

## Frustration in Bristol Bay

There is a deep sense of frustration — and indignation and anger — about what took place during the recent herring fishing season at Togiak in Bristol Bay. The reports are bitter and deeply disturbing, and indicate that the local harvesters of the resource ended up on the short end of the stick, although none of the fishermen are pleased at all at what occurred in that fishery.

There were apparent conflicts between the gillnetters (nearly all local, western Alaska fishermen) and the seiners (nearly all from everywhere else), and conflicts between the processors and the harvesters. At the root of all the frustration seems to be a feeling that the local fishermen of the villages have little or no input into the process for establishing the policies which govern the management and utilization of the resource.

One gains an idea of the frustration fishermen feel in reading the editorial in the current issue of the *Bering Sea Fisherman*. The editorial, entitled "Why Can't the Good Guys Win?" describes a meeting of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council concerning a plan to limit the amount of Togiak and Bering Sea coast herring taken by foreign trawlers. In the view of the *Bering Sea Fisherman*, the decision was adverse to Alaskan fishermen. In our reading of the editorial, it appeared as though the writers' frustration was not so much from the decision itself (although it was considered greatly unfavorable) as it was from the process through which that decision was adopted. The North Pacific Fisheries Council, a federal organization, regulates fisheries from three miles offshore to the 200 mile limit. Within the three-mile linear mark, the regulations of the Alaska Board of Fisheries are in effect. The writer indicates discomfort at the formality of the NPFMC meetings and its apparent vulnerability to well-organized, well-coordinated lobbying machinery representing foreign fishing interests. There is undoubtedly some merit to that perception.

If the frustration stems from the feeling that local fishermen lack input into the policy-making process, then perhaps we should advocate bringing that process as close as possible to the Alaskans who are most dependent upon the resource. That is only fair. And, perhaps, we can begin with the Alaska regulatory organization, the State Board of Fisheries.

One way of making local fishermen believe that their input counts is to start holding meetings of the Board of Fisheries in the communities which are closest to, and most dependent upon, those fisheries. It is doubtful that the sense of anguish felt among local fishermen about what happened with the Togiak herring would be so great if the Board of Fisheries considered the Togiak herring proposal at Togiak in full view of the local fishermen.

Many of the decisions of the Board are made in telephone conferences. And many other decisions affecting fisheries are made in Anchorage, far-removed from both the affected communities and the resource.

If this can be done, the public policy process can be brought closer to those most affected by those policies. The local fishermen may be relieved of much of the frustration which they now feel. The NPFMC may be another story, but the Board of Fisheries can take one positive step in meeting throughout Alaska in each affected area when they consider regulations affecting that fishery.

If this happens, the Good Guys may not always win, but they'll likely feel better about the process.