

Comments to Board of Fisheries on changing opening date for summer chinook

James Moore, salmon troller since 1970.

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Dear Board of Fisheries members,

May I quote from my personal testimony before the board.

"I have become aware in discussions with staff of how thin the data is that you have to work with. I cannot imagine biologists would not rejoice to see better data collection, better monitoring, especially in sportfish. It seems to me that "baselines" should be maintained whenever possible so I urge you to stay as close to the Chinook management plan as possible. Open summer season July first. To delay that creates many problems for fishermen and processors that I believe are unnecessary and any benefit from a delayed opening is not worth the cost."

Let me expand on that:

1) Importance of maintaining baselines in data collection, especially where that data is used in management models.

In PC 045 Deborah Lyons states this clearly as follows: (emphasis mine)

"I am concerned that this action should not be taken without inquiring how it would affect the ADF&G ability to use the in-season CPUE data from the July 1 fishery as a way to verify the pre-season estimate of SEAK coast wide Chinook abundance. Once the fishery start date is changed you may be comparing apples to oranges." Currently the Pacific Salmon Technical Committee uses a mathematical model to generate the preseason Abundance Index.

And:

"If the July fishery start date is changed the State may lose a statistically significant data set that could potentially be used by the department as in-season verification of whether the preseason estimate is correct." Whether that preseason abundance estimate is developed from the model or from other data found valid by ADF&G".

2) Many Problems for fishermen and processors.

The implications of a required two day fair start closure: Let me explain the situation. The week before the summer Chinook season is a period of high stress and anxiety as well as excitement in the final days of preparation, ***for this is without doubt the single most important fishing trip of the season.*** The entire troll fleet is in port stowing gear and provisions, fueling and icing up. The "ice list" at all processing plants is 5 days long and boat names have been added to the list for weeks in advance. Many trollers, myself included, will be leaving town to travel two or three days before the opening date and will be looking over fishing grounds we haven't been allowed to fish for nearly a year. Since the season is likely to be very short and the stakes are so high we have to try to be "on the hot spot". ***It's like a game of "battleship" only timed and with a limited number of moves.***

Imagine now that the summer season begins with an opportunity to fish coho July 1, then Chinook on July 8. The fleet prepares exactly the same way I described for Chinook opening. Same ice list, lines at the fuel dock etc. *only bear in mind that with a two day mandatory fair start closure prior to Chinook, a fisherman (the entire fleet) has to locate and catch the Coho, return to port, offload his catch, clean and sanitize his boat, switch Coho gear for Chinook gear, somehow get some ice and run out to get into position for Kings- all within an impossibly short time frame! (something like 4 days!)* Sound like fun? Normal protocol for getting ice after a trip is that you can't get on the list till you have unloaded your catch. The entire fleet would need to offload at about the same time. Often after a fishing period there is an "unloading list" that can be up to three days long. The processors would be flooded with small Coho to process and they would have need for ice for processing. I foresee ice shortages in some cases when the fleet needs it most.

Some processor's management stresses how important production in that first week of July is to their business (*undeniably true!*) and that they need anything that the fleets are allowed to produce claiming they would be able to meet the demands of this situation. The workers who would be attempting to deal with this nightmare view it differently, as do the fishermen. I believe many fishermen would forego the Coho opportunity to be assured of a spot on the ice list on the 4th or 5th of July. Many fishermen would ice up and use the Coho fishing opportunity to legally prospect for Chinook while releasing the smaller, less valuable Coho. This plan makes the most business sense. Those fishermen who didn't prospect would be at a disadvantage, not knowing where the densest concentration of kings is. Most of the fleet would know where those bodies of Chinook are on opening day and catch rates would be unprecedented (skewing data again?).

3) Unnecessary and not worth the cost!

The processors will not get their necessary production, in fact they could have unnecessary costs and demands on workers. Consider the cost to fishermen. Stress? Especially high stakes during this conservation crisis! Consider the younger fisher families with high payments for boats and permits and houses. I may choose not to participate in this gong show but they may not be able to afford to. Delaying the opening will effectively cut at least seven precious productive days from our season.

Trollers produce best when they have uninterrupted stretches of fishing periods enabling them to locate targeted species and find appropriate effective gear for harvest. Once "dialed in" trollers can often produce several consecutive trips on the same body of fish or location. Untimely interruption is the typical cause for things to "fall apart." **Seasons opening and closing are the worst interruption, when the entire fleet needs to offload and ice at the same time. July 8th option requires 3 of these within about 10 days!**

Maintaining July 1st opening would maintain the integrity of a statistically significant data set, provide processors with desperately needed production that first week in July. Eliminate unnecessary stress and fatigue which could cause accidents, and give trollers who have spent these months prior to this Board of Fisheries deliberating, studying, working with staff, etc. a sense that their efforts have not been a waste of time.