

December 8, 2012

Alaska Board of Fisheries

Naknek Meeting

NEW INFORMATION ON HERRING PROPOSALS – I WON'T MAKE THE COMMITTEE!

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Board,

I apologize, but I had to run home to get a boat ready to go into a shop for a scheduled time, and it looks like I will miss the committee for Herring which was scheduled for Monday Afternoon- I am flying back early Sunday morning, so will hopefully be there for deliberations on the Herring proposals.

I wanted to bring up some issues in Committee that were not addressed during the Public Testimony or staff reports.

- 1) COST OF A SEINE OPERATION vs. GILLNET OPERATION - A typical seine operation can be 5x the cost of a gillnet operation. Seine vessel - \$1M??, Seine Skiff \$150,000. Togiak special seine (one use only, not used elsewhere in state (\$40-\$50,000) We travel from Homer or Kodiak - a week + long journey each way – not just an 8 hour drive from Dillingham for a gillnetter. We have to pay a pilot 15% of the gross stock, we have (4) crew members, etc, etc.

Seiners founded the Togiak Seine fishery – originally the gillnetters had no allocation, I believe it was first put at 15% in 1980, and then raised to 25% sometime in the early 90's. We had a LONG discussion on raising the allocation for gillnetters to 50% back in 2001, and it was COMPROMISED at 30% after much debate in committee! Seiners need to make more \$\$ than gillnetters to pay all their higher expenses! Raising the allocation to gillnetters will just marginalize our operations even more!

Raising the gillnet allocation WILL NOT force processors to add more “watershed” residents to the herring roster – there are other issues at play there – When the price for herring increases, more market opportunity, AS IN THE PAST, will arise.

- 2) How much have gillnetters left “unharvested” vs. seiners? Ask the Department to show you how much quota has been “left on the table” between the gear types. Gillnetters have averaged about 16% unharvested, vs. the seiners 5%. I would argue that the seiners leave some on the table, mainly because of the issue explained in Proposal 11 – seiners have to stand down, while the gillnetters “catch up” to their 30% allocation. It simply is difficult for few gillnetters, to harvest their quota. AND the more gillnetters added to the fishery, then none of them make any money. If a gillnetter only catches 30 tons, @ \$150 /ton, (\$4500 GROSS) then they go backward – that is why so few gillnetters participate – just like us, they have to catch quantity to make any money. And it's very hard to do much quantity with a gillnet! – Only a few can participate and make any money, so therefore, they have a hard time catching their quota! The more quota you give them, the more they will leave on the Table – they won't have any more market opportunity!

The Togiak Fishery is healthy, at one of the highest biomass levels in history, and is economically viable for those who participate in the fishery – I hope that herring prices will continue to increase, and that more people will be able to participate and make \$\$\$. This is a classic case of market economics. We

made more \$\$ in Togiak, *WITH THE HIGHEST PARTICIPATION LEVELS EVER*, when the prices were high in the late 80's, and early 90's!!! SO everyone benefited – Not so today!

The other thing that I did not have a chance to explain to BOF members, is the great difference between Togiak herring stocks, and say Sitka , PWS, or Kodiak stocks. Most of those herring stocks are pretty local, and don't travel too far from their spawning grounds during the remainder of the year!

Togiak fish on the other hand, are highly migratory – Not only during the fishery, but the rest of the year!

During the fishery, Togiak fish pour into Togiak Bay – then many thousands of Tons fly to the west, and exit the open area around Cape Newenham headed for points north. Our pilots see Thousands of tons of herring going “around the corner” and spawning in Chagvan Bay, Security Cove, Platinum area, and Goodnews Bay.

We chase these ripe fish before they exit the waters we are allowed to fish, but many thousands of tons leave before we can harvest them. Processing capacity is limited to only a set amount per day, so the fleet does not have the ability to always take advantage of the fish that are available each day – they come, and leave! Much different than say, the Sitka fishery.

Likewise, the Togiak herring spawn, then disappear! A few weeks after the fishery, pilots see massive schools, off shore of Port Moller, heading West – and that is why the “Dutch Harbor Food and Bait” fishery exists out in the Aleutians! Hard to believe, but 10's of thousands of tons of herring spend their summers and winters out in the Aleutians. No doubt, there are huge local stocks of herring in the Aleutians as well (When I fished out at False Pass, there would be THOUSANDS of tons of herring in the Unimak Bight in early June! – no way they could have traveled from Togiak that fast!) But these Togiak Herring are highly migratory.

I would argue that if King Salmon declines are related to herring stocks, then we should see dramatic decreases in Herring abundance, to correspond with declines in King Salmon abundance. Why do we see increases or stability in herring stocks, if that were the case?? Whale numbers are on the increase too? These Togiak herring only stay in the Bristol Bay region for a very short time - and most of that time is when King Salmon are coming back to Spawn, and not in the eating mode anyhow!

We would like to see “STATUS QUO” in the herring fisheries in Togiak – market forces are unfortunate, but unfortunately, there is nothing the Board of Fisheries can do about that!

Thank you very much!

I will be there Sunday Morning! (unless deliberations for herring happen today) I will have my cell phone with me at all times, so please feel free to call me if you have any questions about any of the herring issues.

Sincerely,

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