

ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES  
FINDINGS OF FACT

Bristol Bay 32 Foot Vessel Length  
5 AAC 06.341  
#81-92-FB

After hearing a report on the Findings of the Governor's Bristol Bay Task Force, conducting a public hearing on 5 AAC 06.341 in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Act, and discussing the subject, the Board of Fisheries on April 4, 1981 by unanimous action, adopted a regulation to continue the 32 foot vessel length for the Bristol Bay salmon fishery. The Board considered this action to be consistent with its responsibilities to conserve and develop the salmon resources of Bristol Bay, promote the orderly harvesting and marketing of quality fishery products and to maximize the public interest.

The action of the Board in 1979 to repeal the 32 foot length limit by 1982 had been based in part on the premise that larger vessels would permit the use of ice to improve quality. However, Bristol Bay processors who imposed 12 hour delivery requirements on fishermen in 1980 showed that more frequent deliveries by existing vessels can adequately improve quality. An increased vessel length that allows the use of ice, chilled brine or special insulation is not necessary to achieve the desired quality improvements at this time.

The Board also reviewed testimony indicating that until recent years the average costs of the Bristol Bay gillnet vessels were in the \$5,000 to \$20,000 range. In recent years 32 foot vessels costing as much as \$150,000 are being constructed to participate in the fishery. The use of these larger capacity, more expensive boats has, in some cases, resulted in over capitalization by fishermen and is believed to have contributed to lengthy price disputes and threats of violence prior to the 1980 price settlement as fishermen felt obligated to achieve continued high prices to meet boat payments.

Repeal of the 32 foot limit will interfere with production economies of scale associated with construction of standard size vessel. Unlimited size will therefore exacerbate the problem of overcapitalization in the Bay area.

During the public hearing, Representative Joe Chuckwuk testified that repealing the 32 foot limit in 1982 would work a hardship on the Bristol Bay fishermen who had already invested in newer, larger-capacity 32 foot boats. In addition the Board also received the results of a January 1981 mail survey of all setnet and drift gillnet limited entry card holder and interim use permittees in the Bristol Bay salmon fishery. Of the 2,668 ballots mailed out, 81% of the 2,003 ballots returned favored reestablishment of the 32 foot length.

The conduct of the Bristol Bay fishery has been based upon the 32 foot length vessel for more than 30 years. Continuation of the length restriction will promote stability and predictability in the fishery.

ADOPTED: Anchorage, Alaska  
April 7, 1981

VOTE: 5-0

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Nick Szabo, Chairman