

Senator Peter A. Micciche

Alaska State Legislature

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Members of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council:

I am an Alaska State Senator and an active commercial fisherman who represents the central Kenai Peninsula, where many commercial salmon fishermen, crewmembers, fishing supply businesses, processors and process employees live and work. With respect to Upper Cook Inlet and the creation of a Fishery Management Plan (FMP), I am writing to ask that the Council not consider implementing Alternative 4 in your upcoming meeting.

Starting with the process, it is difficult to understand why the Council would advance this alternative in the manner that it came forward. The NPFMC has an excellent reputation of being methodical and thorough in its' analysis leading to any final action. As we have tracked this issue, the record indicates that the case was being made to pursue some variation of Alternative 2, which I support. The last-minute amendment put forward to simply close the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) has not been supported by any analysis and has not been vetted in the tradition that the Council has taken on issues in the past. While a single gear type has been the focus here, there is much more at stake. This has clearly left the processing sector as well as the coastal communities I represent out of the decision-making process. Taking final action in support of Alternative 4 will harm the credibility of the Council, it is not a good-faith, problem-solving action.

Alternative 4 will have dramatic negative consequences for the entire commercial fishing industry in Cook Inlet, a commercial fishery which has been prosecuted for well over a century. Generations of Peninsula families have lived a life of fishing these waters, providing high quality protein to the nation and the world. Young crew members have earned money for college while being instilled with a work ethic which they carry with them for life. Alternative 4 will likely put an end to commercial salmon fishing in Cook Inlet and therefore, an Alaskan way of life.

Beyond the negative impacts to fishermen, their families and crewmembers, Alternative 4 will serve to decimate the few commercial processors who remain in the area. When the last processor closes their doors, the few commercial fishermen who may remain will be forced to hang up their gear and a century old key industry will become extinct.

User groups in the Cook Inlet area have long struggled to find a balance between sport, commercial, personal use and subsistence user groups. Alternative 4 drives a stake through the heart of one user group causing any chance of balance to be eliminated and 40 years of successful fisheries management to erupt into chaos. A fishery management plan is essential to ensuring salmon are available to all. However, a management plan which eliminates an entire group is short sighted, at best.

Some believe that the elimination of the opportunities in the EEZ will allow sport and personal use fisheries to thrive, unimpeded by commercial fisheries. The opposite is actually closer to the truth. Instead of a fishery beginning in late June, in an area with little allocation competition, more openings would be

required later in the season in order for the ADF&G to manage large quantities of returning fish, actually exacerbating the conflict. Inevitably, this will result in over-escapement and eventually smaller returns, directly and negatively impacting the quality and quantities of salmon available for the other sport, personal use and subsistence user groups. A 40-year relative balance would be upended without any consideration for economic impacts and ultimately, sustainability of the resource.

I cannot urge you strongly enough to avoid taking this path leading toward the ultimate destruction of commercial salmon fishing in Cook Inlet, and eventually negatively impacting the other user groups for decades. I recognize that management of fisheries is a challenge for all those who set future allocation levels. This alternative and the negative impacts on many thousands of Alaskans goes beyond a simple change in allocation. I sincerely hope you settle on a more traditional plan, such as Alternative 2, which balances the survival of the species and the various user groups who rely on salmon.

My primary job responsibility is to listen to my constituents. I have not heard from a single individual supporting the closure of the EEZ in Alternative 4. I have heard from many individuals, organizations and municipalities opposing the change. I request that you join me in opposition to Alternative 4. The plan appears to be a lose-lose that Alaska cannot afford, not only during these challenging times, but ever. We can and must do better for the sustainable salmon resources in Cook Inlet.

Politics and doing the right thing are often at odds. I respectfully request that in this case the right thing carries the day. Supporting Alternative 4 is not the right thing to do and I believe in your hearts most of you know that to be the case.

I am always available to further discuss my opposition to Alternative 4. I can be reached in my Kenai office at 907-283-7996.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Senator Peter Micciche

CC: VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Governor Mike Dunleavy
Ben Stevens, Chief of Staff to the Governor
Doug Vincent-Lang, Commissioner ADF&G