



THE STATE
of **ALASKA**
GOVERNOR MICHAEL J. DUNLEAVY

Department of Fish and Game

BOARDS SUPPORT SECTION
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January 24, 2020

Mr. Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator
NOAA Fisheries
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
Chris.w.oliver@noaa.gov

Subject: Gulf of Alaska Annual Stock Assessment Surveys

Dear Mr. Oliver:

At its January 11-15, 2020 Kodiak Finfish meeting, the Alaska Board of Fisheries heard from scientists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and stakeholders alike regarding dramatic changes occurring in our marine ecosystem. 2019 saw an unprecedented loss of sea ice, rising ocean temperatures, seabird die-offs, and marine mammal deaths in the North Pacific. Based on National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) bottom trawl survey results in 2019, all directed federal Pacific cod fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska (Gulf) are closed for 2020, the first time this has ever happened. As well, environmental conditions in the Bering Sea appears to have caused major changes in the distribution of pollock and Pacific cod.

NMFS at-sea survey capacity in the Gulf continues to decline despite it serving as our most critical data source for stock modeling and biomass assessments. Recent and rapid climate change and its impact on fishery resources emphasizes even more how critical annual stock surveys are to the Alaska's fishery resources. Without annual surveys, the connections between anomalous observations in the ecosystem, which serve as early warning signs of fishery collapse, could pass unobserved, affecting the ability to manage our fish stocks sustainably.

Standardized annual surveys provide baseline information from which scientists and managers can respond to changes in species abundance and distribution in a timely fashion, potentially averting a more serious crisis. Historically, there have been three charter boats for Gulf bottom trawl surveys which takes place every other year. We encourage NOAA Fisheries to conduct their Gulf bottom trawl survey on an annual rather than biennial basis with the normal 3-vessel contingent which would help capture ecosystem changes in time to adjust models and quotas prior to a fishery collapse.

We thank you for your commitment to maintain funding for these essential stock surveys necessary for Alaska's commercial fisheries to thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Reed Morisky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Reed" and last name "Morisky" clearly distinguishable.

Reed Morisky
Chair, Alaska Board of Fisheries

cc: U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan
U.S. Representative Don Young
Dr. Robert Foy, Director, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, NOAA Fisheries
Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

FEB 24 2020



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Mr. Reed Morisky
Chair, Alaska Board of Fisheries
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
1255 West 8th Street
P.O. Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526



Dear Mr. Morisky:

Thank you for your letter of January 23, 2020, regarding Gulf of Alaska surveys conducted by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). We appreciate the information you have provided and value our partnership with the State of Alaska in managing Alaska fisheries resources. I agree that these surveys provide critical data for stock modelling and assessments and appreciate your recognition of their value. I also share your concerns about the environmental changes and unusual mortality events observed by scientists and community members in Alaska, and the unprecedented rate at which they are occurring.

NMFS strives to maintain a balanced research portfolio, which provides information needed for current management decisions and improves our understanding of complex population and ecosystem dynamics. To best achieve this, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center has implemented a research prioritization process. However, the rapidly changing marine environment and subsequent expansion of species distributions has increased the complexity and geographic scope of our mission in Alaska.

We are grateful for your support of conducting NMFS' historic Gulf of Alaska bottom trawl surveys in odd years on three charter boats. The importance of these surveys is reflected in your encouragement to conduct the surveys annually. However, an increase in survey frequency would compromise other critical research and be unfeasible at current staffing levels. Historically, in even years, three charter boats conduct bottom trawl surveys in the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea slope. However, as you know the Science Center could not support one of the three charter vessels in the Gulf of Alaska in 2019 and likely will be unable to support the Bering Sea slope in 2020.

We continue to investigate novel ways and scientific innovations to maximize our existing resources. Additionally, our annual longline survey in the Gulf of Alaska is a source of supplemental data to the biennial bottom trawl surveys. We are also working with our international and state partners to collect data in regions we cannot cover, such as the Gulf of Alaska in 2020.

These are challenging times that will require increased cooperation, coordination, and partnerships among all stakeholders. I appreciate your interest and valuable feedback and look



forward to working together to address the issues you have identified and achieve our shared stewardship mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Oliver". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" and last name "Oliver" clearly distinguishable.

Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator
for Fisheries