

**ARCTIC STORM MANAGEMENT GROUP, LLC**

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Seattle, Washington 98103 U.S.A.

Robert D. Mecum, Acting Administrator  
National Marine Fisheries service  
P.O. Box 21668  
Juneau, AK 99802

February 22, 2009

**RE: Comments on Bering Sea Chinook Salmon Bycatch Management DEIS**

Dear Mr. Mecum,

Arctic Storm Management Group is deeply concerned about the inadequacies of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) prepared for the proposed action on Bering Sea Chinook Salmon Bycatch Management dated December 2008. Based on these inadequacies, we do not feel the National Marine Fishery Service, North Pacific Fishery Management Council or the public can engage in an informed decision-making process.

The Arctic Storm Management Group (ASMG) is a long time participant in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. ASMG manages four American Fisheries Act (AFA) qualified vessels including two catcher processors and two catcher vessels. All our vessels are participants in the Bering Sea offshore pollock fishery. Approximately, three hundred and fifty people are employed on our vessels and in our home office. The future financial viability of these vessels and the job security of the people that work on these vessels and income to their families could be seriously jeopardized if the pollock fishery were closed prematurely by proposed actions to reduce Chinook bycatch. The DEIS provides very little information on the costs to participants in the pollock fishery, their families and communities and to the nation of a premature closure of the pollock fishery. As participants in the pollock fishery we find this deeply disturbing.

While we appreciate the time and effort staff invested in developing the DEIS under a truncated timeline, it simply was an inadequate amount of time to develop a properly analyzed document. Equally inadequate was the time allowed for the public to comment on the 762-page document. Members of the public requested an extension of the comment period. While we appreciated the twenty-day extension, it was simply inadequate to prepare a proper review of the document.

In addition to an inadequate comment period, the document additionally fails to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) insofar as it fails to include an adequate range of alternatives for considered action. Specifically, among the four proposed alternatives, there does not exist one that includes the current Bering Sea Chinook bycatch management regulation, Amendment 58. This regulation triggers the closure of a large area of

the Bering Sea, known as the Chinook Salmon Savings Area, when 29,000 Chinook salmon are caught as bycatch in the pollock fishery. Instead, the Status Quo (SQ) alternative includes only the exemption to that regulation as embodied in Amendment 84a. This action allowed AFA coops to be exempt from the triggered Chinook closure if they were party to an Inter-Coop Salmon Bycatch Agreement that manages monitors and enforces a Vessel Hot-Spot Closure program. Even though Amendment 58 is described as the backdrop to the SQ alternative, it is not a reachable alternative for the Council to recommend as long as the exemption allowed through Amendment 84a is in place. So in effect, the SQ alternative is the exemption to the current Chinook bycatch regulation. This exemption is considered an innovative program to avoid salmon bycatch. However, since the exemption was allowed, Chinook salmon bycatch has increased significantly. It is unknown if the increase in salmon bycatch is coincidental to implementation of the hot-spot closure program or if it was less effective in reducing Chinook bycatch in years of high interaction with pollock. Nonetheless, it seems an entirely inadequate range of alternatives *not* to include a proven bycatch management measure that is currently in place and was in place when the Salmon Treaty was signed with Canada. If this alternative were available, it would be ASMG's preferred alternative. We believe it is a proven management measure that best balances the legal requirements of National Standard 1 and National Standard 9. Unfortunately, we do not have the opportunity to support it because it is not included in the current range of alternatives.

In closing, ASMG would like to note that we fully appreciate the economic, social and cultural significance of salmon, particularly Chinook salmon, to the fishermen and residents of Western Alaska and the need to limit bycatch of salmon in the Bering Sea pollock fishery to the extent practicable. Our vessels have among the lowest Chinook salmon bycatch rates in the pollock fleet. Our vessels have volunteered to test the use of salmon excluder devices now under development. We are committed to actions now and in the future that will reduce our salmon bycatch further. Nevertheless, we feel that the DEIS is not adequate to support informed decision-making designed to reduce Chinook salmon bycatch while allowing for the reasonable prosecution of the pollock fishery. It is deficient in the range of alternatives it analyzes as well as in providing adequate biological and economic information to make a reasonable assessment of management alternatives.

Finally, ASMG endorses separate comments on this issue provided to you by the law firm, O'Connor & Hannan on behalf of the pollock industry and by the At-Sea Processors Association.

Sincerely,



Doug Christensen  
President  
Arctic Storm Management Group