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## ADFG Commissioner Reports on Yukon Chum Salmon to Alaska House Fisheries Committee

The House Fisheries Committee invited ADFG Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang to speak about the recent low Yukon salmon returns. He addressed the Committee on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022. He began his comments:

*‘Many reasons including bycatch in marine fisheries are being identified as the culprit for the low returns. So, is bycatch the culprit? Or simply a piece of the puzzle the we must put together to see the entire picture of what happened this past summer. Seeing the complete picture allows us to focus our management and research efforts on what will make the biggest difference in ensuring the sustainability of these runs and the future of these runs that have the least impact on Alaskan fisheries and communities.’*

The Commissioner discussed possible reasons for the low Yukon chum returns. He recognized trawl bycatch by groundfish fishermen as one possible contributor to low returns. However a [recent NMFS report](#) shows only about 16% of chum bycatch in Bering Sea pollock fisheries are bound for Western Alaska, compared to 39% headed to Northeast Asia. The Commissioner noted that all fisheries are cyclical and cited ocean conditions, competition by chum with sablefish for food and a sharp increase in the number of marine mammals as other possibilities. The first months of salmon survival in the marine environment are critical, and marine survival and ocean conditions are the most likely cause of low returns. The Commissioner surmised Russian fisheries outside US waters could also be a factor.

The Commissioner answered several Committee Member questions about the South Alaska Peninsula salmon fisheries in Area M. The State salmon fishery in Area M is a mixed-stock fishery that lawfully allows harvest of salmon destined outside the region, especially during June. Post-June chum harvested in Area M are a majority local stocks,

with negligible harvest of Western Alaska stocks. This also demonstrates that Area M harvest cannot be the sole cause of low returns, as the AYK fall chum run also collapsed despite minimal harvest in Area M. There were 802,000 chum harvested during the 2021 South Peninsula June salmon fishery, a record number since June of 1982 (1,095,044 chum) and 38% over the previous 5-year average of 498,236 chum harvested in June. On several occasions, Committee members confused salmon bycatch in the federal fisheries (i.e. Bering sea pollock) with harvest of salmon in the Area M fishery. The Commissioner reminded Committee members that salmon caught in State-water salmon fisheries are *not* bycatch.

## **Research Considerations**

Commissioner Vincent-Lang said the ADFG is beginning a study this year to look at the genetic stock composition of chum salmon in South Alaska Peninsula salmon fisheries. The study will be funded in 2022 with food security monies considering chum as an important food source for the Yukon. Moving forward, the ADFG has a \$2 Million supplemental FY 22 capital budget request to the Legislature for continuing the research for 2 to 3 years to allow a representative sampling over time.

The Commissioner said he expects the study to inform Board of Fish decisions as soon as the 2023 management year and the upcoming 2022/2023 cycle that will include the Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian Islands/Chignik finfish meetings. The best information currently available is from the Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Project ([WASSIP](#)) study during a time of relatively high abundance over 10 years ago. *'We're interested in collecting information in a period of low chum abundance right now.'* he said.

In addition to research in the South Pen salmon fisheries, the Department will be managing proactively: *'I have also directed my staff to explore options for what I could do this summer using my Emergency Order authority to reduce intercept of Western Alaska chum salmon stocks during June if again we experience low chum returns and subsistence fishing is restricted or closed.'* He said ADFG is working with fishing groups to look at ways to disincentivize harvesting chum salmon in South Pen June fisheries.

The Commissioner stated the ADFG will expand on the research of Dr. Katie Howard, Fisheries Scientist with the ADF&G Salmon Ocean Ecology Program. The Alaska House Fisheries Committee was presented the 2021 Salmon Stock Status Summary by Dr. Katie Howard as well as a presentation on Disaster Declarations for Alaska Fisheries by Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker on [Tuesday February 15, 2022](#).

## Area M Response

Following the Commissioner's remarks to the House Fisheries Committee, the Area M Seiners Association, joined by Concerned Area M Fishermen and the Aleutians East Borough, sent a [letter](#) to the Committee, thanking the Committee for the attention paid to the historic and economically important Area M fishery. The groups expressed their support for the Commissioner's proposal for new genetic research that will be critical for fishery managers to make informed decisions. However, they also noted there is an existing comprehensive baseline of genetic data and any future research should be equally robust

The groups also agreed with the Commissioner's comments that the harvest of chum salmon bound for Western Alaska in Area M fisheries may be over-estimated, due to baseline genetic information in WASSIP collected in years of high abundance. Incidental harvest of Western Alaska chum and other salmon is generally related to abundance. The letter also pointed out a previous Board of Fisheries finding that "found that the impact of the June fishery on specific stocks of AYK chum salmon is negligible and that reducing the chum harvest in the fishery would not produce detectable results or measurable benefits to AYK chum runs."

The Aleutians East Borough, Area M Seiners Association and CAMF are all committed to working with the ADFG to collect accurate information to inform fishery management decisions that will lead to sustainable salmon fisheries and sustaining the communities that depend on these fisheries.

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## Board of Fisheries Statewide Shellfish Meeting

The Board of Fish Statewide Shellfish meeting has been postponed twice, but will occur March 26<sup>th</sup> at the Egan Center in Anchorage. The Board will take up several crab proposals of interest to AEB fishermen, but the main focus for AEB constituents is Proposal 282. This proposal is adapted from the Agenda Change Request 7 submitted by Don Bumpus of Chignik, and accepted by the Board at their October Work Session. Proposal 282 as written would cut salmon fishing time by approximately 50% in the Dolgoi Area and the Shumagin Islands Section of the South Alaska Peninsula.

Chignik residents believe that making this change will help the struggling Chignik sockeye salmon returns rebound, however there is little evidence to support this. South Peninsula stakeholders are opposed to this out-of-cycle proposal, and the proposed cuts that would be severely damaging to the AEB and its local communities' economies.

[ADFG Staff Comments](#) for the meeting (RC 2) are now posted on the Board's Statewide Shellfish [meeting website](#). The graphics below from the Staff Comments (pages 130,131) show the drastic reduction of fishing time under Proposal 282 in Dolgoi and the Shumagins in June and July. The on-time comment deadline for the Statewide Shellfish meeting is March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

## June 2022 All Gear Types Schedule

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
<b>Proposed fishing in Shumagin Islands Section and "Dolgoi Islands area" until midpoint achieved</b>						
<b>Current Fishing Periods</b>						
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	6 a.m. <b>Open 64 hours (Set Gillnet Gear Only)</b> 10 p.m.		10 p.m.		6 a.m. <b>Open 88 hours</b>	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
10 p.m.			6 a.m. <b>Open 40 hours</b> 10 p.m.		6 a.m. <b>Open 88 hours</b> 10 p.m.	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	6 a.m. <b>Open 40 hours</b> 10 p.m.					6 a.m. <b>Open</b> 10 p.m.
	6 a.m. <b>Open 88 hours</b> 10 p.m.					
26	27	28	29	30		
40 hours 10 p.m.						
6 a.m. <b>Open 88 hours</b> 10 p.m.						

## July 2022 All Gear Types Schedule

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
<b>Proposed fishing in Shumagin Islands Section and "Dolgoi Islands area" until midpoint achieved</b>						
<b>Current Fishing Periods</b>						
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
			6 a.m. <b>18 hours</b> 12 p.m.			
			6 a.m. <b>33 Hours</b> 3 p.m.			
10		12	13	14	15	16
6 a.m. <b>18 hours</b> 12 p.m.				6 a.m. <b>36 hours</b> 12 p.m.		
6 a.m. <b>36 Hours</b> 6 p.m.						
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	6 a.m. <b>18 hours</b> 12 p.m.				6 a.m. <b>18 hours</b> 12 p.m.	
	6 a.m. <b>36 hours</b> 6 p.m.					
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
		6 a.m. <b>18 hours</b> 12 p.m.				6 a.m. <b>18 hours</b> 12 p.m.
		6 a.m. <b>36 hours</b> 6 p.m.				
31						
6 p.m.						

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