



**Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council (BAC)
Bycatch Utilization Subcommittee
Meeting Minutes - November 20, 2023**

Subcommittee Members: Brian Gabriel (Chair), Chelsae Radell, Duncan Fields

Call to Order: Chair Gabriel called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM with all three subcommittee members present. Introductions of subcommittee members were made.

Also present were Bycatch Advisory Council members Linda Kozak and John Jensen, as well as Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker. Twenty-eight individuals attended the meeting.

Approve Agenda: The agenda was approved.

New Business: Chair Gabriel began with an overview of the subcommittee work to be completed and reports to be submitted to the Bycatch Advisory Council for consideration to be presented to the Commissioner. He provided a review of the Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force recommendation on bycatch utilization and reminded the subcommittee of the definition of bycatch which is, *"Bycatch is defined as fish which are harvested in a fishery, but are not sold or kept."*

Prior to subcommittee discussion, the chair called for public comment and advice on addressing the issue of bycatch utilization.

Public Comment: Four members of the public provided comment:

Malcolm Milne (North Pacific Fisheries Association): Supports the concept of bycatch utilization with several issues to address including first minimizing bycatch, adequate monitoring, ensure not to incentivize, and be aware of market competition for bycatch species which would result in unintended consequences. Also addressed differences in regulations between the State of Alaska and federal government regarding bycatch of yelloweye rockfish.

Rebecca Skinner (Alaska Whitefish Trawlers): Supported a lot of what Malcolm said. Appreciated the definition of bycatch being put on the record. It is important to address each regulatory body and their regulations in moving forward. Processor concerns regarding inability to process certain species is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

Erik Velsko: Served on the original Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force and believes that bycatch utilization is a good thing. Gave examples of other places throughout the world where bycatch is utilized and proceeds used for management. Important to set up the infrastructure to deal with bycatch and need direct individual accountability.

Patrick O'Donnell: (commented out of order): Spoke to the issue of deck sorting for survivability of halibut and that if required to retain, they would go from 68% mortality to 100% discard mortality. Most product now that isn't processed goes to fish meal plants and in Kodiak the processors own the fish meal plant and harvesters receive no benefit from the sale of product. Full utilization issues need to address more equitable solutions.

Subcommittee Discussion: Chair Gabriel asked the subcommittee to discuss how best to move forward and identify information gaps. Following is a brief summary of the discussion.

Duncan Fields: Would like the group to focus on a specific gear type, species and region as an initial step forward. Looking at big picture tends to bog us down. We need to recommend specific steps the state can take to move forward. Need conversations with the processing community and some incentives need to be considered. Using yelloweye bycatch as an example might make some sense. Reluctant to address where funds would go at this time.

Brian Gabriel: Agree that we can get bogged down and maybe it makes sense to look at a specific species. Stated that Malcolm Milne made a good point about avoidance of bycatch as a first priority. Looking at management and gear modifications. Maybe a good idea to have State of Alaska provide information on what is required to be retained and what is required to be discarded.

Chelsae Radell: Appreciate not wanting to get bogged down, but need to look at retention requirements, MRA amounts and the need to discard, while other gear groups retain the same species. Need to look at the Council process and bring in IPHC staff as well.

Duncan Fields: Can't solve everything at once. Halibut is one species we can focus on now.

Brian Gabriel: Need to address the concerns many groups and regions are expressing about incentivizing bycatch and need to be careful as we move forward.

Duncan Fields: Intention is not to legitimize bycatch, but it would be on a separate fish ticket and no benefit would go back to the harvester. SeaShare is a good program to review. Maybe consider the Gulf of Alaska first and work on a regulatory structure that makes sense.

Brian Gabriel: Presentations from SeaShare and from the processors makes sense.

Chelsae Radell: Processors need to be consulted as they struggle with capacity and processing multiple species at the same time.

Rachel Baker: Can provide some assistance in providing information and help with presentations. Suggest considering the focus to be on high value species such as halibut, salmon and crab.

Duncan Fields: Recommend that the focus be on federal fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska. Bring in processors to discuss issues and ask SeaShare to come to provide information on their program.

Subcommittee Action:

1. Agree to initially focus on high value species of salmon, crab and halibut.
2. Agree to begin with addressing federal fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska.
3. Request presentations and information at next meeting on retention requirements, processor issues and concerns, and the SeaShare program.

Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 1:00 PM Alaska time.
Meeting Adjourned at 10:52 AM.