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### **Fishery Managers Set First Ever Limit on King Salmon Bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska Pollock Fishery**

Nome – Late yesterday, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) voted to establish the first ever limit on Chinook salmon bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska pollock fishery. In 2010 the groundfish fleet caught over 51,000 Chinook salmon. This all-time high number reinvigorated a call from coastal Alaskans and members of the NPFMC to pursue a limit for future years. While a limit on Chinook bycatch was established for the Bering Sea pollock fishery in 2009, this will be the first salmon bycatch restriction in the Gulf of Alaska pollock fishery.

“This is a critical time for getting king salmon bycatch under control,” said Theresa Peterson, Kodiak Island salmon fisherman and community coordinator for Alaska Marine Conservation Council. “Central Gulf Chinook runs are hurting and salmon fishermen are restricted. This is a time for the groundfish trawl fleet to be part of the solution.”

In their deliberations the NPFMC considered a range of caps from 15,000 to 30,000 Chinook that would be allowed to be taken as bycatch in the pollock trawl fishery. If the pollock trawl fleet reaches the Chinook cap, the pollock fishery will be shut down. This past April, the NPFMC selected a preferred alternative of 22,500 fish, signaling the direction intended by the fishery managers. In Nome, the NPFMC heard testimony from the pollock industry calling for the least restrictive cap. They also received testimony and a letter signed by over 500 fishermen and coastal Alaskans urging fishery managers to adopt the preferred alternative, pointing out that this number was already a compromise and represented the middle ground. A 22,500 cap represents an amount higher than the pollock fleet’s 10 year bycatch average.

The State of Alaska, through the leadership of ADF&G Commissioner Cora Campbell, made the motion to adopt the 22,500 Chinook bycatch cap. Other NPFMC members argued that the pollock fleet deserved a 25,000 cap to give vessels more cushion to catch the allowable amount of pollock without hitting the king salmon cap. Their debate centered around how much responsibility to place on the pollock fleet to avoid salmon bycatch versus how much benefit there would be to the salmon resource.

“We appreciate the commissioner’s valiant effort to keep the bycatch cap low. Their effort was responsive to the needs of salmon fishermen and the salmon resource itself,” said Theresa Peterson. “We thought the 22,500 Chinook cap option was more equitable.”

After lengthy debate a majority of NPFMC members voted to change the cap to 25,000 to create more cushion for the pollock fleet to operate within a king salmon limit. Members standing firm on the 22,500 cap were Cora Campbell, Duncan Fields and Sam Cotton. (NPFMC chair, Eric Olson, was not present at the meeting due to a family emergency.) The majority, however, chose to reduce the risk to the pollock industry arguing that they need a management system that would allow trawl vessel to cooperate in keeping their bycatch low. The NPFMC intends to develop such a plan. Many in the industry and members of the NPFMC promised that a lower cap would be feasible in the future.

“The good news is there will be a cap on Chinook bycatch. Although a compromise was the final outcome at the Nome meeting, we do not consider this the end of the story. We anticipate opportunity in the future to bring the cap down to a better long-term conservation approach and will continue to work toward that goal,” said Theresa Peterson.

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