



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

West Coast Region
Sustainable Fisheries Division
510 Desmond Drive SE, Suite 103
Lacey WA, 98503

February 17, 2016

Honorable Lorraine Loomis, Chair
Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
6730 Martin Way East
Olympia, Washington 98516

Mr. Curt Melcher, Director
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
4034 Fairview Industrial Drive SE
Salem, Oregon 97302

Mr. Jim Unsworth, Director
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
600 Captiol Way North
Olympia, Washington 98501

Mr. Charles O. Swanton, Deputy Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
P.O Box 115526
1255 W. 8th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99811-5526

Jeremy Wolfe, Chair
Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
700 NE Multnomah St., Suite. 1200
Portland, Oregon 97232

Dear Ms. Loomis and Messrs. Unsworth, Wolfe, Melcher, and Swanton:

The Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC or Council) soon will be moving into its 2016 salmon season setting process. The Council's technical advisors will be modeling anticipated impacts of various fishing alternatives in order to assist the Council and state and tribal co-managers in developing a recommended fishing regime. NOAA Fisheries views the use of best available information in the Council's modeling as essential under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act as well as important to the implementation of treaty Indian fishing rights throughout the Northwest under myriad laws and authorities.

During the season-setting effort of 2015, the Council faced uncertainty about how to model the predicted abundance of Chinook salmon in Southeast Alaska (SEAK). As a result of that experience, Council staff raised concern about the potential of similar uncertainty in 2016. NOAA Fisheries responded on January 21 to correspondence from the Council's executive director with a recommendation on how the Council should proceed should there again be



controversy about the best available information regarding Chinook abundance in SEAK in 2016.

The SEAK Chinook harvest is governed by, among other things, Chapter 3 of Annex IV of the Pacific Salmon Treaty (Chapter 3). From 1999 through 2014, the Pacific Salmon Commission provided PFMC technical advisors an agreed-to estimate of abundance for SEAK. Also during those years, pre-season modeling of the fishing regime in SEAK and the actual management by Alaska under Chapter 3 remained aligned. In 2015, the PFMC dealt with uncertainty as to the abundance forecast, but proceeded as usual to model the fishing regime as it had in the prior 15 years. Months of uncertainty about actual management in SEAK followed. This experience has given rise to uncertainty about 2016 and the need to examine whether the technical advisors – as well as state and tribal co-managers – will be working with the best available information about the upcoming fishing regime to be used in SEAK.

NOAA Fisheries seeks the help of the State of Alaska and other state and tribal managers to remove as soon as possible uncertainty about the 2016 management regime for the SEAK fishery to be modeled during the pre-season planning process. The specific purpose of this letter is to solicit any information you may provide to NOAA Fisheries, to the PFMC, and to other managers that will add to the best available information with which to model pre-season the harvest management regime to be applied to the SEAK fishery in 2016. NOAA Fisheries hopes there is prompt agreement on the modeling. If that is not possible, NOAA Fisheries hopes that the limited time available prior to the PFMC's April meeting is used to gain consensus. Should consensus not occur, we hope any information you can provide would be timely enough to contribute to a robust discussion of these circumstances at the PFMC meeting in March and thereafter, and we expect that the Council will be asked to determine at the start of the April meeting its best assessment of the fishing regime to be applied in SEAK in 2016.

Sincerely,



Robert Turner

Assistant Regional Administrator
Sustainable Fisheries Division

cc: Pacific Fishery Management Council–Dr. D. McIsaac