

Vote to halt U.S. interception fails

by Harold Sparck
for the Tundra Times

BETHEL — On a 5-5 tie that failed, the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council voted recently not to start the process of limiting the interception of salmon by U.S. trawlers operating in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea as part of its 1990 Bering Sea/Aleutian Island and Gulf of Alaska Fisheries Management Plan Amendment Cycle.

As a result of this vote, U.S. trawlers are free to harvest and then discard dead salmon without penalty for at least one more year.

Although Alaskan salmon are shared by both Alaskans and Pacific Northwest interests, the council vote reflected the recent split between in-state and out-of-state interests on off-shore trawling versus territorial sea fishing.

The plan amendment to include limits on salmon bycatch had been submitted by the Kuskokwim Fishermen's Cooperative of Bethel and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Fisheries Task Force.

Salmon interests representing both fishermen and processors had voted 11-6 on the council's advisory panel to support the addition of salmon to the 1990 amendment cycle.

Voting on the council for the motion were Henry Mitchell of the Bering Sea Fisherman's Association, Alaska Department of Fish & Game Commissioner Don Collinsworth, Larry Cotter of Juneau, Tony Knowles of Anchorage and the National Marine Fisheries Service's Jim Brooks.

Voting against the motion were Council Chairman John Peterson of Seattle, Kodiak's Oscar Dyson, Washington State's Commissioner of Fisheries Joe Blum, Bob Mace for the State of Oregon and Bob Alverson of Seattle.

The motion and vote took place during the absence of John Winther of Petersburg.

Alaska salmon interests have lobbied for salmon bycatch limits on the domestic fleet since soon after "Americanization" of the offshore trawl industry began to take place. Salmon remain a prohibited species and cannot be retained, but must be discarded.

All salmon are returned to the sea dead. American trawlers are free to take salmon without penalty.

Unlike the U.S. fleet, foreign trawl fisheries had observer coverage and bycatch limits for salmon.

These caps resulted from successful efforts by Western Alaskans to limit interception of king salmon in the Bering Sea. In the event that a foreign nation's trawlers exceeded the king bycatch limit, that nation's fishery would be suspended first in the fishing area.

In the event that the total king bycatch limit was reached, all foreign trawling would end for the year.

Documentation of significant interception of king salmon in the Shelikoff Straits pollock fishery brought Kodiak area fishermen and the Southeast troll fisheries into the bycatch effort.

Western Alaskans knew the location

OPINION

of foreign trawl interceptions. Observers on U.S. trawl vessels reported salmon being taken in the Unimak Pass area. American trawlers concentrate in this area in July, August and September.

Alaskan salmon interests must find another vote on the council to make their case in the 1991 council amendment cycle. The term of the council's vice chairman, Winther, expires this year. Winther is a candidate for re-nomination by Gov. Steve Cowper to another three-year seat on the council.

Winther's swing vote to support the

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election for Seattle's Peterson to chair the council did not endear him to Cowper. His absence at this critical salmon vote was viewed by many council observers as another stumbling block to his re-nomination by Cowper.

Salmon interests present at the meeting viewed his absence as additional incentive to submit alternate names to Cowper for nomination to the council by mid-February.