

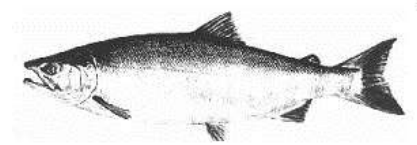
# **ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**

## **DIVISION OF COMMERCIAL FISHERIES**

### **NEWS RELEASE**



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## **2013 KOTZEBUE SOUND SALMON SEASON SUMMARY**

### **BACKGROUND**

The Kotzebue Sound District commercial salmon fishery opened on July 10 and closed after the August 31 fishing period. Similar to last year there was a very strong run of chum salmon and again commercial fishing time was limited, mostly in August, because of insufficient cargo space on airplanes to get the catch out to processing facilities.

In the Kotzebue fishery, gear is limited to set nets with an aggregate of no more than 150 fathoms per permit holder. Fishermen generally operate with one end on or near shore and also set in deeper channels in the mud flats farther out from shore. Most gear used in the district is 5-7/8 inch or 6-inch stretch mesh gillnet.

During most of July, there was sufficient airplane capacity for the fleet to fish six days a week and fishing periods were four to eight hours in length. Starting in late July until the third week of August, periods were four hours or less because of the high catches during the traditional peak weeks of harvest. During the last week of August, fishing periods were increased to 12 hours a day as a result of decreasing catches, reduced fishing effort and sufficient airplane capacity.

Sixty-six permit holders sold chum salmon in 2013. There were 65 permit holders who sold fish to the major buyer, Great Pacific Seafoods. One catcher-seller sold to a second buyer, Maniilaq Services, Incorporated, and also to Kotzebue area residents. In late August, with the decreasing catches, Maniilaq began to buy from additional permit holders who had been previously selling to Great Pacific. Maniilaq purchased from 21 permit holders during the season. There was a 20% drop in the number of permit holders selling fish this year compared to last year (Figure 1 and Table 1). The price per pound for chum salmon dropped 15% from last year and may have been a factor in the number of permit holders fishing this season.

The overall chum salmon run to Kotzebue Sound in 2013 was estimated to be well above average based on commercial harvest rates, subsistence fishermen reporting good catches, and the Kobuk test fish index being the highest in the 21 year project history.

The commercial harvest of 319,062 chum salmon was the highest since 1988 and tenth highest in history. There were 67 chum salmon kept for personal use included in the commercial harvest total. Also, kept for personal use were 16 Chinook salmon, 13 sockeye salmon, 42 pink salmon, 43 coho salmon, 302 Dolly Varden, 705 sheefish, and 50 whitefish. However, there were likely some additional fish kept for personal use that did not get reported on fish tickets.

A total of 2,555,304 pounds of chum salmon (average weight 8.0 lbs) were sold at an average of \$0.27 per pound. The total exvessel value was \$689,163 to Kotzebue Sound fishermen. The average value for each participating permit holder was \$10,442. The total exvessel value was 16% above the \$591,964 historical average (Table 1).

### **SEASON NARRATIVE**

Primary fishery management objectives are to provide adequate chum salmon escapement throughout the duration of the commercial fishery to ensure a sustained run and to provide for the subsistence priority. A test fishery conducted on the Kobuk River provides the only inseason escapement index of the Kotzebue Sound District.

Beginning on July 10 the season was opened to commercial fishing. Fishing periods during the first two weeks were usually eight hours in length starting at 6 p.m. or 8 p.m. On July 30, fishing periods were reduced to four hours in length through mid-August. From August 16 through August 25 there were continued strong catches, but limited airplane capacity resulted in fishing periods ranging from two to five hours in length. During the last week of August, when there were declining catches the fishing periods were increased to 12 hours in length. The one major buyer was Great Pacific Seafoods and they bought from all permit holders, except from one permit holder who was also a catcher-seller, and there was one minor buyer, Maniilaq Services, Incorporated that purchased salmon from two permit holders for a value added market, and in late August purchased from additional permit holders. The weekly fishing periods for the minor buyer were set during the day so as to not conflict with the fishing effort during the evening hours when the major buyer was purchasing salmon. However, during the last week of August, fishing periods were combined when the two buyers began to purchase from all permit holders.

In summary, strong commercial and test fish catches in July indicated a very large chum salmon run and the department continued to open fishing any time either buyer requested a fishing period, but the department had windows between the openings to keep the fishery orderly, and provide for subsistence and escapement needs. In late July catch volume started to increase and the major buyer needed to shorten fishing hours. Hours were lengthened in late August with the decreasing catches, sufficient airplane capacity and the buyers entering into competition.

The biggest one day catch was on July 23 when 17,712 chum salmon were sold during a 6-hour opening. This one-day catch was the second greatest catch in nearly 20 years. Fishing effort

peaked on July 30 when 47 permit holders fished. The season catch of 319,062 chum salmon was the greatest in over two decades.

Age, sex and length composition (ASL) was taken from commercial catch samples, but was not used to manage the fishery. The majority of the chum salmon each year are usually four- and five-year-old fish. In 2013, commercial catch samples were 4% age-0.2 fish, 54% age-0.3 fish, and 40% age-0.4 fish and 2% age-0.5 fish.

### **ESCAPEMENT**

This year's test fish chum salmon CPUE cumulative index at the department test fish project on Kobuk River near Kiana was 2,698 points, the highest in the 21 year project history.

Kobuk River test net catch samples were 6% age-0.2 fish, 33% age-0.3 fish, 60% age-0.4 fish and 1% age-0.5 fish.

No aerial surveys of the Kobuk River and Noatak River drainages occurred.

### **SUBSISTENCE SALMON FISHERY**

No subsistence salmon surveys are scheduled. No other information on subsistence harvest is available other than comments that chum salmon fishing on the Kobuk River and Noatak River was very good.

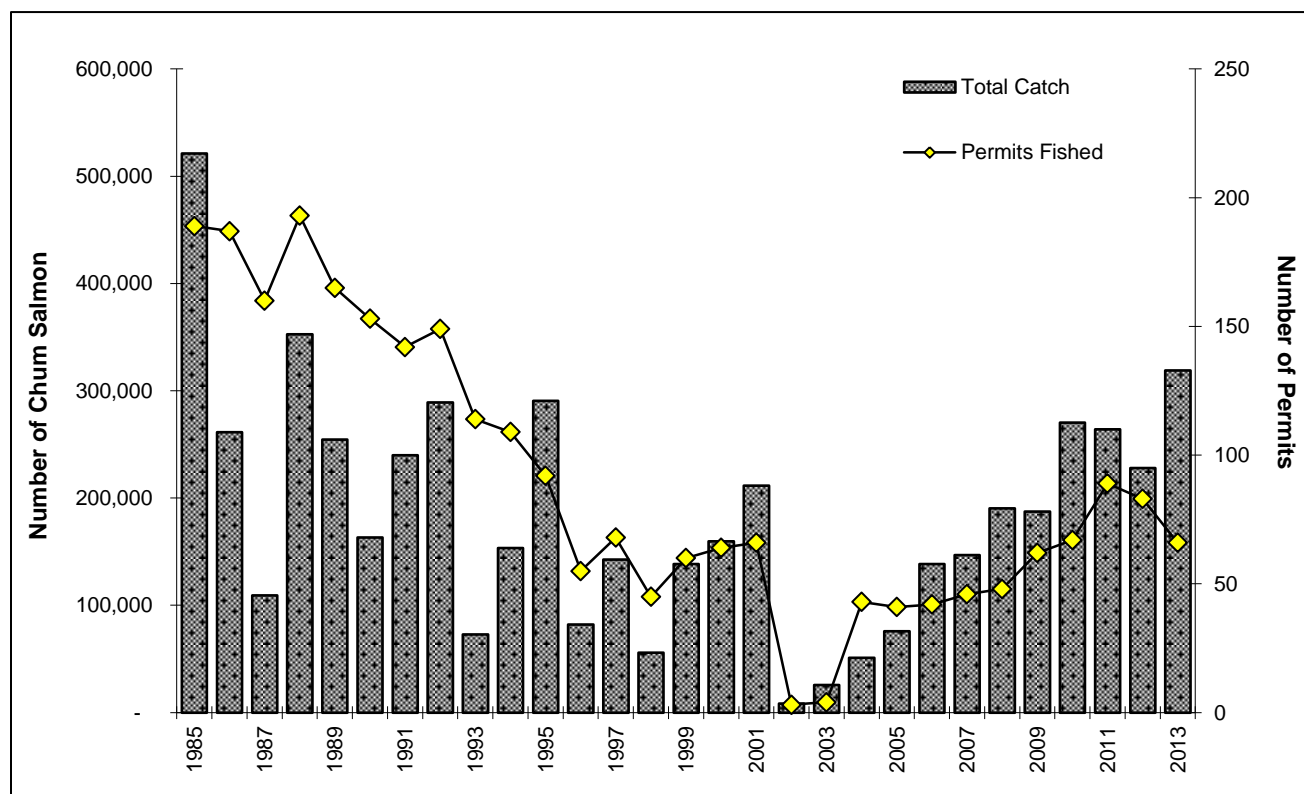


Figure 1.—Kotzebue District commercial chum salmon harvest and number of permits fished, 1985 - 2013.

Table 1.-Kotzebue District Chum Salmon Catch and Dollar Value, 1962-2013.

Year	Total Catch	Number of Permits <sup>a</sup>	Average Catch per Permit Holder	Gross Value of Catch to Permit Holders <sup>b</sup>
1962	129,948	84	1,547	\$4,500
1963	54,445	61	893	\$9,140
1964	76,449	52	1,470	\$34,660
1965	40,025	45	889	\$18,000
1966	30,764	44	699	\$25,000
1967	29,400	30	980	\$28,700
1968	30,212	59	512	\$46,000
1969	59,335	52	1,141	\$71,000
1970	159,664	82	1,947	\$186,000
1971	154,956	91	1,703	\$200,000
1972	169,664	104	1,631	\$260,000
1973	375,432	148	2,537	\$925,000
1974	627,912	185	3,394	\$1,822,784
1975	563,345	267	2,110	\$1,365,648
1976	159,796	220	726	\$580,375
1977	195,895	224	875	\$1,033,950
1978	111,494	208	536	\$575,260
1979	141,623	181	782	\$990,263
1980	367,284	176	2,087	\$1,446,633
1981	677,239	187	3,622	\$3,246,793
1982	417,790	199	2,099	\$1,961,518
1983	175,762	189	930	\$420,736
1984	320,206	181	1,769	\$1,148,884
1985	521,406	189	2,759	\$2,137,368
1986	261,436	187	1,398	\$931,241
1987	109,467	160	684	\$515,000
1988	352,915	193	1,829	\$2,581,333
1989	254,617	165	1,543	\$613,823
1990	163,263	153	1,067	\$438,044
1991	239,923	142	1,690	\$437,948
1992	289,184	149	1,941	\$533,731
1993 <sup>c</sup>	73,071	114	641	\$235,061
1994	153,452	109	1,408	\$233,512
1995	290,730	92	3,160	\$316,031
1996	82,110	55	1,493	\$56,310
1997	142,720	68	2,099	\$187,978
1998	55,907	45	1,242	\$70,587
1999	138,605	60	2,310	\$179,781
2000	159,802	64	2,497	\$246,786
2001	211,672	66	3,207	\$322,650
2002	8,390	3	2,797	\$7,572
2003	25,763	4	6,441	\$26,377
2004	51,077	43	1,188	\$64,420
2005	75,971	41	1,853	\$124,820
2006	137,961	42	3,301	\$229,086
2007	147,087	46	3,198	\$243,149
2008	190,550	48	3,970	\$385,270
2009	187,562	62	3,025	\$376,554
2010	270,343	67	4,035	\$860,125
2011	264,321	89	2,970	\$867,085
2012	227,965	83	2,747	\$567,664
Average	199,135	110	1,988	\$591,964
2013	319,062	66	4,834	\$689,163

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Table 1.–Page 2 of 2.

<sup>a</sup> During 1962-1966 and 1968-1971 figures represent the number of vessels licensed to fish in the Kotzebue District, not the number of fishermen.

<sup>b</sup> Some estimates between 1962 and 1981 include only chum value which in figures represent over 99% of the total value. Figures after 1981 represent the chum value as well as incidental species such as Dolly Varden, whitefish and other salmon.

<sup>c</sup> Includes 2,000 chum salmon and \$3,648 from the Sikusuilaq Springs hatchery terminal fishery.