

**PROPOSAL 143 – 5 AAC 21.505. Cook Inlet Smelt Fishery Management Plan.** Increase the amount of smelt that may be taken in the Cook Inlet commercial smelt fishery from 100 tons to 200 tons annually, as follows

Change the eulachon or smelt quota in Cook Inlet from 100 tons to 200 tons as follows:

5AAC 21.505 1.e. Total harvest is limited to 100 tons or less.

Change to:

5AAC 21.505 1.e. Total harvest is limited to 200 tons or less.

**What is the issue you would like the board to address and why?** We would like the board to increase the quota for smelt in the Cook Inlet commercial smelt fishery from 100 tons to 200 tons.

In 2005, this was a new and developing fishery and the board passed a very conservative quota partly out of concern that markets were unknown and they didn't want waste to occur. After 10 years of this fishery, no waste has ever occurred and markets at this point would accept more than the 100 ton limit. Having such a low quota causes an unnecessary race for fish by the participants in this fishery, and causes managers to have to be unduly burdened with very close monitoring of the catch which can exceed the quota in just a few short days.

Although definitive run size data is unavailable at this time, there has been some stock assessment done and the department has 10 years of good harvest data. A Didson sonar counter trial showed that run passage can exceed 100,000 fish (about 15,000 lbs) per hour at which time it's impossible to get an accurate enumeration. We have shown that a single person may catch 35,000 fish (5,000 lbs) per hour with a very small (22 inch) hand held dipnet, while the vast majority swim past as escapement. The current 100 ton quota gets caught in just a few days by just a few people and the impact on the run is miniscule. Many other river systems in Cook Inlet, besides just the Susitna, also have healthy stocks of smelt and are not even targeted by this fishery.

The State of Alaska, the governor, legislators, and many others are often pointing out how our natural resources are "locked up". Here is a vast resource that is almost completely unused and is controlled by the State through the board of fisheries. This fishery has provided a bit of work and money for a group of fishermen and cannery workers before the salmon season. The State gets to collect fish taxes and it's good for the economy. It should be doing even more.

**PROPOSED BY:** Teague Vanek

(EF-F16-144)

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