

Mr. Chairman and members of the Board of Fisheries

I am Chuck McCallum and I am the Fishery Advisor for the Lake and Peninsula Borough.

My comments today focus on proposal #9 which the Chignik AC unanimously supported and calls for a reduction of the waters closed for the protection of Steller sea lions during the parallel Pacific cod fishery in the Chignik Area.

I would draw your attention to Figure 9-1 on Page 27 in Staff Comments.

As you are making your way there I will start off with a little history.

The Steller Sea Lion Closures in question were put in place around 2001. They were put in without any agreement or any public participation from Chignik fishermen or Chignik communities. I am chagrined to admit it but prior to 2002 Chignik fishermen paid virtually zero attention to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council process. The fact is that as Kodiak and Area M fishermen grappled with where to put the closures they took advantage of our absence to put the biggest Steller Sea Lion haul out closures in Chignik waters. All around the state 20 mile closures are generally reserved for rookeries. Haulouts typically have smaller closures and often have three mile closures. But Chignik got stuck with these massive 20 mile closures.

The percentage of State water closed during the parallel season due to Steller Sea lion restrictions is probably much higher for Chignik than for Kodiak or Area M and I request that the department provide a map similar to figure 9-1 in Staff comments that shows the Steller sea lion closures for Kodiak, Chignik, and Area M on one map – and make that available to you prior to deliberation.

Keep in mind that the State water fishery was started to benefit fishing dependent communities. The Chignik area has five communities that are extremely vulnerable economically and fuller access to the fishery resources is very important to Chignik.

I hope you have Figure 9-1 before you now. You can see four large intersecting circles in red cross hatch pattern. The northern-most red circle has a point on Sutwick Island as its center. It is this Sutwick Island Steller Sea Lion haul-out that is the prime focus of attention of proposal #9. Please note that where the red circle around Sutwick Island intersects with State waters that the area is shown in purple. It is that purple intersection that is the area that Chignik cod fishermen are proposing should be open during the parallel fishery.

In speaking with Chignik cod fishermen here at this meeting I note that they are willing to concede that it would be acceptable to them that the closed waters around a point on Sutwick Island be reduced from 20 miles to three miles.

Fishermen everywhere, and Chignik is certainly no exception, doubt that competition for prey is the reason for the sharp drop in the population of Steller sea lions or is a significant hindrance to population recovery. But in any case the area close to haul outs are recognized as less important than around rookeries and the area closer to haul outs (within three miles for example) is more important than outside three miles.

This proposal keeps the area closed to trawl fisheries which is by far the gear of most concern with respect to any potential competition for Steller Sea Lion prey. We expect that opening this area to the Chignik waters parallel fishery pot and jig fisheries will not jeopardize the recovery of Steller sea lions and will be important to the communities of the Chignik area by increasing access to the cod fishery during the parallel fishery.

Please support proposal #9.

Thank You for your time.

Chuck McCallum