

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today on this very important issue. My name is Frank Kelty and I am the Mayor of the City of Unalaska, this nation's #1 commercial fishing port for the past ten years in tonnage landed and dollar value. Each year, 500 million to 700 million pounds of product is processed in my community, and the dollar value of that product is in excess of 100 million dollars annually. The total value of the pollock fishery in Alaska is one billion dollars per year.

My community has major concerns with the process that was used to develop the Jeopardy findings, biological opinions, and the reasonable and prudent alternative for the pollock fishery under the Endangered Species Act. Was the best science used? Was the research they worked off of current and up to date? Was a peer review performed on the science and research data? Or were these regulations driven in haste by the National Marine Fisheries Service/Green Peace Lawsuit?

The City of Unalaska supports stellar sea lion research and has provided funding in excess of \$30,000 to the North Pacific Marine Science Foundation Consortium of Universities, since its inception. The North Pacific Marine Science Foundation includes the University of British Columbia, University of Alaska, and the University of Wash.

This Consortium receives its funding from the seafood industry, support sector businesses, and coastal communities. The City of Unalaska has also used taxpayer's dollars to become intervenors in the Green Peace/National Marine Fishery Service lawsuit. Why would we use taxpayer's dollars on these issues? Because the fishing industry in Unalaska is the only economic base we have, and the pollock industry in our community is the most important part of our fishery based economy. In 1997, NMFS figures showed that 93% of all product landed and processed in Unalaska was groundfish. 83% of that amount was pollock. This shows the importance of the pollock fishery in the Bering Sea to our community.

During my 30 years working in the Alaskan seafood industry. I have seen the crash of the crab and shrimp stocks in the Gulf of Alaska, and I lived and worked in Unalaska during the Bering Sea red king crab crash in the early 80's.

I have seen, first hand, the devastation of coastal communities whose economic base has disappeared overnight. Employment in the community will be hurt, not just in the local processing plants, but in all sectors. We have support sector businesses that have invested millions of dollars in our community. Their revenues will be hurt, the people that they employ in transportation, marine repair, retail stores, fuel companies, longshoremen, and City work force will all be impacted. The City of Unalaska with a major

decline in revenues would have to cut back on services, program, and capital projects would have to be delayed or stopped.

There is a section in the Magnuson Stevens Act that talks about protection for fishery dependent communities. We should remember that section as we review these regulations. The most damaging impacts will be to the seafood processing industry. Both to onshore and offshore sectors, and the fishing fleets that provide the product to these operations. They have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in shoreplants, factory trawlers that process at sea and use Unalaska as their support base, and in catcher vessels that deliver to these operations.

I would like to share with you now some of the problems the seafood industry has encountered because of the recent adoption of the RPA's. The roe season was impacted with a 5% reduction. The roe season is the most important part of the pollock fishery, and is critical to the bottom line of the fishing fleet and the processors.

Aleutian Island area pollock closure impacted the fishing fleets, our local processing plants, the at-sea fleet and revenues to the community of Unalaska. This fishery is valued at over \$50 million dollars.

The new RPA regulations require a Stand down provision between seasons which is very costly to the industry.

Moving the fishing fleet away from sea lion critical habitat areas, and reducing the amount of fish taken from these areas, as well as other proposed area closures or buffer zones, could dramatically reduce the amount of fish available to all processors and fishing fleets. This could lead to quality concerns of the product received by shore plants by our fishing vessels who will have to fish farther away, and having a longer running time to get their product to the plants. Fishing in areas that the fleet hasn't traditionally fished could lead to bycatch problems, gear conflicts and could impact all fishery dependent communities in the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska.

National Marine Fishery Service has imposed a jeopardy finding. My community, other fishery dependent communities, and the seafood industry of Alaska that supports these communities are the ones facing jeopardy now. I would ask this committee to advise the National Marine Fishery Service of your concerns with the biological opinion, jeopardy findings, and the RPA's. Are these decisions based on good science and research? Changes need to be made to these regulations. We would ask your support for substantial funding for independent research with peer review. Continued research for this billion dollar a year fishery is critical to the economic well being of the State of Alaska, the community of Unalaska, and the seafood industry.

Thank You.

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