

Magnuson/Stevens Reauthorization Hearing
January 18, 2000

Aleutians East Borough Testimony
Beth Stewart
Director Natural Resources Department

The Aleutians East Borough includes the communities of Akutan, Cold Bay, False Pass, King Cove, Nelson Lagoon, and Sand Point. With the exception of Cold Bay all of the communities are Eastern Aleut villages that depend entirely on commercial fishing to maintain local economies.

False Pass, Akutan and Nelson Lagoon participate in the CDQ program. Sand Point and King Cove fishermen have extensive histories in both the state and federal groundfish fisheries. The vessels owned and operated by local fishermen are almost all under 60' in length, and are built to participate in salmon, herring, halibut, crab, cod and pollock fisheries. Local residents know that they must be able to remain diversified in order to maintain their families and homes in this remote region.

Although a few local fishermen did receive enough halibut IFQ to maintain their participation in the halibut fishery, most did not. Although halibut remains an important component of most fishermen's slate of possible fisheries, local people are now forced to purchase quota to retain the needed flexibility.

The vast majority of local residents oppose Individual Fishing Quotas (IFQ's), sometimes referred to as Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQ's). They view IFQ's as a management tool that encourages single fishery dependency by rewarding those who focus on a single fishery and making it more expensive, sometimes prohibitively expensive, to maintain a full suite of fishing options which allow the vessel owner and crew to shift fisheries as stocks and markets fluctuate.

Residents are also deeply concerned that IFQ's and the cooperative structure provided for under the American Fisheries Act (AFA) will result in the consolidation of quota on fewer and fewer vessels. Such consolidation has extremely negative on crew employment. Crew jobs are a critical source of income, particularly during the winter months.

The recent formation of cooperatives under the AFA has created additional challenges for small boat diversified fishery dependent locals. Aleutians East Borough is home to two shore-based processors

with plants in Akutan, King Cove, and Sand Point. From time to time floaters come into the area and the market competition improves prices for local fishermen. Local fishermen also desire the ability to establish additional markets for species for which the shore-based plants may not be able to provide a market.

The idea of limiting entry for processors within the Aleutians East Borough is adamantly opposed by the local fleet. As mentioned above, the coop model developed for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands pollock fishery is viewed as unworkable by the local fleet.

However, in the course of facing the reconstruction of the pollock fishery in response to the current situation with Stellar sea lions, Aleutians East Borough proposed that NMFS set aside that portion of the pollock TAC taken by vessels under 60' in the Western Gulf of Alaska (area 610) and in that portion of the Central Gulf east of 157 degrees, so that the small boat fleet can continue to fish in the haulouts around Sea Lion Rocks and Mitrofanina/Spitz Island. These are the only safe areas for the small boat fleet to fish during the extremely dangerous weather that occurs during the pollock fishery.

We proposed that NMFS establish a fishing schedule that would slow down the harvest and insure that localized depletion of pollock was avoided in these areas. The service is interested in pursuing this idea, and has come to think of it as a type of coop.

Aleutians East Borough views this type of management tool as being more like a Territorial User Rights Fishery (TURF) than a coop. Individual vessel allocations are not made. Instead the small boat fishery is managed in a way that does not require these vessels to participate in the race for fish against larger vessels. It stabilizes the amount of quota available to local fishermen, and provides the necessary flexibility to maintain a diversified fishery portfolio and to find local solutions to local problems, and retains a healthy environment for local employment.

We realize that our situation is, in many respects, unique. Unlike Kodiak and other Gulf communities, we do not have access to a wide variety of processors. We are on the path between the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands. We must maintain healthy local fisheries for the small vessels that are the most suitable vessels for our region and economy. While we have no desire to dictate solutions for other components of the fishery, we believe that solutions developed for other areas are not suitable in our area.

Although most residents do not like any form of limited entry, the need to maintain a local fishing economy must accommodate its inevitability. Giving the North Pacific Fishery Management Council the tools to establish TURF fisheries in the Western and Central Gulf (east of 157 degrees) would provide the most desirable alternative for these native fishermen.

Therefore, the Aleutians East Borough asks that this authority be established for the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.