

Vote No on Proposal 243

My name is Fritz Johnson, the Regional Fish Coordinator for the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation. BBEDC represents 17 communities in the Bristol Bay region and we are opposed to Proposal 243 to add Pacific Herring to the Forage Fish Management Plan. My comments here are in support of RCs 17 and 20.

BBEDC is one of six community development quota organizations created by the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation Act to promote economic development for disadvantaged coastal communities of western Alaska. That economic development is based on the sustainable harvest of Bering Sea fisheries resources.

Our opposition to 243 is based on both those concepts. First, that western Alaska herring are abundant and sustainably managed, and second, that harvesting those fish is important to our economy. We oppose adding a layer of regulation that could restrict those harvests and prevent future development of now under-utilized herring stocks.

The Togiak herring fishery is the largest in the state and has been commercially fished and well-managed since the late 1970s. According to ADF&G records, only four times in the last 35 years have more herring been documented in the district than the 169,000 tons forecast for the coming season. When roe herring prices were higher, the Togiak fishery was worth as much as \$16 million. Today it still puts some \$3 million in fishermen's pockets, supports local businesses, and provides processing jobs and tax revenue for Togiak, Naknek and Dillingham.

Yesterday you heard Charlie Lean of the Norton Sound CDQ group describe how herring stocks in his part of the state have grown since the 200-mile limit was enacted, and how important the income from the spring's first commercial fishery is to local people. He also described the fishery as sometimes 'periodic,' in the sense that in some years no fishery took place, mostly because of market conditions and sometimes weather. And he spoke of herring stocks outside of designated management areas where local residents hope to pioneer markets where none have existed. Proposal 243 would put those Alaskans out of business before they could launch their boats.

Unexpected consequences from Proposal 243 could one day do the same to already established herring fisheries, to the detriment of our coastal residents. Please vote no on 243.