



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

Department of Fish and Game

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June 22, 2022

Ms. Gale Vick
Chair of Fish
Fairbanks Advisory Committee
PO Box 83825
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Ms. Vick:

Thank you for your letter dated June 14, 2022, requesting that I use my emergency order authority to close the South Alaska Peninsula purse seine fishery in June 2022 based on the harvest of Western Alaska chum salmon in this mixed stock fishery.

Let me begin by saying that ADF&G shares the concern over the status of chum salmon returns to Western Alaska and the impact this is having on culture and food security. The best information we have is pointing to the poor returns being linked to poor marine smolt survival in the first month and a half after the chum salmon emigrate from freshwater. The poor survival is likely linked to changing oceanic conditions and food availability. Other potential factors include bycatch, which while small and likely not a major factor contributing to the poor returns, is being addressed by the NPFMC. At their recent meeting in Sitka this month, the Council heard from leading scientists and managers regarding the status of Western Alaska salmon stocks. The presentations can be found on the Council's website. I urge you to review these documents.

Another potential factor is the harvest of chum salmon in other fisheries, including those along the Alaska Peninsula. While these fisheries harvest some chum salmon destined to AYK drainages, the harvest in these fisheries does not alone explain the poor returns. A large majority of the chum salmon harvested in these fisheries are not destined to AYK drainages.

The most recent study conducted on the South Peninsula June fishery chum salmon harvest, the Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Program (WASSIP), used genetic stock identification to show harvest rates in the South Alaska Peninsula June fishery of Coastal Western Alaska (CWAK) chum salmon from 0.3-4.6% of the total CWAK chum salmon run and mean harvest estimates of 177,876-420,739 chum salmon in the study years 2007-2009. While harvest rates show proportional harvest of CWAK relative to run strength, they are difficult to apply outside of the study years and impossible to use for inseason estimates. Mean harvest estimates do not consider changes in run strengths of stocks that are harvested in the fishery. For example, lower than average CWAK chum salmon run size and increased Asian and Russian

hatchery production would change the stock composition of the chum salmon harvested in the fishery.

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The CWAK reporting group used in WASSIP is a broad scale group that includes Norton Sound, Yukon Coastal, Kuskokwim, and Bristol Bay chum salmon populations. It is important to not confuse the CWAK reporting group with AYK stocks. AYK stocks are only one component of the CWAK reporting group. WASSIP results also show that the Bristol Bay Area fishery harvested between 1,229,873 and 1,870,560 CWAK chum salmon during the study years. This highlights the probability that a large portion of the CWAK chum salmon harvested in the South Peninsula June fishery were likely Bristol Bay Area chum salmon as a component of the CWAK reporting group. The WASSIP findings confirm the previous tagging and allozyme studies referenced in the 2004 Board of Fisheries findings # 2004 – 229 – FB, which summarizes previous tagging and genetic stock identification studies and concludes that the June fishery has a low impact on the separate CWAK chum salmon stocks harvested.

This said, ADF&G is taking steps by working with the fishermen and processors to reduce chum harvests in these fisheries this year. Some of these steps include:

- All processors have signed confidentiality waivers to allow full disclosure of harvest.
- The fleet has conducted test fishing to determine the presence of chum prior to the fishery opening. They used this information to avoid areas of high chum salmon abundance. Test fisheries occurred on the 8th, 9th, and 10th of June to assess areas for chum salmon abundance.
- The seine fleet did not fish on June 10th, fished only until 1pm on the 11th and 12th, and fished until 8pm on June 13th. This reduced their fishing time from 88 hours to 31 hours in the whole South Peninsula seine fishery for the first opener. These were voluntary reductions in fishing time, not EO by department.
- The June 15th and 20th seine openings are reduced by EO to 40 hours in the Shumagin Islands Section due to low sockeye returns at Chignik.
- The total chum salmon harvest as of June 18 was 205,618 fish. This is compared to 484,325 chum salmon by June 18 in 2021 and the 10-year average of 248,624 chum salmon by June 18.
- The ratio of chum salmon to sockeye salmon harvest has been reduced from approximately 19.4% last year to 8% this year to date.
- The harvest is being sampled to determine the stock composition of chum salmon harvested in the South Alaska Peninsula.

In short, during the 2022 South Peninsula June fishery, we have worked with the purse seine fishery to reduce the harvest of chum salmon. That said, we will be monitoring the fishery closely and will use our emergency order authority to reduce chum salmon harvests if voluntary measures fail.

Keep in mind that the current abundance of Coastal Western Alaska Chum (CWAK), which includes Bristol Bay, Kuskokwim River, Yukon River and Norton Sound stocks, are much reduced compared to their abundance during the Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Program in 2006-2009, so we do not expect proportions of chum salmon harvested in the South Alaska Peninsula fisheries to be the same as seen in the WASSIP results. Regardless, we are sampling the chum salmon harvest for the next several years to determine the stock composition.

The Board is scheduled to meet next year to review regulations pertaining to the management of commercial salmon fisheries in the South Alaska Peninsula. I encourage you participate in these meetings as the Board explores possible regulatory changes for this fishery. We hope the actions taken this year will inform Board deliberations on these fisheries next year.

Ms. Vick ~ 3 ~ June 22, 2022 Again, thank you for your letter. Please call with any

questions.

Respectfully,

Doug Vincent-Lang
Commissioner

CC: Mike Dunleavy, Governor, State of Alaska
Alaska Board of Fisheries Members
Fairbanks Advisory Committee Members
Bering Sea Fisherman's Association
Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association
Tanana-Rampart-Manley Advisory Committee