

Alaska Board of Fisheries

Summary of Public Hearing in Soldotna re: Upper Cook Inlet Finfish January 14-15, 2005

The three-member panel of Board of Fisheries members Heyano, Dersham and Andrews attended the public hearing in Soldotna to hear first hand comments and concerns of the public as regards to the 2005 Upper Cook Inlet proposals, including commercial, sport and personal use.

Attendance over the time span of the hearings ranged from 35 to over 60 stakeholders. Of special note, the communities of Soldotna / Kenai were unanimous in their appreciation of the Board of Fisheries traveling to the area to listen to them. Board of Fisheries members were thanked by the Soldotna mayor and a potluck was held to further express community appreciation for the Board of Fisheries presence.

The concerns expressed to the Board of Fisheries members covered a very wide range of public expression as regards present and proposed changes to the fishing regulations. More net fishing time was the prevalent theme expressed by most net fishermen, followed by requests to remove the "windows" and let the management staff manage by emergency order as the local management staff has first hand experience and information.

Concerns expressed by public testifying covered many subjects and topics. Listed below are those topics, not in any order of priority, but in the order of the person testifying. I may have missed several items, but I believe that those listed comprise 99 percent of the concerns / subjects presented.

Concerns were expressed over water quality in the Kenai River of new regulations governing making zones of treated sewage; the impacts of sockeye salmon over-escapements on the future brood classes in the Kasilof and Kenai River watersheds; chinook salmon run into the Kenai system; the proliferation of negative trout regulations in the Kenai; liberalize opportunities for west side Cook Inlet beaches set netting; and increasing harvest strategies for all fisheries.

The panel also heard complaints regarding the ID tags on set net buoys as unnecessary. There were expressions of the value of nonresident recreational fisheries to Alaska and the Kenai / Soldotna communities; improving the emergency petition process and management plan for the personal use salmon fisheries in Upper Cook Inlet.

There was criticism of the Upper Cook Inlet Salmon Management Plan with recommendations to write a new plan with management goals for sockeye and coho salmon. In fact, there were numerous statements that the Board of Fisheries and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game have failed to develop harvest goals and strategies.

The public hearing in Soldotna was successful in giving stakeholders an opportunity to testify and the Board of Fisheries was listening to them. If budget in FY 2006 permits, more three person meetings in other communities should be considered.

Submitted by Board Member Rupe Andrews
January 25, 2005