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Yukon River Panel 100-419 Range Road Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 3V1

January 26, 2009

Eric Olson, Chair
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Doug Mecum, Acting Regional Administrator
NOAA Fisheries, Alaska Region
PO Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

Re: Industry Programs for Chinook Salmon Bycatch Reduction

Dear Mr. Olson and Mr. Mecum:

This letter provides our general comments on industry programs to reduce Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council discussed this concept at its June 2008 meeting and included it in Alternative 4 Preliminary Preferred Alternative (PPA) described in the December 2008 "Bering Sea Chinook Salmon Bycatch Management Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Regulatory Impact Review/Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis."¹ The Council will be reviewing incentive-based programs at its February 2009 meeting.

At our recent US/Canada Yukon River Panel meeting in December 2008, Dr. Diana Stram of the Council presented to Panel members an overview of the management alternatives. We very much appreciated this presentation and the opportunity to ask questions of Council members and staff about the alternatives and information presented. Some Panel members also attended two presentations of draft reports on industry incentive-based programs, as the concept of an incentive program is a key element of the Council's preliminary preferred alternative (PPA).

¹<http://www.alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/bycatch/default.htm> accessed 12-12-08.

At the Panel's December 2008 semi-annual meeting, four key points were identified by US and Canadian Panel members, alternates, and advisers: 1) a meaningful regulatory cap is necessary; yet a cap of 68,392 is too high regardless of an incentive program's effectiveness; 2) 100% observer coverage must be required to avoid any attempts to under-report salmon bycatch; 3) any incentive program has to begin working immediately; and 4) an incentive program must include funding, at a meaningful level, to support research relevant to salmon bycatch reduction.

The Yukon River Panel is an international advisory body established under the Yukon River Salmon Agreement for the conservation, management, and harvest sharing of Canadian-origin salmon between the United States and Canada. This Agreement constitutes Chapter 8 of the Pacific Salmon Treaty, which means it has the full power and force of an international treaty between our two nations.

In December 2008, Panel members described to Council members the very poor 2008 Chinook salmon fishing season on the Yukon River. The Canadian Chinook salmon escapement objective was not met for the second year in a row. Fisheries managers closed commercial fishing in the US and Canada; reduced fishing time in the subsistence fisheries in the US and in the lower Yukon River districts only allowed smaller mesh gillnets; reduced sport fishing bag limits in the US; closed sport fishing in Canada; and Canadian First Nations voluntarily reduced aboriginal fishing harvests by more than 50 percent. Even with these severe reductions, spawning escapement of Canadian-origin Chinook was 27 percent below the minimum interim management escapement goal of 45,000.

With the anticipated poor run of Yukon River Chinook salmon in 2009, fishery managers and Panel members will be gathering input from local fishermen regarding salmon management strategies and options to assist getting adequate numbers of Canadian-origin Chinook to the spawning grounds. Management and conservation of Yukon River salmon is challenging during these times of reduced salmon production when restrictions to subsistence fisheries may be necessary.

With in-river measures being taken to conserve salmon and improve escapement, it is equally important to abide by the Pacific Salmon Treaty, Chapter 8, Yukon River Agreement, paragraph 12: *"the Parties shall maintain efforts to increase the in-river run of Yukon River origin salmon by reducing marine catches and by-catches of Yukon River salmon. They shall further identify, quantify, and undertake efforts to reduce these catches and by-catches."*

It is a major concern to the Panel that without some analysis of incentive-based program proposals, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of any proposed program to reduce salmon bycatch. We urge the Council to request an analysis of proposals before taking final action.

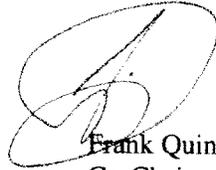
As the Council reviews incentive-based program proposals during its February 2009 meeting, we ask the Council to evaluate each proposed program with regard to the following: a) monitoring and enforceability; b) meaningful penalties for non-compliance, not simply a "trading" of credits or reducing or phasing out of participation in the fishery; and c) the inclusion of funding from industry for research that will help reduce salmon bycatch in the pollock fishery and to meet escapement goals established by the Yukon River Salmon Agreement.

We support responsibly managed and monitored sustainable fisheries and recognize that nearly every fishery has some level of bycatch. On behalf of the Yukon River Panel, thank you for your diligent work to reduce Chinook salmon bycatch and for considering our comments during your review of incentive-based programs.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Andrews

Elizabeth Andrews
Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank Quinn". The signature is stylized with a large, looping initial "F" and "Q".

Frank Quinn
Co-Chair