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To: Tom Carpenter, Acting Chair  
Alaska Board of Fisheries

Date: October 29, 2024 **RC 011**

Thru: Glenn Haight, Chair  
Rick Green, Commissioner  
Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission

Subject: CFEC Preliminary Dipnet  
Feasibility Survey

From: Reid Johnson, Research Section Lead  
Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission

In response to petitions to make dip nets a permanent gear type for S04H permits, CFEC conducted a survey on September 30, 2024, to assess whether dip nets are economically feasible for commercial fishing operations. The survey was distributed to 407 unique email addresses, resulting in 130 completed responses. Cook Inlet set net operations are often family affairs, with many permits sharing a single email address, reflecting multiple operations under one family. On average, about 1.65 permits share a single email address, while the respondents in the survey averaged 1.7 permits per address.

The survey collected data on participation in the dip net fishery. Those who did not participate were asked to explain why, while those who did participate were asked about fish harvest, seasonal costs, and crew availability. Respondents also had the opportunity to provide additional feedback.

Of the 130 respondents, 34 (roughly 26%) indicated they participated in the dip net fishery, and 96 said that they did not. Some individuals (26) reported that they did not dipnet because they fished in an area that allowed set net operations. Many non-participants cited the perceived lack of economic benefit as a key reason for not using dip nets, believing that the costs would outweigh potential gains.

Twenty-seven participants chose to disclose if they made a profit or not using dip nets; only 11 (41%) reported making a profit. The average self-reported cost of participation was \$7,262, with an average harvest of 4,569 pounds, translating to an estimated ex-vessel value of \$7,767. This resulted in an average net revenue of \$505. As is common in Alaskan fisheries, outcomes varied widely, with some participants pleased with their earnings, while many others reported financial losses. Notably, four respondents accounted for 50% of the total self-reported harvest, highlighting a familiar pattern of earnings concentration, which is typical in the industry.

A total of 18 dip net participants reported increased difficulty in finding crewmembers, while six indicated no change, and two found it easier. Although the added operational costs associated with crew shortages are not easily quantifiable, they nonetheless represent a real expense.

Among those who did not participate in the 2024 dipnet season, economic concerns were frequently cited as a primary reason. Respondents noted that the cost of equipment, crew, and other operational expenses outweighed potential revenue, making dip netting financially unfeasible for their operations. Practical challenges, including rough tides and demanding physical conditions, further deterred participation. Many respondents also expressed cultural frustration, as set netting has been a family tradition for generations. Some were critical of the regulations that pushed them to adopt dip netting, arguing that the shift was politically motivated and failed to address the actual causes of declining fish populations.

For those who attempted dip netting but did not profit, the overall feedback was more negative. Many reported significant financial losses due to low yields and high costs, with some describing the experience as inefficient and frustrating. There were also concerns about safety, with respondents mentioning dangerous conditions that made dip netting physically risky. Families who have been set netting for generations expressed deep sadness

about the loss of tradition, and they felt that dip netting could not provide the same economic and cultural benefits that set netting had offered over time.

In summary, dip net gear was implemented to allow some level of sockeye harvest while minimizing the impact on vulnerable king salmon populations, offering an alternative to halting fishing activities altogether. However, the economic feasibility of the gear type remains a concern: only 41% of dip net participants reported any profit, with an average net revenue of just \$505. These modest returns, paired with operational issues like crew shortages, raise questions about whether dip netting provides a viable income as it is currently implemented.

Additionally, many responses likely represent family-run operations, where a single respondent may cover multiple family members holding permits. This suggests that the net revenue per individual permit is almost certainly lower than the reported average, highlighting again the financial limitations of dip netting as an economically feasible gear type.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns about the information presented here.

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