



Bering Sea Elders Group

Summer Newsletter, 2014

Chaninek Qaluyat Nunivak Working Group—Update

Inuuniagniqput –

The way we live as people
(Inupiaq)

Yuungnaqsaraq –

Our way of being
(Central Yup'ik)

Key yaq tak tak –

Way of life
(St. Lawrence Yupik)

OUR MISSION:

To bring together elders as one voice to protect our traditional ways of life and the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children's future.

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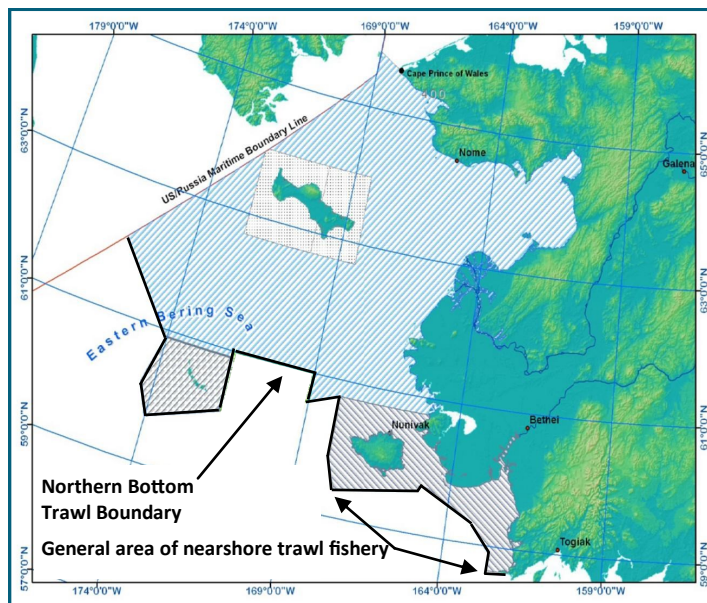
www.beringseaelders.org



The Chaninek Qaluyat Nunivak (CQN) Working Group is made up of five tribal representatives (AVCP, Bering Sea Elders Group and three at-large tribal members) and five trawl vessel owners in the Alaska Seafood Cooperative.

The tribal and industry members of the Working Group will share information in order to address bycatch and other concerns in our area.

Fisheries biologist Paige Drobny has been hired to support the tribal members of the Working Group. Paige has experience working with subsistence fishermen and tribes in rural Alaska, focusing on Yukon River salmon research. (When she is not working on fisheries, she is busy training her dog team for the Iditarod.) Paige will help us prepare for the first meeting of the Working Group, planned for October in Anchorage. This will include developing information about halibut bycatch in the nearshore yellowfin sole trawl fishery. This way we can understand how the trawl



fishery is operating in our area and how it may be affecting our local halibut fishery.

Special thanks goes to David Carl from Kipnuk and Michael Hunt from Kotlik for the time and expertise they gave to creating the CQN Working Group. Their efforts involved traveling to Anchorage and Seattle for meetings with the trawl fleet and being part of the Elders Group /AVCP team that worked to reach an agreement with the Alaska Seafood Cooperative. We are pleased to announce the formal Working Group will commence this fall.

Further information: Natalie Landreth or Erin Dougherty at Native American Rights Fund.

Chinook & Halibut Bycatch

In light of low returns of Chinook salmon to our rivers, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) is wrestling

with policies to continue the reduction in Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. (continued on p. 2)

(continued from p. 1)

The NPFMC will consider provisions to reduce salmon bycatch late in the year when encounters with Chinook tend to be higher, and to strengthen incentives for every pollock vessel to avoid salmon throughout the year.

The NPFMC is also analyzing measures to reduce halibut bycatch in longline and bottom trawl fisheries in the Bering Sea. They will consider a reduction of up to 35% of the allowable amount of halibut bycatch, and other ways the industry can reduce the mortality of halibut when it is taken as bycatch.

For details, see the NPFMC June newsletter available at www.npfmc.org.

Below are letters submitted by the Elders Group to the NPFMC in June.



Photo: Erin McKittrick



Bering Sea Elders Group

June 2, 2014

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

RE: Agenda Item C-5: Bering Sea Chinook Salmon Bycatch

Dear Chairman Olson and Members of the Council,

The Bering Sea Elders Group is made up of elders from 39 participating tribes from Kuskokwim Bay to the Bering Strait. Our mission is to protect our traditional ways of life and the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children's future.

Low returns of Chinook salmon, and the broad restrictions or closing of subsistence fishing, has become an undeniable crisis throughout western Alaska. Our way of being is disrupted and, as elders, we are concerned for our future generations.

The cost to our people cannot be measured in dollars or quantified in terms of lost company revenue and jobs. We are tribal nations who for countless generations have relied on the Chinook salmon to return to western Alaska rivers. Fish camps along the river are the pulse of the Yupik way of life in the summer. It is the way we have always lived, drying king salmon, teaching our children, and preparing food that we will share throughout the winter.

Our salmon culture is in jeopardy. But while there are not enough to catch for our families, Chinook salmon are allowed to be taken in the offshore pollock fishery as bycatch to ensure groundfish revenue is maximized. This is far out of balance. The situation is so dire that every fish counts. We must urge you to take immediate action to reduce as much as possible the amount of Chinook that can be taken in the pollock fishery.

Sincerely,

David Bill, Sr. - Chair

Fred Phillip - Executive Director

Our subsistence lifestyle is our culture. Without subsistence we will not survive as a people...If our culture, our subsistence lifestyle, should disappear, we are no more and there shall not be another kind as we in the entire world.

- John Active

From "Why Subsistence is a Matter of Cultural Survival: A Yupik Point of View"
Alaska Native Writers, Storytellers and Orators.
Alaska Quarterly Review, 1999.



May 27, 2014

North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 West 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501-2252

Re: Agenda Item D-1 BSAI PSC Halibut Stock Impacts

Dear Chairman Olson and members of the Council,

The Bering Sea Elders Group is made up of elders from 39 participating tribes from Kuskokwim Bay to the Bering Strait. Our mission is to protect our traditional ways of life and the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children's future.

We are very concerned about the level of halibut bycatch in groundfish fisheries of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands. This bycatch affects the overall halibut population and limits opportunity for tribal members along the coast to harvest halibut for our families and to participate in local commercial fisheries. Fishermen in our villages harvest halibut from small boats and skiffs. The halibut resource is a significant contribution to our local economies as food, income and jobs. We are concerned not only about the impact of bycatch on our fishing opportunity, but about the waste itself. In our culture, we have always been taught to respect everything that the land and sea provides and never to waste what we harvest.

The Bering Sea Elders Group and the Association of Village Council Presidents have collaborated with the Alaska Seafood Cooperative, made up of Amendment 80 trawlers, to establish a Working Group to address several issues. Halibut bycatch in the nearshore yellowfin sole trawl fishery adjacent to Kuskokwim Bay and Nunivak Island is an issue the Working Group will discuss, as the trawl fishery overlaps with our traditional use area and the local halibut grounds where subsistence fishing and the small boat commercial fishery takes place. The Working Group will be one way to address our questions and concerns about bycatch, specifically in these nearshore waters. The first meeting of the Working Group is planned for fall 2014 and we very much look forward to these discussions with the Alaska Seafood Cooperative.

The level of halibut bycatch for the whole Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands management area is a concern that we believe requires the Council's attention. Ultimately, the state of the overall Bering Sea halibut population is important to us because our opportunities to fish are tied to the health of the resource as a whole. Halibut move inshore and offshore at different times of the year for feeding and spawning, which means there is widespread mixing of the fish we harvest throughout the Bering Sea.¹ We know that what happens offshore affects the abundance of halibut that our coastal villages rely on.

The Bering Sea-wide halibut bycatch cap has remained almost the same since the late 1980s even though the halibut stock has precipitously declined in recent years. Halibut bycatch in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands now exceeds the directed catch.² In the combined Area 4CDE, which encompasses the small boat fisheries in our region, the IPHC estimates halibut bycatch is 205% of the directed catch³, and includes 2.23 million pounds of fish over 26 inches and 1.42 million pounds of fish smaller than 26 inches.⁴ The large scale of this problem requires regulatory action by the Council. We urge the Council to move forward with the development of a plan amendment to reduce the halibut bycatch cap.

Sincerely,
David Bill Sr.

Fred K. Phillip

David Bill, Sr. - Chair

Fred Phillip - Executive Director

¹ Ian J. Stewart, Steven J. D. Martell, Bruce M. Leaman, Ray A. Webster, Lauri L. Sadorus. June 2014. Report to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council on the Status of Pacific Halibut in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands and the Impacts of Prohibited Species Catch. P. 10.

² Ibid., p. 20, Table 2.

³ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

About the Bering Sea Elders Group

The Bering Sea Elders Group was established in 2007 because of our concerns about the proximity of bottom trawling to some of our villages and the potential movement of industrial fisheries into northern Bering Sea waters. Participating tribes join by resolution and appoint one elder and an alternate to serve.

We have one mind – to protect our traditional way of life, and the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children’s future.

Bering Sea Elders Group—Executive Committee

David Bill, Sr., Toksook Bay – Chair

David O. David, Kwigillingok – Vice Chair
(Alternate: Owen Beaver)

Harry Lincoln, Tununak

John Phillip, Kongiganak

Annie Cleveland, Quinhagak

Charlie Saccheus, Elim

Allen Atchak, Stebbins

Norman Menadelook, Teller

Iver Campbell, Gambell



Thirty-nine tribes and the Qayassiq Walrus Commission participate in the Bering Sea Elders Group.

Acknowledgements:

Quyana Jazlyn! We appreciate the work of our intern, Jazlyn Samuelson, this past winter. She developed a Facebook page to communicate with more people, especially youth. She also researched a potential school program that we hope to develop in the future to engage our young people more.