

Dear Board of Fisheries:

We are writing in support of Proposal 121 which will expand the "core area" closed to commercial herring fishing in Sitka Sound. Maintaining a healthy and sustainable herring population is of the highest importance here in Sitka and not just for the herring fishermen. The other major fisheries in Sitka including the long-line and salmon fisheries, all target species that feed on herring at some point in their life cycles. Creating a safe area for herring spawning will ensure that our fishery can continue and that the industries and species that depend on herring will prosper as well.

Herring are a keystone species in marine ecosystems. A report by the Canada Department of Fisheries and Oceans of the coast of British Columbia concluded that herring make up 68% of the diets of adult Chinook salmon and 62% of Coho salmon diets. Harbor seals, lingcod, seabirds - all depend on herring as a critical food source. Naturally, that importance can be expressed as a dollar value. The Lenfest Forage Fish Task Force calculated that globally forage provide \$5.6 billion to fisheries in direct value, but \$11.3 billion in supportive value to other fisheries. The Sitka Sound herring industry is an important contributor to the Sitka economy, but so are our salmon and long-line fisheries. Providing a safe haven for salmon food by supporting Proposal 121 is excellent management for the whole community.

A larger protected area for herring will also be good news for our herring fishermen by leading to a more robust herring fishery in Sitka Sound. Protected areas such as the Marine Remote Pacific Islands National Monument have been known to increase fish populations outside those areas. In Hawaii, the creation of several "no harvest zones" for yellow tang in 2000 sparked enough population growth for the yellow tang industry to export 70,000 more fish per year in 2009 than in 2000! With its multitude of kelp beds, islands, and complexity of extensive shore habitat, the core area in Sitka Sound is ideal spawning territory for herring. That characteristic makes it an excellent candidate to lead to increased herring populations overall. Herring populations across Southeast Alaska are clearly trending downward; we need to take steps to increase the success of this year's spawn.

Considering the importance of herring as food for salmon and lingcod, as well as the steady decrease in their abundance across the region and in Sitka Sound, we ask the Board again to approve Proposal 121. The health of the Sitka Sound ecosystem and the fisheries that it sustains will be much more resilient and robust overall with the approval of this proposal.

Sincerely,

Sitka Conservation Society