

Submitted by Seth Charlton
February 28, 2015
Support for Proposal 233

Members of the Board of Fisheries,

I am a hand troll permit holder in the Southeast salmon troll fishery and I strongly support Proposal #233. This proposal would allow hand trollers to use downriggers on a year round basis. Different versions of this proposal have been presented to the BOF in previous cycles and have not been successful. I suspect that those members of the public that opposed this proposal did not completely understand the gear, current regulations or some combination of these issues.

Downriggers are not some kind of magical fish catching device. They simply serve to set the line of a rod and reel at a known depth. Passage of this proposal would allow hand trollers to control the depth of presentation when fishing their single lure or baited hook. Depth control is a fundamental requirement of salmon fishing and should be available to those using rod and reel, just as it is for hand trollers operating hand gurdies and power trollers.

It has been noted that there may be some enforcement concerns should this proposal pass. I would like to offer that registered hand trollers are required to display the letters "HT" on both sides of their vessel. This requirement provides enforcement officials with the ability to identify potential commercial hand trollers as well as the opportunity to investigate the vessels' activity if they have a reason to be concerned. It does not seem logical to deny this appropriate fishing method to the hand troll fleet because of concerns that a few may somehow abuse this regulation. I am unsure how the passage of this proposal will change current enforcement conditions. A person may legally sport fish from a registered hand or power troll vessel (5 AAC 47.041). This regulation also requires immediate removal of the dorsal fin for sport caught salmon taken aboard a registered troll vessel and prohibits a person from sport fishing and commercial fishing for salmon from the same vessel on the same day. Additionally, sport fishing from a commercially licensed vessel while commercially caught salmon are in possession is illegal in waters closed to commercial salmon fishing. To determine whether a registered troll vessel (hand or power) using rod and reel gear is legally sport fishing, sport fishing and exceeding their bag limit, or is possibly retaining sport caught salmon for illegal sale, an enforcement officer must make personal contact with the individuals aboard that vessel. This remains the case whether or not this proposal is passed. There are always a handful of individuals in all fisheries and gear groups that work outside of the laws of the State of Alaska but I believe the majority of fishermen abide by the law.

Passage of this proposal would provide an alternative for hand troll permit holders who may prefer to fish with rod and reel or are no longer able to operate hand gurdy gear due to shoulder injuries or age. This proposal would also provide an option for a safer fishing method for small skiffs in rougher sea conditions as the downrigger/ rod and reel combination is lighter duty gear and easier to manage than the heavy duty wire and cannonballs utilized by hand power gurdies, should a dangerous situation arise.

Finally, those that would choose the downrigger/ rod and reel combination over hand gurdies would also be voluntarily accepting a reduction to the amount of gear they could fish as they are limited to a single lure or bait on each rod. There is no conclusive evidence to support the notion that passage of this proposal will result in an increase in harvest by hand trollers. Alternatively, the catch could potentially decrease for a hand troller that chooses to use rod and reel instead of hand troll gurdies which allow the use of many hooks.

Please note that the Alaska Trollers Association supports this proposal in PC 93.

Thank you.