

## **PROPOSAL 172**

### **5 AAC 40.XXX New Regulation.**

Board generated regulation that places a moratorium on pink and chum hatchery production.

Adopt a Hatchery salmon policy establishing a moratorium on any increase in egg take of Pink Salmon and Chum Salmon for the purposes of artificial production in the waters of Alaska relative to permitted levels as of 2025.

The moratorium would remain in effect until repeal or revision by the Board based on considerations that might include:

- 1) resolution of uncertainty in the science regarding hatchery-wild effects,
- 2) comprehensive hatchery policy guidelines for acceptable levels of hatchery straying; hatchery sanctuary areas for protection of genetic legacy salmon populations; criteria for identification and evaluation of remote hatchery release sites; criteria for new releases of hatchery salmon in areas where they do not currently occur; escapement goal assessments in enhanced wild salmon population; and ecosystem interactions with hatchery fish.
- 3) the availability of updated Regional Comprehensive plans that reflect current programs and comprehensive hatchery policies.
- 4) results of any independent scientific review of Alaska hatchery research findings, policies and programs that might occur.

A moratorium would call a time out on any further hatchery expansion in light of significant concerns and uncertainty in negative effects of current programs. This pause would allow time for the Alaska hatchery study time to complete its work and for current information to be incorporated into policy and practice.

This action endorses and codifies an informal policy decision by the Commissioner to not permit increased egg take for pink salmon hatchery production as reported in RC240 of the 2024 Upper Cook Inlet Board of Fisheries meeting. Without Board action, this informal policy could be set aside by a future Commissioner without regard for the current scientific information on hatchery effects.

This action is within Board authority as per AAC 16.05.251 (9) “prohibiting and regulating the live capture, possession, transport, or release of native or exotic fish or their eggs” and AAC 16.10.440 (b) “the Board of Fisheries may, after the issuance of a permit by the commissioner, amend by regulation...the terms of the permit relating to the source and number of salmon eggs...”

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** New information produced by the Alaska Hatchery Research Project and recent publications in the peer-reviewed scientific literature have identified a high potential for significant negative impacts of Alaska salmon hatchery programs on wild salmon stocks and the marine ecosystem. Hatchery Pink and Chum salmon have been observed to stray widely into Prince William Sound, Southeast Alaska and Lower Cook Inlet wild salmon streams. Wild Pink Salmon productivity may be reduced by low relative reproductive success of hatchery fish.

Significant changes in marine ecosystems have also been associated with large numbers of Pink Salmon including hatchery fish. Ecosystem impacts of large-scale hatchery in Alaska may have contributed to widespread declines in productivity of Chinook and Chum salmon in many areas of Alaska.

The *Policy for the Management of Sustainable Salmon Fisheries* directs that wild salmon stocks and fisheries on those stocks should be protected from adverse impacts from artificial propagation and enhancement efforts [5 AAC 39.222(c)(1)(D)] and artificial propagation shall be managed conservatively with a precautionary approach in the face of uncertainty [5 AAC 39.222(c)(5)(A)].

While enhancement activities are guided by a variety of Department policies, guidelines and processes, many of these have not been updated based on current scientific information and a comprehensive salmon hatchery policy does not exist. Regional Comprehensive Salmon Enhancement Plans [5 AAC 40.340] are out of date and current programs may be inconsistent with the available plans.

**Did you develop your proposal in coordination with others, or with your local Fish and Game Advisory Committee? Explain.** Not applicable

**PROPOSED BY:** Kenai River Sportfishing Association

(EF-F26-007)

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