

RC014

Van Baker
P.O. Box 56
Gustavus, Alaska 99826
907-697-2283

January 3, 2018

To: Alaska Board of Fisheries

Re: comment on decline in king salmon in Southeast Alaska

My name is Van Baker. I live in Gustavus and began fishing commercially for salmon in Alaska as a deckhand on a seiner in 1954, when I was 16 years old. After a stint in the Coast Guard, I bought and ran my own seine boat, the *Peasant*, in 1964. Four years later, I converted the *Peasant* to a troller. Since then, I've owned a number of boats and trolled each year for salmon until I retired in 2014.

I would like to add an observation regarding why king salmon may be declining in Southeast Alaska's rivers. As a troller, I fished often along what we refer to as the Homeshore, in Icy Strait. When fishing there (for cohoes), I would often catch immature king salmon, but only on my bottommost spreads. Some of these salmon were just 5 inches long. If I fished shallower, I wouldn't catch kings. Over the years, I've fished all over Icy Strait and Cross Sound, but the Homeshore is the only place I've caught immature kings in such numbers.

About 8 years ago (you guys would know exactly when), a troll chum salmon fishery was inaugurated along the Homeshore. The chums caught there are primarily hatchery stock from the hatchery at Juneau. Chums--like the kings at Homeshore--tend to run deep, and the trollers who target them fish deep and may be inadvertently catching a lot of immature kings. Though fishermen release the kings, the mortality is likely very substantial. The fact that kings began declining at about the same time the chum fishery started lends credence that there may be a relationship.

The situation may be similar for the Unuk River, given that there are hatchery chum salmon in the vicinity that are targeted by trollers.

Thank you for your consideration.

Van Baker