

North Pacific Fishery Management Council

Eric A. Olson, Chairman
Chris Oliver, Executive Director



605 W. 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501-2252

Telephone (907) 271-2809

Fax (907) 271-2817

Visit our website: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc>

September 10, 2008

Dear Interested Parties;

I am writing today to discuss an issue that is of importance to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council), Alaska Native tribes, and local communities. The issue concerns the proposed measures under consideration for limiting Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. We wish to inform you of the Council's current position on this issue, the schedule for action, and opportunities for you to provide comments and feedback as this effort progresses. The Council is scheduled to take final action on this issue at its April 2009 meeting in Anchorage.

Enclosed with this letter is a flyer that summarizes the Council's proposed measures being considered to limit Chinook salmon bycatch and the schedule for action by the Council on this issue. We will be participating in several regional meetings as listed in the flyer in our continued effort to provide outreach on this Council action. Additional information will be provided at the meetings, as well as on our Council website (<http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/>). Specifically, a booklet entitled *Navigating the North Pacific Council Process*, which provides more information on the Council's overall role in fishery management, how this process works, and how you can participate, is provided on our website at: http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc/misc_pub/Navigating_NPFMC.pdf.

Please be assured that the Council will continue to seek input from Alaska Native and rural communities in the continued development of salmon bycatch limitation measures. If you have questions, please contact Diana Stram at (907) 271-2809 or diana.stram@noaa.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Oliver". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Chris Oliver
Executive Director
North Pacific Fishery Management Council

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council is Evaluating Measures to Limit Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery



Salmon and pollock are both important fisheries for Alaska. Salmon support large and critically important commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries throughout Alaska and elsewhere, and are the basis of a cultural tradition in many parts of the state. At the same time, the commercial pollock fishery produces significant revenue for the State of Alaska, and participation in the fishery (through royalties and employment) is important for the western Alaska Community Development Quota communities.

Salmon are caught unintentionally in the offshore Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery, and may not be kept. Despite bycatch control measures implemented in the pollock fishery since the mid-1990s, Chinook salmon bycatch has increased over time, and reached an historic high in 2007. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) is required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to balance minimizing salmon bycatch, to the extent practicable, with achieving optimal yield from the pollock fisheries.

The Council is developing new measures to limit Chinook salmon bycatch

The Council is preparing a draft environmental impact statement (EIS) that evaluates the following management measures to limit Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery:

- caps on the amount of Chinook salmon bycatch allowed in the pollock fisheries,
 - limits under consideration range from annual amounts of 29,300 - 87,500 Chinook, divided seasonally into a winter and a summer/fall pollock fishery
- seasonal closure of the pollock fishery when these bycatch limits are reached, and/or
- seasonal closure of areas where high salmon bycatch has traditionally occurred.

Council's preliminary preferred alternative

In June 2008, the Council identified a preliminary preferred alternative (PPA), to focus public comment on the current direction being considered by the Council. Under the PPA, the annual cap level would be 68,392 Chinook, provided the pollock industry develops a self-regulated, incentive-based program to avoid salmon bycatch. If an acceptable program is not proposed, the PPA mandates a lower cap of 47,591 Chinook. The pollock industry intends to present their proposed program to the Council prior to April 2009, when the Council will make its final decision on a preferred alternative.

The Council is seeking public input

The Council is seeking input from local residents and communities, as well as agencies, organizations, and the general public, prior to making a decision in April 2009. Interested stakeholders are encouraged to contact the Council with their concerns as the Council proceeds with this effort. For ways to provide comments to the Council or to its partner, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), see the back page of this flyer.

NOTICE: *Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Bering Sea Pollock Fishery*

HOW TO PROVIDE COMMENTS

Write a letter to the Council or NMFS. The public comment period on the draft EIS will be open from early December (when the draft EIS is published) to early February 2009. Send letters by mail or fax to:

North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 W 4th Ave Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501
Fax: (907) 271-2817

National Marine Fisheries Service
Alaska Regional Office
PO Box 21668
Juneau, AK 99802
Fax: (907) 586-7249

Attend a regional meeting. Council and NMFS staff plan to attend several regional meetings to present information on the Council's action and the likely impacts. Details of the meeting locations will be posted on the Council website:

Dillingham	October 7	Bristol Bay Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting
Bethel	October 8	Association of Village Council Presidents meeting
Nenana	October 15	Eastern Interior Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting
Kotzebue	October 16	Northwest Arctic Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting
McGrath	October 28	Western Interior Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting

Testify at the April 2009 Council meeting, when the Council will make its final decision. The April Council meeting will take place from March 30 - April 7, 2009, at the Hilton Hotel, in Anchorage. The draft agenda will be posted on the Council website in early March. You may also send a letter by mail or fax to the Council for the April meeting, to the address listed above. In order for the letter to be circulated to Council members, it must be received by March 25, 2009.

Council website: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/npfmc>

Proposed timeline for the Council's Chinook salmon bycatch action:

- September 29-October 7 2008 – Council meeting in Anchorage. Council receives report from Pollock industry on progress towards an incentive-based bycatch reduction program.
- Early December 2008 – Draft EIS available for public review, begins 60-day public comment period. The draft EIS will be available to download from the Council website; if you need a hard copy, contact the Council office and we will put you on the mailing list.
- Early February 2009 – Public comment period ends.
- March 30 - April 7, 2009 – Council meeting in Anchorage. Council reviews comments on the draft EIS and decides on a final preferred alternative, to be recommended to the Secretary of Commerce.
- April 2009 to December 2010 – NMFS reviews the Council's preferred alternative, writes regulations; regulations go out for public review; the Secretary of Commerce makes a final decision.
- January 2011 – Management measures are implemented in the Bering Sea pollock fishery.

Chum salmon bycatch

The Council also intends to evaluate options to limit chum salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery. Similar alternatives have been proposed for limiting chum salmon bycatch as for Chinook. The Council will tentatively review the alternatives at the October 2008 Council meeting in Anchorage. An analysis will then be developed by staff, and reviewed by the Council in the spring and summer of 2009.