

RC 95

Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Boards Support Section
P.O. Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

17 March 2013

TO: Chairman Karl Johnstone, Vice-Chairman Tom Kluberton, John Jensen, Vince Webster,
Orville Huntington, Sue Jeffrey, and Reed Morisky

FROM: Michelle Ridgway, Life Long Alaskan Marine Ecologist

RE: YES on Proposal 243 – Recognition of Family Clupeidae as Forage Fish

Dear Board of Fisheries Members:

The ecological function of herring as a “currency species” – fish that transfer carbon energy most efficiently among organisms in the marine foodweb, has been recognized by scientists globally for hundreds of years. I urge you to lead our State to recognize the vital role that herring serve in the Alaskan marine food web and vote in support of proposal 243, adding the Family Clupeidae to 5 AAC 39.212.

What we DO know is that herring is a key species in the Gulf of Alaska, Bering Sea and Chukchi sea. Herring not only provide upper trophic levels with critical fat-rich biomass, but also forage themselves on plankton species at lower trophic levels. Herring cropping these lower foodchain species helps maintain a dynamic balance in our foodwebs that we have yet to fully understand. But we recognize the proceeds of this balance : an enriched foodweb that yields tremendous fisheries harvests and supports superlative marine mammal and seabird populations.

What we DO NOT know is the role that herring play in the deep sea. Herring move vertically in the ocean on a daily and seasonal basis. This vertical migration to depth has an ecological impact for the deeper realm of Alaskan seas that we do not comprehend. Recognizing herring as a forage fish is the first step to opening our research focus to the broader role of herring in the marine foodweb that sustains not only their population, but our own.

The Alaska Chapter of the American Fisheries Society has not yet adopted an official position regarding herring as forage fish (perhaps because their role in the ecosystem *as a forage species* is so obvious it is incomprehensible to think it necessary to take a stand to state this scientifically recognized fact). Here is an Excerpt from the (national) American Fisheries Society North American Fisheries Policy:

*The American Fisheries Society (Society) promotes the well-being of North American fish throughout their geographic ranges and promotes natural genetic variability within and among populations. **North American ecosystems, biological communities, habitats, and their genetic and ecological diversity should be maintained, restored, and enhanced where possible. A goal is to ensure self-sustaining populations that would support commercial and recreational fishing both now and in the future.***

Maintaining biological communities and ecological diversity requires adaptive management that integrates the ecological function of species within the system. The American Fisheries Society recognizes herring as a forage fish, as does the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, as do most fisheries scientists, and as did the late Senator Ted Stevens –and is reflected in reauthorizations of the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act.

Let’s move forward and include herring –the Family Clupeidae –in the forage fish assemblage (5AAC39.212), and in our consideration of ecosystem based management and sustainability of Alaska’s fisheries in the future.

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