

96-165-FB

(Previously)  
Finding # 96-09-FB

## ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES

### FINDINGS

#### CONCERNING NORTH ALASKA PENINSULA FISHERIES

The Board of Fisheries (board), in its January 16 through 29, 1996 meeting, considered proposals pertaining to fisheries in the Northern District of the Alaska Peninsula area. These findings are intended to summarize the board's actions on these proposals so that the public and future boards will understand the reasons for these actions.

#### Background

The board held its regularly scheduled meeting on proposals for changes to regulations in the Alaska Peninsula area during February-March, 1995. However, the board was unable to complete its work on all the proposals during that meeting, including proposals relating to the Northern District. The board publicly noticed another meeting to begin on January 16, 1996, to consider the proposals left over from the prior meeting.

Most of the proposals presented to the board requested that the board restrict the fisheries in the Northern District, particularly the drift gillnet fishery. These proposals took many forms. Some sought to restructure the fishery by creating small terminal areas around the mouths of rivers, by moving section boundaries west, or by limiting the distance from shore that drift gillnetters would be allowed to fish. Other proposals asked for delays in the season or opening dates of sections within the Northern District. Still other proposals urged the board to reduce the size or amount of gear that drift gillnetters would be allowed to use in the Northern District. There were also proposals to impose limits on the harvest of fish in the Northern District. The premise underlying all these proposals was that the fisheries in the Northern District, and particularly in the Three Hills and Ilnik Sections, intercept an excessive amount of sockeye bound for Bristol Bay.

The question of whether and to what extent the Northern District fisheries intercept Bristol Bay salmon was the subject of several staff reports, both written and oral. This issue was also addressed during public testimony and in written comments from the public; over 150 people testified and/or submitted written comments during this meeting, and a substantial portion of this public input pertained to the North Peninsula.

Staff Comments

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (department) presented a number of reasons why previous studies estimating substantial interception at certain times and in some areas, based on scale pattern analysis, were no longer reliable and should not be used to draw conclusions about the stock composition of the fishery. The department assumes that there is some harvest of Bristol Bay bound sockeye at some times and in some areas of the Northern District, but is unable to quantify the amount of that interception or determine when and where it might occur. The department also acknowledged the likelihood that North Peninsula bound sockeye are intercepted in the east-side fishing districts of Bristol Bay.

The department presented additional information indicating that North Peninsula sockeye spawning systems have the potential to produce an amount of sockeye salmon that is more than sufficient to support recent harvest levels.

The department also described the development of the management regime in the Northern District, based on the nature of the coastline and duration of the salmon runs returning to local river systems. In general, by dispersing the fleet along the coast, management is able to obtain a steady stream of escapement from all portions of the runs and promote an orderly fishery that harvests and delivers fish in a predictable manner. While maintaining its neutrality on the allocative implications of the proposals, the department expressed concerns that restructuring the management system which it has evolved in the Northern District could lead to management errors and problems meeting or exceeding escapement objectives, could decrease the managers flexibility, could create problems for the fleet during bad weather, and may disrupt the current orderly harvest.

The board also received information on the current status of Bristol Bay sockeye runs. There are currently no conservation concerns for Bristol Bay sockeye systems and harvests are at record levels.

Public Comments

Scientific and anecdotal testimony and written comments from persons opposed to changing management in the Northern District significantly disputed that there is any substantial level of interception of Bristol Bay sockeye along the North Peninsula. This included information on the probable sockeye salmon migratory patterns as determined from exploratory fishing and oceanography studies and the Port Moller test fishery; travel times from tagging on the South Peninsula; age composition comparisons between North Peninsula catches and catches in the test fishery and in Bristol Bay; and fisherman's behavior, all indicating that the sockeye within three miles of the coast both in the eastern portion of Bristol Bay and along the North Peninsula are largely moving southward out of the bay, not northward, to find their natal streams. These persons also provided considerable information on the advantages of dispersed management. Supporters of the proposals to restrict the North Peninsula fishery argued that, even if the board was unable

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to quantify the magnitude of any intercept of Bristol Bay fish in the Northern District, run timing and other information suggested that Bristol Bay stocks were harvested there. The board also received testimony concerning the growth in effort and harvest levels in various North Peninsula fishing districts and in fishing districts in the east side of Bristol Bay. Recent increases in sockeye catches in both areas appear to have resulted from increased abundance of sockeye returning to both the North Peninsula and Bristol Bay, respectively.

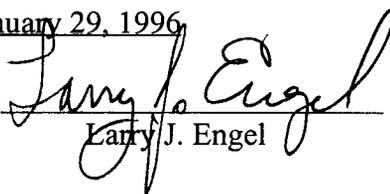
Summary of Board Action

Like past boards that have rejected proposals to restructure the North Peninsula fisheries, the board found no reason to reduce fishing districts, seasons, or harvests in the Northern District. The board recognizes that there may be some amount of interception of Bristol Bay fish in the Northern District. The board further finds that the Northern District Fishery is not an expanding fishery, and does not warrant action under the board's mixed stock policy.

The board did make two changes to North Peninsula regulations. The board amended 5 AAC 09.310 (a)(1)(3) to make the line at Unangashak Bluffs in the Inik Section a longitude line rather than a loran line. This change brings this management line into conformity with other boundary lines in the area, all of which are based on longitude rather than Loran lines, and is intended to provide for an orderly fishery. The board also adopted a regulation to clarify that management of Northern District fisheries is based upon established fishing periods, unless superseded by emergency orders. This change simply codified existing practice by the board.

Approved: January 29, 1996

Board Chair:

  
Larry J. Engel

Vote: 4-3 (yes - no)