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March 17, 2013

ATTN: Karl Johnstone, Chair
Alaska Board of Fisheries

RE: Emergency Petition

My name is Jon Van Hyning, Chair to the Whittier advisory committee. This is an emergency petition to the Alaska Board of fish, which we hope can be addressed in the upcoming board meeting beginning on March 19 in Anchorage.

Allowed under regulation 5AAC96.625, which in so many words says, An emergency situation can qualify to exist under this regulation if a substantial amount of a resource will be unable to be utilized or if a danger to the sustainability of the resource may develop if nothing is done.

In this instance, both apply to the Prince William Sound commercial spot shrimp fishery. The problem arises in regulation 5AAC 31.214, where it stipulates only 25% of the overall quota can be taken from any one stat area.

In this petition I will explain how this will deprive the fisherman of a substantial part of their quota, while potentially handicapping the fisheries overall recovery. I feel the best and safest solution would be to delay the implementation of the 25% per stat area until the next board cycle (two years from now) where the data from the fishery and its associated surveys can be properly assessed. I realize it would've been much better to bring this situation to your attention sooner but extenuating circumstances only recently allowed our advisory committee to meet on March 9 and reach a consensus on the seriousness of the situation.

Although most of the points addressed in this petition were brought forth and agreed with at the recent advisory meeting, I did not offer to the committee this petition as an option, primarily because it has been about 25 years since I filed my last one and I was not sure to the parameters involved. So it will be noted that this petition is from me and not the advisory committee.

As I've stated on other occasions I have no monetary interest in the Prince William Sound spot shrimp fishery whatsoever, that could potentially sway my views one way or the other. Traditionally, but not so much recently, shrimp fisheries in the Prince William Sound have been managed in a similar fashion to many crab fisheries, where it is common to be extremely conservative with the area that holds a primary concentration or epicenter of a population, then being more liberal with the outlying areas. The philosophy being that if something goes wrong the target species will recover quickly as long as the primary population center is not substantially depleted. While this line of thought may be valid with crab it has very little to do with valid shrimp management logic especially in the Prince William Sound where the stocks are still recovering from a major downturn. It has been shown to me time and time again it is the outlying highly dispersed populations that support the high density areas not vice versa.

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Department surveys have shown the areas of consistently high CPUE, stocks recover quickly with no notable harm done, with hints that stocks may be actually getting stronger. These areas of high productivity are the way they are because they supply proper shelter, nutrients, and low numbers of natural predators. Though the terrain of these areas allow for excellent recruitment of new year classes, the planktonic shrimp larvae that supply this recruitment, for the most part, comes from elsewhere. In all probability the outlying areas contain several times the quantity of shrimp that are located in the high concentrations, but are spread out over a vast area that is only fishable if the participants locate pockets of slightly higher numbers.

While at this point of a fisheries evolution these shrimp can take some fishing pressure without harm, small pockets of shrimp do not bounce back at the same fast rate enjoyed by the higher producing areas. These widely dispersed shrimp are the backbone to the highly productive areas recruitment and a major stabilizing factor in the overall species diversity that contributes to its ability to recover from minor setbacks.

Requiring fishermen to concentrate much of their efforts in the outlying areas will be costly for both factors in the equation. Fisherman will need to expend greater time and resources as profitability is stretched to its limit, with the likelihood of leaving a portion of their quota unharvested (estimated by experienced fishermen to be a conservative 30%.) while the shrimp in the less productive areas, that make up the real safety net for the resource, are being unnecessarily reduced in number.

In this healthy fishery a substantial portion of the quota needs to be taken from the areas that show high recruitment and productivity, while curbing the notion that the patient will not thrive if it's heart has a good workout every third year.

Thank you for your attention to this matter....

Sincerely

Jon Van Hyning