



Cook Inlet Salmon Committee

REPORT

March 6, 2019, 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Anchorage, AK

The Cook Inlet Salmon Committee met in order to continue developing recommendations to the Council on management measures needed to extend federal management authority to salmon fisheries in EEZ waters of Cook Inlet.

Committee Members in attendance:

Dan Anderson (Homer)

Jeff Berger (Ninilchik) *tele*

Mark Casseri (Kasilof)

Eric Huebsch (Kasilof)

Dino Sutherland (Eagle River)

Members absent:

John Jensen (Petersburg, Chair)

Hannah Heimbuch (Homer)

Others in attendance:

Jeff Anderson (USFWS)

*Forrest Bowers (ADF&G)

Catherine Cassidy (fisherman)

*Curry Cunningham (Alaska Pacific University)

Neil DeWitt (fisherman)

*Doug Duncan (NMFS)

*Diana Evans (NPFMC)

*Gretchen Harrington (NMFS)

James Hasbrouk (ADF&G)

Georgeanna Heaverley (Cook Inletkeeper)

Wes Humbyrd (UCIDA)

David Martin (UCIDA/CIFF)

Roland Maw (UCIDA)

Glenn Merrill (NMFS)

John McCombs (CIFF/UCIDA)

*Andrew Munro (ADF&G)

Matt Oxford (UCIDA)

Dave Rutz (ADF&G)

Audrey Salmon (UCIDA)

*Lauren Smoker (NOAA General Counsel)

Dyer Van Devere (UCIDA)

Steve Vanek (UCIDA)

Teague Vanek (UCIDA/CIFF)

*Jordan Watson (NMFS)

Jennifer Wilson (UCIDA)

David Witherell (NPFMC)

*member of the Salmon Amendment Work Group
tele – attended via teleconference

Administrative Issues

The meeting began at 9:00 a.m., and Committee members and others in attendance introduced themselves. Air travel complications kept Committee Chairman John Jensen from attending and Council staff Jim Armstrong chaired the meeting in his place in accordance with Council protocol. Committee member Hannah Heimbuch was also unable to attend, and Committee member Jeff Berger attended remotely via teleconference. The availability of a teleconference listen-in option for the public was advertised on the [webpage for the Committee meeting](#), which also provided links to all of the meeting documents.

As the meeting began, Committee member Erik Huebsch offered an amended agenda that contained all of the items in the original agenda but with the sequence re-ordered. The modified agenda was accepted by the Committee and was posted to the meeting webpage. Jim Armstrong briefly reviewed the items in the agenda, and reviewed the December 2018 Committee meeting and Council motion, reminding attendees that the Committee had been unable to agree on a recommendation regarding status determination criteria. As reflected in the agenda, the Council also directed the Committee to address record-keeping, reporting and monitoring measures for harvest and bycatch as required by the MSA.

It was pointed out to the Committee and audience that written public comment had been received via email and that staff had posted the comments to the [meeting webpage](#). Throughout the meeting, after Committee discussion on a topic, audience members were given the opportunity to share their perspectives.

Later in the meeting, Committee member Mark Casseri initiated a discussion that led to the Committee requesting that the Council Chair allow alternates to serve on the Committee when regular Committee members cannot attend in person or by phone. Staff will make the request known to the Council Chair, with the additional request that alternates be allowed in time for the next Committee meeting on April 2, 2019.

Status Determination Criteria (SDC)

Committee member Erik Huebsch provided nine documents for the Committee, under the SDC agenda item, all of which were posted to the meeting webpage, and Mr. Huebsch led the Committee through these documents in varying degrees of detail. The first of these documents, titled “[West Area Cook Inlet](#)”, consisted of a draft stakeholder proposal for developing a Committee recommendation to the Council on status determination criteria, and Mr. Huebsch read this document to the Committee and audience in its entirety. The proposal includes several long-standing stakeholder perspectives on management needs for Cook Inlet salmon including having State jurisdictional waters defined into the Federal management area and interpreting the MSA as requiring management to maximize harvest, i.e., prevent underfishing.

Limited staff comments on the proposal were offered at the meeting, but these generally addressed aspects of the proposal that staff felt conflicted with MSA requirements described in the [discussion paper](#). Some of these issues included the geographic scope of the FMP, the list of salmon stocks included, and the absence of definitions for or methods to calculate scientific SDC (MSST and MFMT). Work group members met during lunch to discuss the proposal and how to respond to it. The Committee was informed that the work group would convey a written response on the proposal to highlight areas for further development. The proposal is expected to be further improved by stakeholders for discussion at the next Committee meeting on April 2, 2019.

Additional documents were presented by Mr. Huebsch to the Committee and he spoke to the reasons for including them. One document reflected the perspective that restricting Federal management of fishery activities to the EEZ does not make sense given the use of EEZ and State waters by salmon fishermen and particularly the drift fleet which crosses the boundary repeatedly, and with the large number of streams in the Upper Cook Inlet system (1,347) being cited. The inability of fishermen to know exactly where the Federal-State boundary is, especially when fishing, but also relative to reporting by stat area was discussed. This was suggested to render historical data on the relative harvest in State vs. Federal waters as unreliable. Perceived mis-management by the State of Alaska in its handling of escapement goals and preferential treatment of in-river fisheries was voiced. The Kenai River pink salmon fishery is particularly appealing for commercial harvest, but overlap with coho salmon and value of that stock by State managers has prevented development of a fishery. Historical State management was characterized as

contributing to underharvest and over-escapement including to the point of spawners exceeding the carrying capacity of spawning habitat.

Discussion of Economic and Community Impacts Outline

Dr Jordan Watson reviewed an [outline prepared by staff](#) on the major issues to be addressed in an analysis of economic and community impacts that will satisfy requirements for regulatory impact review (RIR) for the FMP amendment. Members of the Committee and audience members suggested various sources of information about communities on the Kenai Peninsula. These included borough-funded data, CFEC, and consultant groups such as Northern Economics and the McDowell Group.

Other issues that should be included in the analysis were suggested, such as the longstanding frustration with State management that led to the litigation by stakeholders. The historically high value of driftnet permits compared to their much lower current value was pointed out. The graying of the fleet is an issue that audience members discussed, recommending that the analysis describe why salmon driftnetting is not appealing to potential new entrants, that the number of permits continues to fall, and the fishery does not have turn around. The timeline for the analysis was suggested as needing to go back to the 1970s to capture when over-escapement began. The need to preserve the character of coastal communities was cited, and the uniqueness of the Russian “Old Believer” community was suggested as needing to be included in descriptions supporting the analysis.

Recommendations on a Monitoring Program

Doug Duncan of NMFS AKRO led the Committee through [a series of discussion questions](#) AKRO staff had developed for their consideration in recommending their preferred management measures for a monitoring program that fulfills the MSA requirements on bycatch and harvest record-keeping, and reporting.. Discussion by the Committee and audience reflected the generally clean nature of the fishery with very few incidents of non-salmon catch. The use of the State test boat for characterizing catch composition data was generally supported, though some on the committee indicated that the state test fishery is not representative because it is limited to the early season while the fishery continues after test-fishing is complete. There was agreement that driftnet vessels are not suited for onboard observers due to their limited size. The option of electronic monitoring (i.e., cameras) did not appear to appeal to many participants in the discussion. It was pointed out that “seal-bit” fish are a rare occurrence, but also that stakeholders must retain them. Seals are often seen around nets, but appear to not get caught in them according to the discussion.

The Committee made a recommendation on this agenda item - non-retention of groundfish species, eLandings, and use of paper logbooks. Interest was expressed, however, in also exploring the potential for allowing retention and accepting permitting requirements including some sort of observer coverage for those participants in the fishery who are interested in retaining groundfish bycatch. Clarification was requested to be provided by staff on the cost of observers and the ability to sell retained groundfish species such as salmon sharks.

Discussion of Scope of the Fishery and Delegation of Management Measures under Alternative 2

Gretchen Harrington led discussion of the final agenda item for the Committee. The stakeholder proposal considers federal and all state waters, including freshwater, should be within the scope of the FMP. The limitation of federal management authority to fishery activities in EEZ waters is described in the current [discussion paper](#) and was directly addressed in a [NOAA GC letter to the Council](#) in April 2018.

Delegation of management measures to the State under Alternative 2 was discussed. The Committee clarified that the management objectives that were referred to in the stakeholder proposal were the objectives in the discussion paper under Alternative 2 (section 2.3.1 of the discussion paper).

Contrasting views on the ability of on-the-water fishermen to determine their location relative to the Federal and State boundary line were offered. During discussion, it was agreed that the issue of “scope” was going to take a while to work out between staff and the Committee.

The table in section 2.4.2 of the [discussion paper](#) that lists potential Federal and State measures under Alternative 2 became the focus for discussion and Committee members stated that further consideration led them to question their initial support for Alternative 2 as written. There were questions about the ability of the State to set measures in such a way that federal fishing would be curtailed. Gretchen Harrington explained that criteria can be set to limit the extent of state measures, like in the BSAI Crab FMP. Staff clarified that the decision to assign specific management measures to the State side of the table was far from final, and there would be ample opportunity for the committee to address those measures.

Although not a recommendation, there appeared to be general agreement by the Committee that they wanted to work further on Category 2 measures listed in the [discussion paper](#). Additionally, there was interest in addressing and clarifying language on accountability measures and a formal request to staff for an explanation of the concepts and terminology associated with accountability measures was made.

Toward the close of the meeting, discussion from the Committee and audience reflected expectations that through an amended FMP, the Council would be able to directly affect State management of salmon fisheries by being involved in setting escapement goals and ensuring that the State complies with the mandates of the MSA. This expectation was seen by some as a fundamental motivation for their involvement with the FMP amendment process as well as the prior litigation to involve the Council in salmon fishery management.

The Committee was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.