

Testimony of the Quileute Tribe on Groundfish Management to the PFMC

The Quileute Tribe is very concerned about the future of all west coast groundfish stocks and in particular, the current status of Yelloweye rockfish. For many years, the Tribe has taken substantial measures to insure a minimal impact on this species of concern. We have implemented a full retention fishery with 100 lb/trip/vessel landing limits to ensure that our individual fisherman are having a minimal impact on the stock and to further ensure that we, as co-managers, have a full accounting of total Yelloweye mortality. The Tribe has achieved additional catch reductions actively avoiding Yelloweye “hot spots” and through the reduction of the inter-tribal open-competitive halibut fishery. These management strategies have allowed the Quileute Tribe to keep its total Yelloweye bycatch to less than 1 metric ton per year over the past 5 years and less than 600 pounds in 2005.

Considering the significant difference in catch favoring the non treaty fleet and the pre-conservation measures that the Quileute Tribe has already taken to protect this species the Tribe believes that it would be both a violation of its Treaty with the United States and economically devastating for the Tribe to bear the brunt of any additional conservation measures. In addition, NMFS, as an agent of the Federal government, has a fiduciary duty and primary trust responsibility to protect and preserve the Tribe’s treaty-secured fishing rights. The federal government and NMFS would violate both its fiduciary responsibility to the Tribe and the Treaty itself if it were to require the Tribe to further reduce its fisheries below current levels, without, at the very least, first looking to non-Quileute fisheries to bear the burden of additional conservation steps.

Additional conservation measures would have severe economic impacts on the entire Quileute Tribal fishing fleet and the broader Tribal community. The Quileute Indian Reservation is located in La Push, Washington, which is about 15 miles West of Forks on the Washington Coast. It is a rural reservation in an area with very few economic opportunities for tribal members. Other than work in tribal government, fisheries represent the only other significant source of jobs for tribal members on the reservation. There are usually between 5 to 7 tribal boats that participate in the tribal ocean fisheries, which provide jobs for not only the vessel owners but crew members as well. In addition, the Tribe owns a fish processing plant that is dependent in large part on the catch that is brought in by tribal fisherman. This fish processing plant is also an important source of employment for tribal members, as well as an important source of revenue for the Tribe itself. The diminishment or loss of fishing related jobs would have a very significant and potentially devastating impact on the Tribe’s economy.