

BOARD OF FISH PUBLIC TESTAMONY.

Jeff Berger

Box 39229

Ninilchik, Alaska 99639

Thank you Mr. Chairman and board members for the opportunity to testify

My name is Jeff Berger I am Kenai Peninsula Regional Manager for Copper River Seafood's. I formerly owned a small primary and secondary processing plant in Ninilchik for 27 years. I have been in the Seafood industry all of my life and have bought all species of fish year around in Cook Inlet since 1986. I participated Bristol Bay and Kodiak fisheries before that.

We have had a long standing dichotomy between user groups in our area. As urban expansion has developed there is increasing demand for this resource. It is not possible for any user group to expand infinitely nor is it wise to forsake one user group over another. With proper management and enhancement there can be enough resource for us all to share. We need to build a prosperous, diversified economy that future generations deserve.

Currently the biggest challenge we face is diminishing confidence that we will have an industry to pursue in the future. I would strongly encourage the Board to put this issue to rest, once and for all, by assuring everyone that all user groups have a rightful place and that this will be the course for the foreseeable future. This issue has great bearing on our ability to make diligent long term investment to maintain a vibrant and diverse local economy.

Another very difficult areas for our industry is concentration of the harvest in a very few days. When considering management of the fishery we need the ability to spread the harvest from the beginning of the run to the end. If we have the harvest spread out it gives us much better quality of product and the department much better data, in season. The board should support regular openings throughout the fishery. The department can still close by EO if we are in a situation with exceptionally low returns. As everyone knows the harvest is a sharp bell curve and during the peak it is impossible to not over escape the habitat unless you start early and utilize all of the tools available.

I believe we are mandated to manage our fisheries for Maximum Sustained Yield for the benefit of all users. With the increasing population we must preserve our habitat and enhance our resource. Our current problem with King Salmon is a propagation of a number of factors, not the least of which, is pressure in the river. This segment has grown and will continue to do so while the commercial harvesters have been capped since limited entry in the early 1970's.

If we enhance King Salmon we could harvest more in the saltwater marine fishery and not on the spawning grounds. This would be beneficial for everybody. We stopped or cut back most enhancement programs on the grounds of genetic diversity and argument that cultured Salmon have an unnatural advantage. This bus sailed almost 100 years ago when the Kenai River was enhanced with Columbia River Stocks. We should have King Salmon returning to every fresh water stream that flows into the east side of Cook Inlet. Let's not continue down the road of political destruction of our two best segments of our economy.

Thank you again for the opportunity participate in this process. I am happy to answer any questions that I can.

Jeff Berger