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BRISTOL BAY DATA REPORT NO. 120

Report on the Bristol Bay 32 Foot Boat Limit, August 1979

by

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Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Division of Commercial Fisheries
Dillingham, Alaska

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STATE
of ALASKA**MEMORANDUM**

TO: [To all Bristol Bay Advisory Committees

DATE : August 28, 1979

FROM: Greg Cook
Executive Director
Boards of Fisheries and GameSUBJECT: Bristol Bay 32-Foot
Boat Limit 5 AAC 06.341

Please find enclosed a preliminary summary of information gathered during the April, 1979, survey of local resident Bristol Bay fishermen regarding the repeal of the 32-foot limitation on salmon fishing vessels.

The report would not have been possible without the kindness and assistance of numerous residents of Bristol Bay. Almost without exception, the people I came in contact with on this trip were open, very kind, and willing to help. I am grateful to all those people and take this opportunity to thank them.

A more detailed and complete report will be made to the Board of Fisheries at their December, 1979 meeting in Anchorage.

Greg Cook

INTRODUCTION

~~In December of 1978, the Lower Bristol Bay Advisory Committee proposed repeal of the 32-foot limit on salmon fishing vessels in Bristol Bay. 5 AAC 06.341. The Board tabled that proposal for further study. This report is based on a visit to Bristol Bay made in April, 1979, at the direction of the Board of Fisheries. The visit was made by Greg Cook, Executive Director of the Boards of Fisheries and Game. A total of 337 resident Bristol Bay fishermen were contacted in 15 villages. Also, the Western Alaska Cooperative Fishermen's Marketing Association, Jim McConnell, president of the Dillingham branch of the National Bank of Alaska, and several cannery managers were interviewed.~~

Public meetings were held in 15 different villages. Advance notice for the meetings was provided by Kay Larson of the Bristol Bay Native Association and Radio Station KDLG. I took minutes at each meeting and notes of each individual's testimony are on file in Juneau for inspection.

Meetings were conducted in the following manner: A statement of the issue was given, then the floor was opened for discussion. Translators were necessary in several villages. Each time a translator was needed, one local resident was able to serve in that capacity. I tried to summarize the arguments on each side of the issue when discussions seemed to be over. This often made people aware of more points of view and stimulated a renewal of discussion. This report is a product of those meetings.

VILLAGE BY VILLAGE SUMMARY

1. Dillingham; April 23; 20 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.
2. Togiak; April 24; 31 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.
3. Twin Hills; April 24; 30 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.
4. Manakotak; April 24; 27 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.
5. South Naknek; April 25; 12 people contacted; 11 people opposed to changing the limit, 1 favored the change.
6. North Naknek; 37 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.
7. Egegik; April 26; 32 people contacted; 30 opposed to changing the limit, 2 favored to changing to 36 feet.
8. Pilot Point; April 27; 14 people contacted; 7 people favored eliminating the limit, 3 opposed, 4 silent.
9. Port Heiden; April 27; 25 people contacted; all favored changing to 36 feet, but nothing larger.

10. Kokhanok; April 28; 9 people contacted; 7 opposed to the change, 2 favored changing (facetious).

11. Iliamna; April 28; 7 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.
12. New Halen; 26 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.
13. Koliganek; April 29; 29 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.
14. New Stuyahok; April 30; 24 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.
15. Ekwok; May 1; 14 people contacted; all opposed to changing the limit.

CONCLUSION

The controversy over the 32-foot limit is often emotional. Arguments on each side encompass social and economic, as well as biological issues. Much of the thinking is necessarily conjectural since vessels larger than 32-feet have never yet participated in the Bristol Bay salmon fishery. Judging from the intensity of the participation in the public meetings that form the basis of this report, the Board's decision on 5 AAC 06.341 will be closely watched by all Bristol Bay fishermen.

The vast majority of Bristol Bay resident fishermen who were contacted during the April, 1979, Board of Fisheries survey, strongly oppose any change in the 32-foot limit regulation. The biggest single reason expressed for their opposition was the anticipated effect that such a change would have on income distribution in Bristol Bay. Local resident fishermen are convinced that bigger boats would lead to a few rich operators profiting to the detriment of the majority of fishermen. "The rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer."

A recurring theme in the villages was fear of purse seine gear being introduced in the Bay. Allowing larger boats was seen as the first step towards allowing seine gear, moving fishing district boundary lines farther seaward, and eventually over-fishing and depleting the resource.

Support for changing the 32-foot limit was found exclusively on the Alaska Peninsula. Residents of Port Heiden favor a new limit of 36-foot vessels. They want slightly bigger boats for greater comfort and safety in rough weather. They do not advocate bringing in vessels larger than 36-feet. Residents of Pilot Point strongly advocate removal of any size limit whatsoever. They argue that this would enable fishermen to present a higher quality product during the salmon season, permit entry into other fisheries without necessitating purchase of a second vessel, and encourage true entrepreneurs.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTS FAVORING
REPEAL OF THE 32-FOOT LIMIT

- More efficient, carry more crew, gas and food, spend more time fishing and less time making deliveries, going for gas, etc.
- Greater safety in rough weather.
- Better ability to fish king salmon. Kings are a rough weather fish in Bristol Bay.
- Increased comfort. Port Heiden people in particular feel this desire since they travel further than other Bristol Bay residents in order to reach an open fishing district.
- Could be used in other areas of Alaska where 32-foot boats are inappropriate.
- Could be used for other fisheries such as bottomfish, crab, herring.
- More room would give space for a slush ice machine. This would encourage delivery of a higher quality product, allow for watertight compartments, and enable the fishermen to spread the fish out more so that they wouldn't get "squished."
- Fishermen are now independent; there's no need to be tied to a cannery's apron strings either by history or because of canneries' unwillingness to renovate their storage facilities and docks.
- Professional fishermen should have the latitude to develop as rapidly as they wish. "Laissez-faire" is the best approach.
- 32-feet is too small to be versatile.
- Greater fuel efficiency.
- Financing would be easy at a rate of 4 3/4 percent interest (contact Alec Griechen for his loan source).
- When people have big boats, canneries will build facilities to accommodate them.
- It's cheaper to have one boat to use in all fisheries.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTS OPPOSED
TO CHANGING THE 32-FOOT LIMIT

- Puts 32-foot boats at a competitive disadvantage. Rich people will buy the bigger boats and get richer, poor people will end up with less fishing time and less fish.
- Inability of small boats to fish as long before needing to resupply.

- Would make Bristol Bay more attractive to outsiders since they could then use their bigger boats in Bristol Bay. This would result in outsiders buying out the limited entry permits held by local Bay residents.

- 32-foot boats are fine for fishing herring. To say the bigger boats would be useful in bottom fishing is specious; no boat can fish the shallow water where the salmon run and at the same time be versatile enough to fish out on the high seas where the bottomfish are.
- The Bay is too shallow for deep draft boats.
- Deep draft boats can't go up the rivers. Villagers would be disadvantaged since upriver people would need a second boat in order to haul their supplies and travel up and down the river. While repealing the 32-foot limit would make one boat practical for outsiders, it would necessitate two boats for upriver people if they wanted to remain competitive.
- A decrease in fishing time for small boats would result since larger vessels could take on more fish in rough weather and harvest the allowable catch quicker.
- People in the villages can't afford bigger boats; they have no collateral for loans and banks just laugh at them when they try to get loans based on fishing ability. Upriver villages have an especially difficult time securing financing.
- The Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission has studied the possibility of buying back permits in Bristol Bay and bigger boats would mean they'd buy back more permits.
- 32-foot vessels now adequately harvest 100 percent of the resource. The real problem is inadequate processing capacity.
- Shorter openings would result (because the fleet would be more efficient). This would hurt setnetters, 32-foot boat fishermen, and skiff fishermen.
- Could lead to requests for changing the fishing boundary limits, thereby increasing the fishing pressure on mixed stocks.
- There are not storage facilities adequate to accommodate larger vessels over winter. Existing storage facilities are already overcrowded and inadequate. Harbors are only designed for 32-foot vessels. More dredging would be required in Dillingham, the only harbor in Bristol Bay. Docks are old and cannot support the extra weight that bigger boats would require. Booms and hoists are barely adequate for lifting existing 32-foot boats; larger vessels would be too heavy for this equipment.
- Fear that seiners would return to the Bay's salmon fishery.
- Management of the fishery would be harder in weak years if efficiency of the fleet increases. For example, in one twelve hour period, 70 percent of the total allowable catch for a weak run year can now be taken.

- Shorter openings would make problems for setnetters who really need a full tidal cycle in order to work their nets.

- ~~Salmon is the sole basis for the economy in Bristol Bay; few alternative employment opportunities exist.~~
- There would be a serious decline in the value of existing 32-foot vessels.
- There is no good reason for change; management is good now with the 32-foot boats.
- New boats would just mean fishing harder to pay off the vessel; there would be no real increase in income for fishermen who only fish salmon.
- Bigger boats will get a higher percentage of the fish available and leave less for the small boats who are even more income dependent on the fishery.
- Larger boats would fish the kings harder; king returns are now strong.
- Larger boats would want more fathoms of gear.
- Canneries already have trouble processing in peak years. Changes in delivery patterns that would result from larger vessels could prove chaotic.
- Bigger boats might mean that canneries would cease buying from some small operators since they could receive all the fish they could process from a more limited number of fishermen.
- Bigger boats will mean a higher dropout rate as gill nets are hauled higher to reach the deck.
- overcapitalization
- It would complicate deliveries to salmon scows. Vessels tie up one behind the other and skiffs tied up to 50-foot boats tied up to skiffs will cause problems.
- The Bristol Bay fishery is just now getting to the point where all the locals can really make a living from the fishery. Why should the Board change the fishery to benefit outsiders?
- Fear of shorter openings.
- Bristol Bay residents rarely own limited entry permits for other fisheries. They would have a hard time amortizing the investment in a larger boat since they would not be able to fish other areas of Alaska where limited entry has been instituted.
- Small boats won't be able to compete with bigger, more stable boats in rough weather.
- Who will want to buy 32-foot boats that are owned now if 36-foot or 40-foot boats with greater efficiency are allowed?

- The 32-foot limit acts to equalize competition between skiff fishermen and big boats.

- ~~Bad weather and fishermen's strikes are the prime contributors to escapement. If bigger boats are allowed to fish, this will complicate management.~~
- A decrease in the amount of money made by locals will increase the number of locals that have to go on welfare and BIA assistance.
- Larger vessels will mean an unequal rate of drift; this will result in more gear conflicts among drifters.
- Big money will buy up the limited entry permits and more local people will end up sitting on the beach. Kids in the villages who don't have permits and who might benefit from an increase in the number of limited entry permits will never get them if an increase in boat size is allowed. A greater investment is required for a bigger boat. Village children who are potential beneficiaries of an increase in the number of permits will not get this opportunity if bigger boats become the norm.
- Any change in size will act to frustrate the goal of limited entry: limiting the ability to take.
- Entry into the fishery will be so expensive that it will become a virtual recreational fishery for doctors and lawyers.
- All the support facilities of canneries are geared to 32-foot boats: hydraulics, docks, storage, parts inventories. Change will mean canneries will have to make massive capital investments.
- Bristol Bay Borough could lose an important part of its tax base if boats are no longer stored in the Borough on the day that taxes are assessed.
- Increased interception by Alaska Peninsula people and Sand Point people.
- It will increase the number of requests for more gear types.
- It will result in enforcement problems in the area since big boats could overnight there.
- Outsiders on big boats will be able to fish continuously during the openings; small boats must deliver and lose fishing time.
- Longer boats won't necessarily mean they will be any less beamy.