



# Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT)

## October 12, 2022 Meeting Minutes

### Hybrid Meeting Via Zoom

### Egan Civic & Convention Center, Anchorage AK

*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

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

#### 2. Roll call: acknowledge Task Force participants

**Task Force Members present (physical attendance unless otherwise noted):** John Jensen, Tommy Sheridan, Ragnar Alstrom, Brian Gabriel, George Guy, Linda Kozak, Mike Flores, Erik Velsko, Raymond May, ADF&G Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang, Representative Edgemon, Senator Micciche (virtual), Karma Ulvi, Stephanie Madsen, Kevin Delaney (virtual), DCCED Director Jim Anderson (virtual).

#### Chair Jensen provided

- a) Welcome and opening remarks
- b) Review of ABRT and Admin Order
- c) Review of Process

#### 3. Approve Agenda: October 12, 2022, Approved.

#### 4. Approve minutes: September 20, 2022, Approved.

#### 5. Old Business

- a. **Review of ABRT committee research recommendations** was provided by Vice Chair Sheridan, documents were/are available on the ABRT site.

#### Western Alaska salmon discussion:

Commissioner **Vincent-Lang** asked a question regarding the general recommendations and requested feedback from the task force on what the goal of research is. **Vincent-Lang** responded to Senator Micciche that yes, the Department is doing a lot of research on various issues that may be causing the decline in Chinook salmon stocks; there is a research plan looking into gravel-to-gravel life cycle of Chinook salmon and what could be happening to them. Chum salmon are a different issue, as all of the poor returns are coming off of really good escapements which points to poor ocean survival. Bycatch can account for a small percentage of the missing fish, so it is a factor but not a leading factor. The Department is looking at

fishery interception and bycatch but changing ocean conditions appear to be having the greatest effect. Vincent-Lang noted that similar steps are being taken with halibut and everything with crab is pointing to a very poor survival rate in the ocean. The Department is looking to see if crab are moving north to colder waters. A question was asked regarding modeling of moving the fleet around to save one species could possibly cause an issue for another species. **Vincent-Lang** responded that the ADF&G Gene Conservation Laboratory is doing research to be able to further determine genetic stocks of western Alaska salmon, but the ability to determine different genetics is just not there yet and the Department is unable to determine this, although not for lack of trying. A study in Area M is being done on genetic composition and discussion by the Alaska Board of Fisheries regarding Area M commercial salmon fisheries is forthcoming this year. Vincent-Lang notes that genetics for chum matter because there should be a gap on Alaska origin chum salmon but not one on Asian origin chum salmon. That piece of genetic data needs to be there to put a more comprehensive cap in place. **Vincent-Lang** responded to Member May that genetics research is continuing to move forward but that ability to determine genetics in season is not something that can be done at this point.

Member **Kozak** Added that there was a struggle with the attempt to focus on bycatch but also really find out what the issue is with the species.

Member **Guy** wanted it recognized that Western Alaska Salmon are suffering. Notes that in every salmon's brain is a GPS and that they are not making it back to Western Alaska in the rivers and that any fishing is stopping the ability to subsistence fishing on the rivers. There is a right of the in-river users to fish for food and to continue their traditional values. This is a really sensitive issue for the Western Alaska in-river subsistence users. Fishing in Area M is an issue and causing loss of opportunity in river.

Member **Madsen** further commented on presentations provided to the ABRT in regard to Western Salmon and why the committee moved these research recommendations forward and that information about these stocks of concern is needed. Noted that rolling hot spot in real time could be a goal of these research recommendations. **Madsen** responded to Member Fields there was no discussion on enhancement because of the focus on bycatch and the difference of opinion regarding the need for hatcheries. Madsen responded to Senator Micciche that the committees did attempt to focus on bycatch and also the gaps in knowledge that need to be filled to have a true and complete life cycle understanding for these species. **Madsen** responded to Commissioner Vincent-Lang that there was not really a discussion of how moving fleets would affect other species. Notes that the pollock fishery is avoiding chum in general regardless of Asian or Alaska origin.

Member **Alstrom** Noted that good research can go on for years and this is a call for real time research so that good decisions can be made on that research. Notes there was not a detailed discussion for accounting of chum salmon because the in-river users feel one bycaught fish is too many.

Member **Gabriel** Commented further on research recommendations.

Member **Fields** noted there was no discussion regarding enhancement. Feels the nexus is understanding bycatch but that requires a full context of the life cycle and ecosystem of these species that are declining. The real question is bycatch — the primary goal to solving these issues — and based on the research recommendations, that it is not being addressed.

Senator **Micciche** notes there really is not a research element to look into the biomass issue as a whole and the poor returns of salmon. What happens if we stop trawl fisheries, and we continue to have declines? There are assumptions made regarding bycatch by the public but is there research going on to determine what is happening to the biomass that is not bycatch? Wants to link these studies to be linked and there

should be a tie to what we know and what we don't and if we only focus on bycatch, it does not keep the public alert to other issues regarding ocean conditions for survival.

Member **Ulvi** notes that as the numbers are declining there is a need to protect what is left and even one bycaught fish is too many.

Representative **Edgemon** underscores Senator Micciche's comments that the documents generated by the Task Force are going to be used by the legislature to fund some of these projects and notes that a discussion will be had in the legislature that will be much broader than bycatch.

Member **May** wants to know if the genetic studies on chum are necessary and how that could be implemented in-season.

#### **Gulf of Alaska salmon and halibut discussion:**

Member **Gabriel** spoke to the committee's process behind these recommendations.

Member **Delaney** spoke to how the committee discussion went and how these research recommendations were reached.

Member **Kozak** notes the input from International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) was important to halibut bycatch and total removals and discard mortality are the highest priorities in halibut information.

#### **Crab discussion:**

Member **Kozak** introduced and discussed the research recommendations and responded to Commissioner Vincent-Lang to clarify the discussion.

Member **Velsko** approves of the work Member Kozak did and thinks these research recommendations hit on everything that is needed to better manage the crab fishery.

Commissioner **Vincent-Lang** asked for more detail on data gaps regarding uncertainty in directed crab fishery.

Member **Delaney** spoke to the thought process behind some of the committee's crab recommendations.

### **6. Public Comment on Research**

**Autumn Cantu (via chat):** How do you decide what is high priority and who do you include on making high priority decisions? Communities on the river would like more input, or to comment on why the research isn't making action steps from the data collected already. Thank you, we would like to know what is causing the declines

**Laine Welch (via chat):** Pardon my naivete but if I were a villager in Western Alaska, I would not care about the genetics origins of salmon if the fish originated from a hatchery or was wild, I would only care that good numbers of salmon were available to me in my river. Why is there so much focus on genetic studies that will take years to produce results? And what will result from the findings?

Member **Kozak** responded with some basic information.

Commissioner **Vincent-Lang** responded that this would allow management to be more precise.

**Member Ulvi** notes that will there still be wild stock by the time these genetics have been completed.

**John Warrenchuck:** Impressed by the suite of research recommendations how related are salmon within a school. If there are a couple hundred salmon in a particular tow how related are they? We are focused on the overall genetic relation but what about the spatial distribution on a tow-by-tow basis? Feels there could be a better way to do genetics and collaboration on research

Member **Kozak** responded with a question regarding sampling and collaboration regarding research.

**Rochelle Adams:** From Fort Yukon along the Yukon River. Appreciates the work of the ABRT. Remind everyone we are on the land of the Dena'ina people, and that Alaska is a Native place, and these are Native lands. This stewardship of the land has been developed over many generations. This is to serve as a reminder that science is not only western but that there is Indigenous knowledge, and this should be acknowledged and used. Does not want to see her people go hungry due to the mismanagement of these systems.

**Martin Nicolai:** When research or management of wildlife and fish and game is trying to solve a problem, whatever problem there is. Trawlers continue to destroy the salmon, halibut, and crab and this is approved and legal destruction of these resources. Hardly saying anything about the issues with subsistence on the river and the destruction of resources depended on for the livelihood of the subsistence users of the Alaskan resources. This is an injustice and very unfair any salmon caught as bycatch is a direct decline of salmon in the rivers. Fishing for a single salmon results in a fine and the ability to fish is taken away. Becoming a criminal over one salmon is very unfair. Asking for a moratorium on trawl fishing in the Bering Sea for a period of five or more years.

**Cory Lescher:** Spoke to the general research recommendations, wants to know if they are laid out in a priority order. Feels it would be important to have a tier system for obtaining funds would be good. Appreciates the work of the crab committee and approves of the recommendations moved forward by this committee. Alaskan Bering Sea crabbers encourages collaborative effort on research. Would appreciate being included on the discussion. Looking for a winter survey and additional tagging studies but also collect seasonal distribution from logbooks of bycatch data.

Member **Kozak** asked regarding order of importance and what collaborative research the Bering Sea Crabbers would be looking at.

**Brent Paine:** Executive Director of United Catcher Boats, appreciates the ABRT and the commitment of the State to move this forward. This has provided an opportunity to discuss research and how different groups could work together to make this research happen. Notes the different methods to move the fleet off of bycatch. Spoke to some further research recommendations. Responded to Member Fields that knowing the amount of Asian hatchery chum salmon could inform on impacts of prey for Alaskan origin salmon. Good research drives effective management and that is what is most important to reduce bycatch and have successful fisheries.

Member **Fields** asked about assumptions of Asian hatchery fish.

Member **Kozak:** asked where the Asian origin chum salmon are.

Chair **Jensen** asked a question regarding salmon excluder use.

**Chris Woodley:** Executive Director of Groundfish Forum, concurs with Brent Paine that research informs management. Appreciates the efforts of the ABRT.

**Rebecca Skinner:** Executive Director with Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association, appreciates all of the effort put in by the ABRT. Notes that with resource management, balancing has to be considered. Notes that diverse species, area, and gear types were taken on by the ABRT. Notes that Senator Micciche comments about only focusing on bycatch and we don't take on the other issues affecting these stocks. If we are not looking at the root causes, we are not going to be able to address these issues. Notes also that genetics matter very much if the Kodiak trawlers were shut down due to a Chinook salmon cap it would matter very much to the businesses and communities of Kodiak.

**Paddy O'Donnell:** All salmon needs to be looked at. Crab bycatch needs to be looked at to further understand location of crab to better determine location and life cycle. Thinks there are many approaches to take to get more data and more information. Notes that fishermen are forever adapting, changing, modifying gear to reduce bycatch. Cannot lose sight of changing ocean conditions causing issues with survival of all species in the ocean.

**John Gauvin:** Fisheries Science Director for Alaska Seafood Cooperative, is concerned that some closed areas become legacy areas and that environment and area have changed over the 30 years since the creation of the closed areas. Encourages research on these closed areas to determine if these areas are actually still protecting the species they profess to protect. Responded with areas to consider looking into.

Member **Fields** asked if there were any particular closed areas to focus on here.

**Member Ulvi** comments that industry keeps talking about being affected and notes that she and her family and friends are going from thirty fish to ten fish a year to feed their families. This is very important to those who feed their families based on subsistence fishing.

## **7. Unfinished Business**

### **a. Task Force review of committee state engagement/management recommendations**

Presentations were given by committee chairs, all materials were/are available on the ABRT website.

### **b. Review of additional state engagement/management proposals received on/ by September 30, 2022**

There was a presentation of additional proposal provided by Member Flores.

There was discussion of an additional proposal put forth by Member Fields.

## **8. Public Comment on Management and State Engagement**

**Craig Lowenberg:** Appreciates the crab committee recommendations for rationalization and supports these recommendations.

**Paddy O'Donnell:** Has fished for the last 32 years around Kodiak and knows the bottom of the ocean and in looking at the tracks for all of the trawling. Transit lines for vessels are in there along with all of the other vessels it is all together, and you cannot tell which lines are actual trawl runs. Notes that if you are going to present a map of lines for trawling, they should take out the transit and processors and other vessels.

**Cory Lescher:** Feels all sectors should be minimizing bycatch so all recommendations should be focused on that. Female brood stock and essential habitat for crab needs to be protected. Those are important and did not get carried forward for further discussion. Directed crab fishery observer coverage levels were also of interest.

**Laine Welch (via chat):** Western Alaskans can't fish for salmon even subsistence. Bering Sea Crabbers can't fish for snow and red king crab. Yet it is business as usual for the trawl sector. I am in no way an advocate for banning trawling as I recognize the sector's economic importance. But why are no direct and immediate restrictions being imposed on trawlers as with other users while studies and discussions continue? An NPFMC report in April revealed for the first time that pelagic gear is on the bottom much of the time. What management changes are being discussed as a result of this finding?

**John Warrenchuk:** Senior Scientist for Oceana provided a PowerPoint presentation focusing on the seafloor habitat in the Gulf of Alaska. This presentation will be made available on the ABRT website.

**John Gauvin:** Provided some information regarding closed areas as a rolling basis.

**Sarina Fitka:** Thanked the ABRT for the time and effort put forth. Would like to see this continue as a smaller committee or advisor to the state. Has not been able to fish for 3 years. Wants that to be taken into consideration. This is important to Western Alaskans as it is their cultural identity, and recent salmon declines have had mental and social consequences.

**Julie Bonney:** Executive Director with Alaska Groundfish Forum, is sympathetic to the in-river Western Alaska subsistence users but also sensitive to Kodiak residents and the industry that supports the island. Trawling is important for the economics of Kodiak and everyone who lives there.

**9. Task Force Comments**

**Chair Jensen:** Closed out meeting with some comments on upcoming meetings and process.

**10. Next Meeting Date: October 18, 2022, at 9:00 am.**

**11. Adjournment at 3:30pm.**