

Fish crisis demands real local input

Almost every part of Alaska has been affected by serious — even drastic — restrictions on salmon harvests. In some cases, the fish haven't shown up, or there was a perception of insufficient escapement on the part of regulators.

The restrictions have put a serious dent in the summer incomes and winter food supplies of thousands of Alaskans. State cabinet officials and even the governor himself have criss-crossed the state to visit the scenes of disaster. But what have these inspection tours produced? So far, not much.

We feel rural Alaskans have a right to demand:

— An end to political patronizing: no more grandstand trips unless there's a real commitment to both ease the current crisis and develop long-term economic and biological solutions in full partnership with local people.

— Respect for local resource knowledge. There is mounting evidence that the Dept. of Fish and Game is relying on sloppy data collection to support management decisions on the middle Yukon River, completely discounting local data produced by more reliable methods and years of first-hand experience. Local people have a wealth of biological knowledge gained from years of first-hand experience and a vested interest in management solutions with biological integrity. They should be frequently and extensively consulted.

— Honest answers and full disclosure. Dept. of Fish and Game representatives told Cordova fishermen they don't know if residual effects of the 1989 oil spill are hurting fish stocks in Prince William Sound. Don't know? Not a clue? Come on . . . Where knowledge is truly lacking, full-scale commitment to getting reliable scientific data is the only responsible course.

Alaskans living in Prince William Sound, along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers and Norton Sound have a right to be alarmed about the fisheries crisis and the way it's been handled. From Cordova to Kaltag and Kotzebue, they are entitled to a quick and conscientious response from the state, including an invitation to design solutions from the fishing ground up.