

## **Alaska Trollers Association**

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To: City of Sitka Assembly Members and Sitka City Manager John Leach

Dear Assembly Members,

As you know the Historic Southeast Alaska Chinook Fishery, the hub of which is the City of Sitka, is under a threat of elimination by a law suit brought by a radical Puget Sound environmental organization called the Wild Fish Conservancy. WFC has sued the National Marine Fisheries Service over a claimed failure to account for the effect of the SEAK Chinook Harvest on Southern Resident Killer Whales. In a 12/13/22 Recommendation the magistrate hearing the case (and who lives on Puget Sound) recommended the elimination of the Incidental Take permit that allows SEAK fishers to harvest any King Salmon.

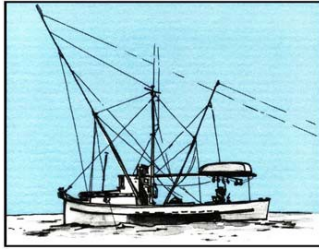
The Alaska Trollers Association, of which I am the President, has been fighting this legal battle since 2020. WFC states that the SRKW are starving from lack of king salmon which they claim is 80% of these whale's diet. This claim is absurd in every aspect. The decade of 2010 to 2020 had the biggest king salmon return on the Columbia River since the dams were built. 2022 had a huge return of Puget Sound Chinook. The science easily debunks WFC claims but the Magistrate wouldn't allow an Evidentiary Hearing at which the facts could be demonstrated.

Since 2020 ATA has spent over 96 thousand dollars (\$5,000 donated by the City of Sitka) defending Alaskans' historic harvest rights. This fight will continue. To help with that ATA is asking for a contribution from Sitka of \$25,000. I know this is a significant ask but the simple truth is that without the financial support of SEAK communities our region will lose it's historic Troll fishery and other supporting Industries.

Thank you for your support and Consideration

Matthew Donohoe

President ATA



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1/3/23

## **Updated Common (and some not so common) Questions and Answers about the Wild Fish Conservancy's Law Suit and ATA**

### **Q: What's new in the Wild Fish Conservancy's (WFC) Law Suit?**

A: On December 14, 2022 Magistrate Peterson recommended to presiding Judge Jones of the Seattle Federal Court to Vacate the Incidental Take Statement (ITS) included in NMFS's Biological Opinion. The ITS allows SEAK fisheries to incidentally harvest some Puget Sound Chinook. Magistrate Peterson is tasked with doing a Report and Recommendation (R&R) to Judge Jones the presiding Judge. ATA, The State of Alaska, and NMFS have until 1/10/23 to respond to the R&R. Sometime after that (we don't know when) Judge Jones will make his ruling on the issue

### **Q: What action is Magistrate Peterson Recommending?**

Closure of the Winter Troll Season.  
Closure of the Summer Chinook Troll Season

### **Q: Will this also close other SEAK fisheries?**

A: We don't yet know. Magistrate Peterson only mentions closing the Commercial Troll Chinook fishery but she recommends vacating the ITS that allows any SEAK fishery to harvest Chinook.

### **Q: What is the Alaska Trollers Association (ATA)?**

A: ATA is a democratic organization that speaks for the Troll Industry. It is completely funded by fees and donations from the nearly 400 (and growing) dues paying members. ATA is listed as a non-profit corporation with Alaska's Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCED). At 92 years old ATA is the oldest fisheries organization on the North American West Coast.

### **Q: Who does ATA represent?**

A: ATA is the recognized representative of the more than 1,000 active power troll and 400 hand troll permit holders that fish in Southeast Alaska (SEAK). ATA also represents the troll interests of SEAK communities where 83% of active trollers live. ATA's office is in Juneau. In Sitka ATA speaks for the 400 local family business that commercial troll and another 200 plus business that sell fish in Sitka. As many as 400 troll permits have winter trolled in Sitka Sound, and around 600 permits deliver troll caught fish in the summer to Sitka.

**Q: What are trollers?**

A: Trollers are small boats ranging in size mostly from 15' skiffs to 58' freezer boats. Trollers mainly target Chinook and Coho salmon but also harvest chum and pink salmon. Trolling, catching one fish at a time, is an artisan fishery done with hook and line. Trollers are easily recognized by their long trolling poles and make up most of the classic fishing fleet that so appeals to SEAK visitors.

**Q: What's happening?**

A: A Puget Sound based environmental group, the Wild Fish Conservancy (WFC), is suing the National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) over NMFS's Biological Opinion (BI-OP). A BI-OP is required to allow the harvest of some of the Chinook salmon that are managed under the international agreement between Canada and the U.S. This agreement is called the Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST).

**Q: What is the Issue?**

A: The WFC claims that SEAK have no legitimate claim to 97% of the Chinook guaranteed to SEAK under the PST. The WFC claims these Chinook belong to British Columbia (B.C.) and the Pacific Northwest U.S. The WFC also claim that these Chinook are vital prey for a small Pod of Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW). Biologists named this Pod the "L Pod".

The WFC maintains that only large mature Chinook (only wild Chinook, not hatchery) are the primary prey of SRKW. The WFC insists that the "L Pod" is dying from starvation. ATA, NMFS, and the science disputes this.

SEAK harvest rights are protected by an international Treaty Agreement and by a tradition of thousands of years of historic use. Lower 48 origin Chinook (the % of which is much lower than the WFC claimed 97%) in SEAK spend more of their lives in Alaskan waters than in lower 48 waters. They mature and grow by preying on Alaska's feed stocks (like herring and needle fish) which live in Alaska's pristine habitat. Unlike Puget Sound SEAK waters have no **polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB)**, no fish farms, and (so far) little critical habitat loss. While the "L Pod" population has slightly declined in recent years other SRKW populations, such as the Vancouver Island Population and the Southern Alaska Population, have doubled and tripled in size.

**Q: Does the SE Chinook fishery actually have a substantial effect on endangered Chinook stocks?**

A: The stocks of primary concern are Puget Sound Chinook. These stocks are listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act. According to the NMFS it is rare that Puget Sound Chinook venture north of B.C.'s Haida Gwaii (formerly The Queen Charlotte Islands) let alone get caught in SEAK.

Appendix B6 of the latest ADF&G Genetic report;

(<https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/FedAidPDFs/FDS18-01.pdf>) indicates that only ~3/10th of 1% of the troll kings caught in July of 2016 were from Puget Sound.

From Appendix D1;

Look at The Pacific Salmon Commission's Chinook Technical Committee's latest report (which

is accessible at <https://www.psc.org/publications/technical-reports/technical-committee-reports/chinook/>. See the link to report *TCCchinook (19)-2 V2.*)

The entire SE all-gear catch historically accounts for only 3/10 of 1% of the Puget Sound return.

**Q: Why does ATA disagree with WFC?**

A: WFC says that Southern Resident Killer Whales (SRKW) are starving and the SEAK Chinook harvest is, "Taking Chinook out of the mouths of starving baby killer whales". The science contradicts this saying that SRKW are suffering from the highest concentration of PCBs of any mammal on earth. PCB contamination severely impacts birth rates and calf survival. The "L Pod" and their Puget Sound Chinook prey have been decimated by habitat loss, industrial pollution, fish farms, and all the accoutrements of the fastest growing megalopolis in the U.S.

At the same time that the "L Pod" of SRKW were declining in population other SRKW populations have doubled and tripled. Some marine biologists say that, "These other SRKW may have, in fact, reached carrying capacity".

The science demonstrates that the "L Pod" as Apex Predators are suffering from the highest **polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB)** contamination of any marine mammal on earth. The WFC insist that SRKW eat as many as 380 contaminated Chinook/day. The FDA recommends that humans eat no more than 1lb of Puget Sound's contaminated Chinook/month. PCBs are stored in fat. This PCB contamination impacts the L Pod's survival as a nursing Orca's milk contains 40% fat.

**Q: What is this suit about?**

A: The WFC has sued National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) alleging that there was insufficient analysis to show that endangered king stocks and SRKW wouldn't be harmed by the king salmon harvest levels allowed under the 2019 treaty.

**Q: Will the law suit just affect trollers?**

A: All SE Chinook fishermen would see reductions in allowable catch if the quota is reduced. Trollers, charter fishermen, resident sport fishermen, seiners and gillnetters will all be affected.

**Q: How soon could SEAK be affected:**

A: Magistrate Peterson in her Recommendation that the current winter fishery be closed.

**Q: What are Federal Waters?**

A: Federal waters are all water more than three (3) miles off shore.

**Q: How does this affect SEAK/Sitka?**

A: The Treaty sets the Chinook quota for all SE Chinook fishermen. If the court decides that the SE catch jeopardizes endangered species the quota could be further reduced.

**Q: How does this directly affect the City & Borough of Sitka's financial picture?**

A: A reduction in the allowable catch of Chinook would reduce the amount of the Fish Box tax from the charter catch and the Raw Fish tax collected from the troll catch (and other commercial fisheries). Possible elimination of the Troll industry

**Q: How does this economically affect the community of Sitka?**

A: In addition to the lodges, charter guides and commercial fishermen that are directly affected, a reduction in Chinook catch would also reduce demand for fish processing workers & gear sales. Reduced fishing effort would mean fewer purchases of food, fuel, bait, transient moorage etc. Furthermore, NSRAA which receives 3% of the value of all commercial kings caught in Northern SE (not just Sitka) would see a reduction in revenue.

**Q: What is ATA's ask?**

A: \$25,000 to defeat the WFC suit.

**Q: Why should The CBS support ATA's Legal Fund in fighting the WFC's suit?**

A: This suit not only threatens the troll industry it puts SEAK aquaculture and the region's economy in jeopardy. Why should and how can commercial fishermen pay for production they're not allowed to harvest? In terms of king salmon alone, Trollers contribute more money to all of SEAK's aquaculture Chinook production than any other gear group. Most of the productive Chinook grounds in the Sitka area are outside of three miles. If trollers can't fish off-shore then NSRAA and SSRAA will have less critical funding to produce King. Also doing so makes no business sense. Other Alaskan gear groups are also threatened by this suit.