Agenda Item F.6.E.  
Supplemental Public Comment 4  
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To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Steve Aarvik. I am the owner of the Windjammer. I have been the owner/operator for the last 20 plus years. My family and others have been through the changes of the fishing industry. Unfortunately, most of them have been to the detriment of my family and the industry which we have nurtured and preserved for these many years. Our livelihood is now being stripped from the people that have been so committed to the fishery for all of these years. When my family started in the fishing industry we began fishing Rockfish. That was taken away from us, given to other fisherman, Native Americans, to rectify the negative occurrences from years past. Even some of those participants didn’t have the years of experience and years of sweat and tears, the building of a family dedicated to the industry since the early 1950’s. We have gone through these many changes, paying the taxes, the increase in licensing costs, and changing permit prices. The buy-back program of the trawling fishing boats, allowing them to sell off and come back into the industry in another boat with other licensing, is stealing from those of us who have dedicated our lives and families to this industry. Unfortunately, with this quick but not permanent fix for some, the overall impact is that people like my family are having to pay the consequences of this program. The dividing up of the catch, among the many fishing vessels, allows some participants who may have never fished to now get on the coat tails of those of us who have worked so hard, paying for the appropriate licensing, being a Native to the fishing industry for so many years.

The Windjammer was built in Seattle, and has paid for the licensing, federal and state taxes for
all of these years. My family started this at a time when not many were involved or willing to work so hard in order to put food on tables, care for our families, continue to pay taxes, buy permits, and follow the guidelines established in order to partake in this industry. Now there is a proposed buy-back similar to the one in 2004 where the Federal Government is able to collect 1.5% of the initial dollars loaned to those of us who went along with the incentives, paying 5% of our gross revenue in order to repay this “buy-back” option. The questions that need to be asked are why are we funding a buy-back program which allows those who sell the option to get back into fishing vessels, buy new permits, and with new licensing to continue to take more and more of this pie we are sharing, only to deplete the resources even more.

This industry has broken many fishermen and fishing families, and lives have been lost. Those of us who were and still are dedicated, still manage through the changes, and continue to fish to support our families, need to have a sort of protection, a grandfather clause that will allow us to keep fishing and manage our business to allow us to continue to support our families. How can any industry justify that during this recent recession no one will take responsibility for giving 12 cents a pound for fish that used to sell for $1.10 a pound? We still pay for the new permits, pay our taxes, and the rising, with no end in sight, fuel costs. How can we as a people, the Natives to this industry, afford to bring the food to the table of so many? How can we justify allowing some to “double dip”, so to speak, to sell off and “re-buy” in order to keep their piece of the dream that so many of us little fishing families have nurtured and worked for all of these years to feed the multitudes? Does our hard work and dedication mean so little to those who have no idea what it takes to support each other in this hazardous at times industry?

We need your help to keep this industry afloat in a fair and committed way for those of us who have worked so hard for these many years. By giving us a grandfather clause or protection from the industry that is going to big boys and buy-backs on the backs of those of us who have worked so hard survive, please give us some recognition for what we have done for so many years. Please support us, the little guys, in this time when so many are going under. To fix this we need your help, including those who agreed years back with the AFA provision signed by Patty Murray and Ted Stevens with precautions, intended to protect us from this type of situation happening again. We need an end to the false promises, and the inability or unwillingness to return our calls and address our concerns when now we are going through the raping and pillaging of the industry that my family and others have worked so hard to appreciate, nurture, and develop in order to place food on the plates of the families all over the globe.

With the ever-changing requirements, new licenses and a third party deciding who can fish, how much a vessel is allowed to fish is determined regardless of the dedication to the industry of the vessel owners, such as my family and others who have been fishermen for these many years. The powers that make these decisions should take into consideration those of us who are Native to the industry, who started fishing years back, through the changes and regulations, the taxes, and the federal requirements. The thousands of dollars we spend with insuring the safety and well being of our crew, the purchasing of supplies to provide for our crew, and our fuel expenditures that pay taxes, keep other industries surviving.
There needs to be some type of monitoring or accountability to those who participate in the “Buy-Back” who may be “double dipping” after completion of the “Buy-Back”. They then may purchase other licenses and vessels which allow them to pursue the same fishing opportunities. How can this be permitted, when the Processors as well as the other industry participants who manage to sell and then buy other licenses can start back where they left off? After they sell their interests and then are allowed to take a second piece of this smaller pie that so many have to share, those of us like my family have been involved and doing the back-breaking, yet honest way of doing business, for all these years are subjected to ever-increasing hardship. This creates a larger issue, the monopolizing of the industry and creating antitrust-like problems in this business that so many have built to provide for our families. At times I am struggling to survive or preserve the livelihood of my family for these many years.

Please take steps to protect the small, long-time fishermen and their families.

Sincerely,

Steve Aarvik

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