

Response to WFC ruling:

As President of Seafood Producers Cooperative, representing nearly 400 fishermen-owners, who reside in California, Oregon, Washington and Alaska, I want to convey our great disappointment and frustration with the recent ruling concerning the Wild Fish Conservancy and their lawsuit directed at our Salmon Troll fleet.

SPC and its fishermen-owners have been the premier producers, processors and marketers of wild-caught troll kings for the last 5 decades. These fish are one of our highest valued products and generally return the best margins to our membership. They are held in high regard by our customers who regard them to be the highest quality and best tasting salmon available. Losing access to these fish will not only reflect an estimated 40-50% direct loss of income to many of our family owned and operated Alaskan trollers, but also have a significantly negative impact on our profitability as a company, which affects all members. The loss of market share is also a major concern for us as customers turn to other products and sources to fill that void, and it will be difficult and costly to re-develop those markets.

We have a vested interest in conservation of the resource—king salmon represent a livelihood not only to our fishermen-owners but to future generations of fishermen as well. As fishermen, we have always been involved in the management process of these fish to promote future availability for our fishermen and the consumer who in most cases do not have the resources to go out and harvest King Salmon themselves but depend on the commercial fishery to provide this healthy and delicious protein source.

As long as I have been involved with our Co-op, nearly 40 years now, our membership has always had a seat at the table with Alaska Trollers Association, Alaska Board of Fish, Alaska Department of Fish & Game advisory committees, The Pacific Salmon Treaty, United Fishermen's Association, Washington Trollers Association, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations, Alaska Longline Fisherman's Association, and others. All of these groups represent fishermen in identifying sustainability goals, which include quota management and harvest levels, as well as habitat restoration and dam removals. Just as Bristol Bay fishermen have fought hard to keep a potentially devastating mine out of their region to save the salmon, we have fought hard to keep the Tongass National Forest from being clearcut and mined to protect salmon populations.

The WFC found a technicality in NOAA's Biological opinion for troll-caught king salmon. No other fishing gear groups are being attacked and other commercial and sports fishermen in the region (and in Puget Sound) will continue to harvest king salmon. The WFC thereby identified a potential easy win and targeted the industry group with the least amount of financial backing to fight this argument. (The troll fleet is made up of small mom and pop family-owned small boats.) I view this as an intentional and malicious move to drum up financial and popular support to finance the next pernicious lawsuit against commercial fishermen.

If this lawsuit were really about Orca recovery and King Salmon stocks, WFC would have identified and called out the challenges much closer to home, such as pollution, vessel traffic, and loss of habitat in the Puget Sound region, all of which have greater negative impact on the orcas than a small boat fishery almost 1000 miles away—and notably, meanwhile, the northern resident orca population in southeast Alaska has nearly doubled since the 1970s! WFC has publicly stated their opposition to hatcheries, and even successfully succeeded in shutting some down. If prey availability is the real concern, why would one reduce hatchery production? (Southeast Alaska's strategic use of hatcheries is one reason why resident orca populations have doubled there.) The fact that WFC, as well as Judge Jones, refused to consider evidence and testimony from our industry representatives only reinforces the idea that this was a one-sided endeavor with no consideration for the devastating ramifications for the fishermen and communities that will be affected.

There has always been an option to discuss the concerns with our fishing associations and to work together to address the concerns with Orca and salmon populations, while minimizing the challenges to our fleet and their way of life, but WFC chose a more confrontational path that has created opponents in the endeavor instead of allies. As fishermen, we have a vested interest in conservation of the species and we have participated in conservation efforts. We could have been an ally to help save the southern resident orca population. We all want to see the Orca population succeed and we surely have a vested interest in seeing our King Salmon returns increase, but we will end up funding attorneys instead of focusing our resources on restoration and prey availability now.

We have been fortunate and are thankful for the quick and supportive response in the face of this challenge from the State of Alaska, our coastal communities, most of the major fishery associations, other conservation groups such as our friends at Salmon State, as well as The Working Waterfront Coalition of Bellingham in coming alongside the Southeast Alaska Troll fleet in the effort to call out this irresponsible and misguided lawsuit. The State of Alaska has quickly appealed the order to the 9th circuit court and asked for a stay, and we sincerely hope the next considering judge is open to hearing our side of the argument. SPC and our fishermen will survive this debacle, as we have survived many others in the past, but the pain and unnecessary hardship that this frivolous lawsuit places on our fleet if our access to King salmon goes through to WFC's intended result will long be remembered in any future conversations.

Norman Pillen, President

Seafood Producers Cooperative