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Dan Hull, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
405 West 4th Ave, Suite 306
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March 30, 2018

RE: Agenda Item C.6. – GOA Non-Pollock Trawl Chinook PSC Limits

Dear Chairman Hull and Council Members

My name is Bert Ashely and I own and operate the family-run F/V Gold Rush, a 99-foot trawler home-ported in Kodiak since 1987. On average we deliver the majority of the fish we catch into Kodiak and the F/V Gold Rush supports nine families, half of which are Alaskan residents. We strongly support raising the Chinook PSC cap under this action.

The Chinook PSC cap was set with incomplete information and resulted in a closure the first year it was implemented. New information dictates that the cap be examined, and I believe it should be raised. New genetic information as well as observer information demonstrate that the Chinook being intercepted in Gulf trawl fisheries is mostly from other regions and likely hatchery fish. Further, observer coverage in the western Gulf was established after the historical information used to set the cap. The actual interaction with Chinook in the western Gulf is much higher than previously thought and thus the cap was set too low to accommodate traditional trawl landings which was the objective of the action when originally taken.

The Council has an obligation to balance the MSA National Standards and taking action to increase the Chinook PSC cap slightly helps to do that. The current information shows that this small increase for GOA trawlers will have significant positive impacts with no negative ramifications for directed Chinook users. As a trawler I will continue to do my best to avoid interactions with Chinook this includes continued work on excluder development and modifications. At the same time, without the Bycatch Tools Package, there must be more flexibility to harvest our target fishery – this small increase in the cap will help us to do that.

The F/V Gold Rush is heavily dependent on Gulf Groundfish fisheries. Please use the best available information to make your decisions on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Bert Ashley