



THE STATE
of ALASKA
GOVERNOR BILL WALKER

Department of Fish and Game

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
Headquarters Office

1255 West 8th Street
P.O. Box 115526
Juneau, Alaska 99811-5526
Main: 907.465.4100
Fax: 907.465.2332

March 8, 2016

Agenda Item E.4.b
Supplemental ADFG Report
March 2016

Mr. Robert Turner
Assistant Regional Administrator
Sustainable Fisheries Division
NOAA, NMFS
510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 103
Lacey, WA 98503

Mr. Turner: *Bob*

Responding to your letter of February 19, 2016, we thank you for clearly articulating your interpretation of the various federal responsibilities connected to how the Southeast Alaska Chinook salmon fishery is managed. As we stated repeatedly leading up to the 2015 fishing season, and again during this negotiating cycle, Alaska intends to comply with the Pacific Salmon Treaty, specifically, Chapter 3, Annex IV, for the 2016 season.

We are encouraged by the recent Chinook salmon abundance model improvements that were reported bilaterally at the February 2016 post season meeting. Improved performance by that model should reduce some of the uncertainty that you generally referenced in your letter. Many of the preseason stock specific Chinook salmon forecasts have been completed, and they too show measured improvement. As a result, the observed error from 2015 will hopefully not recur in 2016. We note that there is still some discussion needed relative to several of the forecasts, which we understand will be forthcoming and may reduce some of the lingering uncertainty. As you are aware, the preseason abundance model relies heavily on the stock specific preseason forecasts.

In June 2015, Alaska forwarded an alternative Chinook salmon inseason abundance estimator referred to as the SE Alaska Winter Chinook model. The model was reviewed by an ad hoc bilateral committee in February and found to be equal or slightly better at estimating inseason abundance than the Chinook model currently employed. Since October 2015, when the fall/winter Southeast Alaska commercial troll fishery commenced, we have observed record level catches similar to last year. The output from the SE Alaska Winter Chinook model suggests that an abundance index (AI) of ~ 1.98 would reflect the Chinook abundance we anticipate observing in Southeast Alaska waters during the 2016 fishing season.

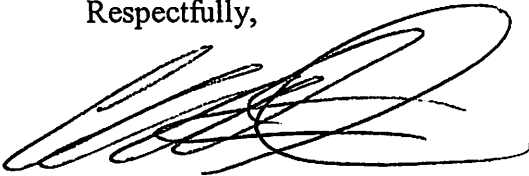
We are also in support of the request made in the letter to you from Phil Anderson, on behalf of the U.S. Section, dated March 2, that the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) consider delaying its April meeting to give the Chinook Technical Committee (CTC) sufficient time to complete its annual work on the Chinook model and estimates of preseason abundance, to assure

the quality of its technical advice. The difficulty we confronted last year in arriving at an agreed AI and associated catch levels for aggregate abundance based management fisheries was, in our view, due in part to the premature release of a draft AI that had not been agreed to by the CTC. The PPMC structured its salmon season on the basis of that draft AI and your agency used it in conducting review under the Endangered Species Act. We believe this had a negative effect on the CTC's ability to achieve consensus, and that it ultimately put the parties, and in particular Alaska, in a diminished position of accepting an AI based on a model calibration that was not accurate, in our judgment, or face consequences.

We are optimistic, for the reasons discussed above, that this scenario will not be repeated this year, but that the CTC will achieve consensus on an agreed AI for 2016. The adjustment to the PPMC schedule recommended by the U.S. Section would be a positive step.

We are hopeful that you and PPMC find this information informative, and I look forward to further discussion of these matters this week.

Respectfully,



Charles O. Swanton
Alaska Pacific Salmon Commissioner

cc: Dr. Don McIsaac, Executive Director, Pacific Fishery Management Council
Mr. McCoy Oatman, Tribal Commissioner, Pacific Salmon Commission
Mr. Ron Allen, Tribal Alternate Commissioner, Pacific Salmon Commission