



Kodiak Salmon Work Group
104 Center Ave., Suite 205
Kodiak, Alaska 99615

RC 131

Kodiak Salmon Workgroup RC regarding Proposal 37

Establishing a science-based process for estimating stock-specific harvest and harvest rates for coastal Gulf of Alaska salmon fisheries.

Without the type of baseline information envisioned by a gulf-wide, multi-species genetic study as outlined below, Kodiak Salmon Workgroup cannot support any of the regulatory aspects of Proposal 37. Likewise, while agreeing with many of the statements contained in the preamble of RC-09, Kodiak Salmon Workgroup cannot support any of the regulatory aspects of this RC.

Kodiak Salmon Workgroup Encourages the Alaska Board of Fisheries to adopt a resolution requesting that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game consider the following plan for a gulf-wide, multi-species, Genetic Stock Identification program and provide suggested revisions to scope and parameters of such a program as well as cost estimates.

Conflicts and disagreements over mixed-stock fisheries in coastal regions of the Gulf of Alaska have existed for many decades. Arguments over harvest of salmon stocks originating in other areas have been regularly aired before the Alaska Board of Fisheries. All salmon species are highly migratory and pass through multiple management areas on their way to spawning locations. It is the nature of their biology. Specific regulatory action regarding mixed salmon fisheries in various regions is well intended, but usually lacks sufficient scientific basis regarding patterns of stock-specific harvest among all fisheries harvesting salmon during their coastal migrations.

Proposal 37 seeks congruent regulatory action for king salmon across multiple management areas, in partial recognition of their complex life history and migratory routes. While the proposal only addresses king salmon, similar issues exist for all species of Pacific Salmon in coastal Gulf of Alaska fisheries. The Board is hampered by lack of contemporary information on stock-specific salmon harvest patterns for commercial and subsistence fisheries, their relationships to species and stock abundance, and the impact of those harvests with respect to total run sizes of the various stocks or stock groups.

What is needed is a comprehensive genetic stock identification study in coastal Gulf of Alaska similar to the large WASSIP study in Western Alaska. This study estimated stock-specific salmon harvests for sockeye and chum salmon in all commercial and subsistence fisheries from Norton Sound to Chignik, and also estimated harvest rates which considered those harvests in the context of total runs. This allows all stakeholders to transcend simple estimates of harvested fish to a better understanding of what that means in terms of total stock-specific abundance for harvested species.

The study should be modeled after the successful WASSIP effort and include three principle components. First, the study should include all fisheries from Unimak Island to Prince William Sound including Cook Inlet over at least a three year period. To the extent practicable, it should consider all species of Pacific salmon since most coastal Gulf fisheries are mixed stock as well as mixed species fisheries. Though different species may be the focus of management and harvest actions at different times, mixed species harvests are common. Available data to ground these studies (genetic baselines and escapement surveys for example) varies widely among species but given the nature of these fisheries, efforts should be made to include each of them. Second, all stock-specific harvests should be placed in context of their respective total runs (harvest rates) so that there is a clear understanding of impacts of these harvests. Many issues before the Board are conservation related and this is the only way to scientifically consider the actual impacts of any species or stock harvests. Finally, the study and process should include all affected stakeholders through representation on a scientific advisory panel. Alaska Department of Fish and Game scientists should lead the effort, but fishery stakeholders should be intimately involved with design and execution of the study. WASSIP demonstrated clearly that when this occurs, all affected parties can agree on methods and ultimately the data generated from the study. Parties may disagree on the regulatory decisions made, but, as shown by WASSIP, no one disputes the integrity of data generated from such a study. For the purpose of regulatory action, and for maximum scientific benefit, this approach is far superior to a targeted study in a limited area.