



Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT)

September 20, 2022, Meeting Minutes

Virtual Meeting Via Zoom

The ABRT is established for the purpose of exploring the issue of bycatch and providing recommendations to policy makers with the goal of improving the health and sustainability of Alaska's fisheries, and protecting Alaska's record as a leader of fisheries' conservation and sustainability. ABRT website: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=bycatchtaskforce.main>

1. Call to order

The Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT) meeting was called to order at 9:00 AM by Chair **Jensen**.

2. Roll call: acknowledge Task Force participants

Task Force Members present: John Jensen, Tommy Sheridan, Ragnar Alstrom, Brian Gabriel, Linda Kozak, Mike Flores, Erik Velsko, ADF&G Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker for Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang, Seth Whitten for Representative Edgemon, Senator Micciche, Karma Ulvi, Jim Anderson, Stephanie Madsen, Kevin Delaney.

Other attendees: Karla Bush, Alaska Department of Fish and Game; Kari Winkel, Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

3. Approve agenda: September 20, 2022, was approved.

4. Approve minutes: August 16, 2022, were approved.

5. New Business

a.) Finalize research recommendations for ABRT report to Governor Dunleavy (ACTION)

Vice Chair **Sheridan** introduced the "ABRT Research Priorities" memo, dated September 13, 2022, with an initial focus on the memo's (3) General Research Recommendations. Sheridan summarized the approach taken by Task Force committees to reach these conclusions and their provision to the Science, Technology, and Innovation Committee for collation and distribution to the Task Force.

Member **Kozak** pointed out that these are "how" statements – they are not research, but instead are how we would develop research further into the future. Kozak stressed that if these recommendations were adopted, this would fundamentally change the way bycatch is researched going forward. Kozak addressed cost recovery's connection to research, and how that might help

to fund future research. Kozak noted that the examples provided are just that – examples, and not recommendations, just examples of how the General Research Recommendations might be implemented.

Member **Delaney** reiterated his interest in developing problem statements.

Member **Gabriel** spoke to the continued process of the ABRT, which will be addressed again later in the meeting.

Member **Fields** spoke to sensitivity regarding cost recovery, and how such processes are controversial to many fishery participants. Fields recommended further discussion on how such recommendations are developed and articulated.

Sheridan then introduced the memo's (3) Research Recommendations, including: gear modifications/improved technology; update assumed discard mortality rates; and, shifting distribution patterns.

Kozak requested additional discussion on these topics and briefly described how the committees came to agreement on these recommendations.

Madsen spoke to the third recommendation and how important that item is to those in Western Alaska.

Member **Gabriel** also commented on agreement among the committees on these topics.

Western Alaska Salmon Committee Co-Chair **Madsen** then introduced the recommendations specific to Western Alaska salmon.

Member **Alstrom** noted that several public comments were received that spoke to the commenters' beliefs that one bycaught salmon bound for Western Alaska is one too many.

Gulf of Alaska Halibut and Salmon Committee Chair **Gabriel** introduced the recommendations specific to Gulf of Alaska Chinook salmon. ADF&G's recommendations were used as a starting point, and it was generally agreed that they warranted additional discussion.

Senator **Micciche** suggested that members of the public may wish for the department's analyses to focus on specific stocks, and not be left to broader groupings.

Gabriel responded that when you get good data regarding harvest and genetic data by area and time then that data can be further analyzed to focus on specific stocks. Gabriel commented that the Committee wanted to move these recommendations forward for further discussion and was not necessarily recommending accepting all ADF&G's recommended priorities.

ADF&G Staff **Bush** briefly discussed the ADF&G recommendations.

Member **Flores** asked the department what rate are samples of bycaught Chinook being taken?

Bush responded that the sampling in the Bering Sea is most likely 1 in 10 Chinook salmon but doesn't have that information on hand. There are more samples taken than are processed and the confidence in those samples being representative of the total bycatch is high.

Member **Fields** asked about the spatial distribution by stat area – where are we at in terms of knowing the spatial and seasonality of target species of bycatch? Fields does not feel there's a fine enough focus on what we know or don't know about Kenai Chinook, for example. Attempting to get genetics done to really dial in genetics for specific species during specific timeframes. Does not believe this has been developed into as fine a scale as seems necessary and wants this recommendation to reflect the need for this fine level of detail. Fields notes that the department recommendations are helpful and does want to include them but also wants to make sure that the committee recommendations hold more weight in the final report.

ADF&G's **Bush** responded to Fields that genetic samples of Chinook salmon are being taken in the Gulf of Alaska pollock and rockfish fisheries and there are no other pelagic trawl fisheries in the GOA. The Council has seen these breakouts for specific areas and has looked at the differences when given adequate samples. There are some differences but more similarities than differences across the different fisheries overall. Annual reports on the stock composition analyses are available online.

Senator **Micciche** states that the public wants to know that their specific fishery is being considered and wants the department to speak to how we might let the public know that we are doing research on the specific stocks they are concerned about. Senator Micciche asks the Task Force if this finer level of detail is called for, and do these research priorities need to be altered to focus on these coastal stocks of public concern? Feels that the public might read this section and feel that the group is skating around what is being asked and wants the public to know that their direct concerns are being addressed and hopes that the language that is to be included will further clarify what the recommendation means.

ADF&G Deputy Commissioner **Baker** responded to Senator Micciche that some of these research priorities were suggested by department staff and wants to note that the broader areas have been the department's focus, and the department does not have a stance on the level of detail for such research. If the Task Force wants to focus research on a finer scale and identify specific runs or corridors, then the department has not identified a need for this finite focus but defers to the Task Force if they want to bring forth a call for research at a much finer scale.

Member **Madsen** commented that sometimes stocks of origin need to be grouped due to the terminal stream information that is available. When you look at the genetics reports you can see the grouping of the stocks of origin that are able to be identified. Madsen suggests that it might be best to provide information to the public so they can better understand what science and data is able to be determined at a finer detail, and what cannot be further determined due to lack of identifying factors. Notes that the Western Alaska Salmon Committee did discuss the department's recommendations and did adopt them as the committee's priorities. Madsen believes that there is an opportunity for the final ABRT report to include the two charts from the genetics presentation.

Member **Delaney** clarified the thought process of the committees that were behind these recommendations. Delaney notes that many of these are ADF&G recommendations and not those of the committee, and states that he is not comfortable including the department recommendations.

Member **Kozak** suggests that the committee recommendations need to be fleshed out further and that the department recommendations could be made as an addendum to the report rather than part of the committee recommendations.

Chair **Jensen** comments that Chinook salmon declines are a concern all over the state and even in southeast Alaska where there is no trawling and yet there are still stocks of concern. There are other things going on that need to be looked at and the department's research recommendations are needed.

Sheridan notes that the department's statements appear to be intentionally broad and therefore inclusive of many issues related to bycatch.

Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska Crab Committee Chair **Kozak** then briefly introduced the recommendations specific to crab species.

Gulf of Alaska Halibut and Salmon Committee Chair **Gabriel** introduced recommendations specific to halibut and informs the Task Force that Committee Member Fields provided an additional motion on bycatch utilization that was not taken up by the committee.

Member **Kozak** noted that there are management recommendations that will help to put these research priorities into better context. For example, bycatch retention and utilization are more related to management recommendations and suggests that implementation would require regulatory changes at both the State and Federal levels. Kozak is ready to have a discussion on better utilization of bycatch during review of management recommendations.

Member **Fields** comments on the State of Alaska's mail out surveys to collect information on fishery removals and wants to highlight that this might need to be reconsidered as the survey is requested months after fishing occurs. Notes that there are no recommendations on better bycatch utilization given the committee thought that this was outside of the scope of this Task Force.

Senator **Micciche** asks member Fields to further clarify what he means by better bycatch utilization. Does this mean maybe reevaluating what occurs with bycaught fish?

According to **Fields**, bycatch utilization focuses on the issue of waste and whether or not we should continue throwing away millions of pounds of halibut annually that just happens to be caught with different gear. Fields believes that regulatory requirements to discard halibut should be discussed and maybe changed into a situation where dead halibut are retained and not wasted. Fields wants to focus on no longer wasting dead bycatch and is open to further debate on what happens to those retained dead bycaught halibut.

Senator **Micciche** wants to make sure the bycatch utilization will be brought back up during the management discussion.

b.) Discuss next steps

Member **Kozak** reviewed expectations on process moving forward and requested a memo to go out to the full ABRT to inform members that recommendations not already forwarded by the committees should be sent to ADF&G staff by September 30.

Chair **Jensen** spoke to process going forward regarding additional proposals and when those would be due to be taken up at the October 12th meeting. After some discussion, it was determined that these proposals would be heard following a review of the committee recommendations, and Task Force members were encouraged to provide any proposals that are not addressed in the materials collected to date.

Member **Kozak** stressed the importance of the Task Force's opportunities to meet in person in October and announced an informal "meet and greet" gathering at the Egan Center in Anchorage on the evening of October 11. Kozak encouraged all Task Force members to attend in person so that members can get to know each other and discuss recommendations and the Task Force's work at every opportunity.

Member **Madsen** concurred with next steps as described and clarified that documents to be discussed at the October 12 meeting will include the committees' state engagement recommendations and management recommendations, which should be available for review by the public in advance of the meeting.

6. **Public comment**

Paddy O' Donnell addressed the Task Force and notes that tender vessels during the purse seine salmon fishery are discarding Chinook as no one wants to sell or process them, so that should be looked at as far as impacts go. Also notes that utilization of bycatch has led to some further issues and wastage and prohibited species catch still must be discarded.

7. **Task Force comments**

Member **Delaney** stated that the Gulf of Alaska Halibut and Salmon Committee in particular reached consensus on recommendations brought forth to the Task Force and acknowledged that Member Fields will likely recommend an additional proposal. Delaney stated that he saw no problem with the Western Alaska Salmon Committee including ADF&G's research priorities and asserted that the Task Force is very close to having reached consensus on research recommendations and encouraged Task Force members to speak up if that isn't the case.

Chair **Jensen** agreed and encouraged others to come forward with their own recommendations if they have them.

Member **Alstrom** commented on the Western Alaska Salmon Committee and emphasized that Western Alaska public members communicated to the committee that when salmon escapements are not being met and subsistence fisheries are closed as they have been for several years, members of the public believe that one salmon caught as bycatch is one too many. Member Alstrom emphasized the importance of subsistence fishing to residents of Western Alaska.

Member **Madsen** informed meeting attendees that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council is seeking nominations for a bycatch committee, with applications due on September 30. The Council will announce committee members at its October meeting.

8. **Next Meeting Date** is Wednesday, October 12 at 9 AM in person in Anchorage.

Member **Kozak** announced that there will be a follow-up Zoom meeting on October 18 and there may need to be another meeting to finalize materials to be included in the final report, which is due to be complete by the end of November.

ADF&G's Bush informed the Task Force that there is also a virtual ABRT meeting scheduled for November 15.

9. **The meeting was adjourned at 11:22 AM.**