 2024 OFL of 3,072 Chinook salmon (Appendix 1, Table 3). Cumulative escapement of Kenai River late-run large Chinook salmon over a generation time (six years) was 70,800 and was larger than the MSST (sum of half Kenai River late-run large Chinook salmon escapement goal) of 44,200 fish, indicating that the Aggregate Chinook salmon stock complex is not overfished (Appendix 1, Table 3). Zaleski, et.al. (January 2025)

DRAFT FOR INITIAL REVIEW, Environmental Assessment for the Harvest Specifications of the Cook Inlet Salmon Fisheries in the EEZ Off Alaska.

AGGREGATE CHUM STOCK

Though chum salmon spawn in multiple watersheds throughout UCI, Clearwater Creek is the only run with a State escapement goal, which is monitored using aerial surveys. For the readers' information Clearwater is in the extreme SW corner of UCI district. The extent to which this stock's escapement indices represent the number of spawners for all freshwater spawning habitats in UCI is unknown given that it is a single drainage. Therefore, total run size for the Aggregate chum salmon complex is unknown. Given that there is minimal monitoring of chum salmon escapement in UCI, aggregate chum salmon are managed as a Tier 3 stock and consequently, the NMFS SAFE Team cannot assess whether the stock is in, or approaching, an overfished condition. However, there are currently no State-designated chum salmon "Stocks of Concern" in UCI and the stock complex is considered to be healthy. Zaleski, et.al. (January 2025) *DRAFT FOR INITIAL REVIEW, Environmental Assessment for the Harvest Specifications of the Cook Inlet Salmon Fisheries in the EEZ Off Alaska.*

The average EEZ harvest/exploitation rate was less than 2%. This harvest rate is dramatically below the State's MSY harvest rate of 56%. This one is also laughable. This harvest rate is the result of time and area restrictions.

AGGREGATE COHO STOCK

During the 2024 CI EEZ salmon fishery, 4,439 coho salmon were harvested in the CI EEZ, which was well below the TAC of 25K (Appendix 1, Table 1). Under the Tier 3 guidelines recommended by the SSC, the Aggregate coho salmon stock complex were not subject to overfishing because the total catch mortality for this stock across the most recent generation (86K) was below a 2024 OFL of 439K coho salmon (Appendix 1, Table 3). However, as previously mentioned, weir counts for the Deshka and Little Susitna River were incomplete during 2024 (Appendix 1, Table 24), as such, cumulative escapement (24.4K) over a generation time (four years) was below MSST (38.6K) in 2024. Given the incomplete weir counts, it is the recommendation of the NMFS SAFE Team to the SSC that this stock is not in an overfished status. Zaleski, et.al. (January 2025) *DRAFT FOR INITIAL REVIEW, Environmental Assessment for the Harvest Specifications of the Cook Inlet Salmon Fisheries in the EEZ Off Alaska.*

The average EEZ harvest/exploitation rate was less than 2%. This harvest rate is also dramatically below the State's MYS rate of 63%. Coho run up the northeast part of Cook Inlet. This low harvest rate is the result of time and area restrictions.

AGGREGATE PINK STOCK

The 2024 even-year aggregate pink salmon harvest in the EEZ was 6,250 fish, well below the TAC of 121.7K fish (Appendix 1, Table 3). Under the Tier 3 guidelines presented in the Salmon FMP and the 2025 harvest specifications, UCI pink salmon were not subject to overfishing during 2024 because the total catch mortality for this stock across the most recent generation (35,799) was below the 2024 postseason OFL of 300K pink salmon (Appendix 1, Table 3). Zaleski, et.al. (January 2025) *DRAFT FOR INITIAL REVIEW, Environmental Assessment for the Harvest Specifications of the Cook Inlet Salmon Fisheries in the EEZ Off Alaska.*

The average EEZ harvest/exploitation rate was less than1%. This is to say that even-year pinks had a harvest/exploitation rate of less than1%. This is laughable. This low harvest rate is the result of time and area restrictions.

G. Summary of TAC Models

Non-abundance based OFLs, and ABCs were identified in both the 2024 and 2025 SAFE Reports. These EEZ harvests have no relationship with MSY/OY or the NS1 guidelines. Then, in the 2025 SAFE Report these contrived harvest values, and suggested buffers further reduce EEZ harvests of the various stocks. The 2025 forecast is 6.93 million (0ne million more than the 2024 forecast) salmon entering UCI.

Thank you for your consideration,

Original Signed Document

David Martin, UCIDA President