March 27th, 2024

Chair Angel Drobnica
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th, Suite 306
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Re: Endorsement of the industry proposed IPA modifications in Alternative 4

Dear Madam Chairwoman,

I am writing on behalf of Global Seas, LLC, a stakeholder in the Wild Alaskan Pollock industry, with a vested interest in the sustainable management of our fisheries. Our operations, centered out of Dutch Harbor with four catcher vessels, are directly impacted by the management decisions of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). **We advocate for IPA modifications in Alternative 4, an industry-led initiative, as a superior approach to addressing chum salmon bycatch issues in the Bering Sea than more static and inflexible regulatory tools.**

Our concern over the declining returns of Western Alaskan chum salmon is compounded by the significant presence of Russian and Asiatic hatchery chum salmon, which the most recent study indicates comprise 68.8% of the bycatch[1] and could certainly range far higher in the future. This introduces substantial competition and genetic mixing, obscuring the understanding of the decline's causes and complicating management efforts. Indeed, managing through archaic hard caps and static area closures may have the unintended consequence of protecting and allowing for a further proliferation of invasive Asiatic and Russian chum salmon to the competition and expense to the Western Alaskan chum salmon. The proposal's development is underpinned by the necessity to address these complexities through adaptive, informed, and cooperative management practices.

The industry's proposal, as detailed in the BSAI Chum Salmon Bycatch October 2023 - Council Motion, Alternative 4, is rooted in comprehensive data analysis and innovative management strategies. The industry proposed modifications to Alternative 4, crafted in collaboration with multiple industry groups, sectors, and stakeholders, aims to refine and enhance the existing incentive plan agreements (IPAs) to reduce Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch more effectively.

Given that the Council's purpose and need statement notes the Council intends to consider establishing additional regulatory measures for chum salmon bycatch that reduces the bycatch of specifically Western Alaska origin chum salmon while maintaining the priority objectives of the Amendment 91 and 110 Chinook salmon bycatch avoidance program - industry proposed modifications to Alternative 4 to enhance the current IPA's and effectively reduce Western Alaska

[1] Genetic Stock Composition Analysis of Chum Salmon from the Prohibited Species Catch of the 2023 Bering Sea Walleye Pollock Trawl Fishery, by P. Barry, J. Whittle, K. D'Amelio, J. Musbach, J. Cornett, J. Whitney, C. Kondzela, & W. Larson 18 March 2024

chum salmon bycatch through four key provisions, each tailored to meet the operational realities and conservation needs of our fisheries.

1. **Weekly Assessment of Western Alaska Chum Salmon Likelihood**: Utilizing historical genetic data, this tool helps model the likely presence of Western Alaska chum salmon in fishing areas, allowing for informed, dynamic management of weekly chum closures. This strategy is designed to minimize Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch while adapting to the weekly fluctuations in salmon distribution.

2. **Rolling Hotspot Closure at Triple Base Rate**: Triggering a fleet-wide closure when chum salmon bycatch hits three times the weekly base rate encourages collective action to maintain low bycatch rates, reducing significant spikes in chum salmon bycatch. This measure has the potential to mitigate the high bycatch events observed in recent years.

3. **Bi-Weekly Chum Salmon Rolling Hotspot Closures:** With assessments on Mondays and Thursdays, this approach enables a responsive management system that incorporates both quantitative data and fishermen insights, aiming to reduce chum salmon bycatch spikes effectively.

4. **Move Along Rule for Catcher Vessels:** Tailored to the operational differences between inshore and mothership sectors, this tool encourages vessels to avoid high bycatch areas. Developing this rule will involve careful consideration to avoid displacing effort into areas with higher Western Alaska origin chum salmon concentrations.

These provisions, formulated from detailed analysis and industry collaboration, reflect an initiative-taking and informed approach to bycatch management. They signify our industry's commitment to sustainable practices and continuous improvement based on the best available science and technological advancements.

The proposed IPA modifications in Alternative 4 emphasize the need for flexible management systems that can integrate emerging genetic data and adapt to new fishing technologies and practices. This approach is vital given the significant unknowns around the interactions between chum salmon of Western Alaska origin and hatchery chum salmon from Russia and Asia. Through real-time genetic testing and the development of more selective fishing gear, we are poised to significantly enhance our bycatch avoidance capabilities.

Notably, the industry proposed IPA modifications rely heavily on rolling hotspot closures. The concept of Rolling Hot Spot (RHS) management, often referred to as "dynamic closures," represents a more agile and responsive approach to conserving marine ecosystems compared to traditional static area closures and hard cap bycatch limits. Unlike static closures that are fixed in space and time, dynamic closures can be rapidly implemented and adjusted based on real-time data, allowing for the swift protection of areas experiencing high bycatch rates. This nimbleness ensures that conservation efforts are precisely targeted and can be adapted to changing conditions,

reducing the unintentional catch of non-target species more effectively than the blunt tool of hard caps, which can be rigid and not reflective of the actual on-water conditions. Therefore, RHS offers a tailored and proactive method for mitigating bycatch, ensuring that management measures are directly aligned with the current ecological needs, thus providing a sustainable balance between fishing activities and marine conservation.

Additionally, while the proposed IPA modifications heavy reliance on RHS management and dynamic closures has the possibility to elicit immediate benefit and bycatch reduction – it also anticipates developments in science and data collection in a way that would allow the incorporation of that new data and science into the management structure without necessitating comprehensive regulatory change. Central to the proposed IPA modifications in Alternative 4 is the ongoing work to gather and utilize genetic data to identify the origin of chum salmon in the bycatch. This initiative aims to distinguish between Western Alaskan origin chum salmon and those of hatchery origin from Russia and Asia. We hope to continue this meaningful work in hopes of one day reaching the point where we may see the development of real-time genetic testing, which could enable fishery managers to make informed decisions swiftly to minimize the bycatch of Western Alaskan origin chum salmon. This is a critical step toward understanding and mitigating the impacts of invasive Russian and Asiatic hatchery chum salmon on local ecosystems and fisheries. In the meantime, these proposed IPA modifications in Alternative 4 take the best science and genetic data available right now, and creates an avoidance plan based on that, but with the flexibility to accept and incorporate new data and information as it becomes available.

Moreover, our commitment to innovation extends to improving fishing gear and practices. In our past actions and industry driven research and activity, we have shown we actively seek out or refine, evaluate, and implement bycatch avoidance systems as they are developed to enhance selectivity in our catches. These devices are integral to our strategy for reducing chum salmon bycatch and are being designed to adapt to the dynamic nature of our fisheries and the migratory patterns of salmon. The continued development of these technologies should not be hampered by disincentivizing continued evolution by way of static semi-permanent regulatory rules.

The flexibility of the proposed IPA modifications is one of its key strengths. It is structured to accommodate and integrate ongoing advancements in genetic testing, bycatch reduction technologies,[2] scientific data, and fishing practices. This adaptability ensures that our management practices can evolve in response to emerging data and scientific insights, allowing for more precise and effective bycatch mitigation measures.

The Catcher Vessel Chum Reduction Plan outlined in the proposed IPA modifications represents a holistic and progressive approach to fisheries management. It emphasizes the need for a cooperative and adaptive management system that leverages the latest scientific data and technological advancements. Our plan is not merely a set of regulations; it is a framework designed

[2] While currently there is no proven excluder specifically for chum salmon, it is important to note the success of excluders designed for chinook salmon. We are optimistic that the insights and experience gained from developing chinook excluders will lead to the innovation of effective excluder devices for chum salmon in the near future.

to evolve, incorporating real-time data and innovative fishing practices to minimize bycatch and its impacts effectively.

In light of the above, we urge the NPFMC to recognize the value and potential of the proposed IPA modifications to Alternative 4 submitted by industry representatives. Adopting these proposed IPA modifications would signify a commitment to data-driven, adaptive, and cooperative fisheries management, ensuring the sustainability of the Wild Alaskan Pollock industry and the protection of Western Alaskan chum salmon.

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss these proposed IPA modifications further with the Council and its staff. Your consideration of our perspective in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

/s/ *Philip Michael Powell J.D., LL.M.*

Philip Powell
General Counsel
Global Seas, LLC