



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

January 4, 2010

Dear Alaska Native and community representatives:

As part of our ongoing consultation and outreach process, I am sending you this letter to inform you that National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has released the Bering Sea Chinook Salmon Bycatch Management Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Final Regulatory Impact Review (RIR). These documents assess the environmental, social, and economic impacts associated with measures to minimize Chinook salmon bycatch to the extent practicable in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. Enclosed is a copy of the executive summary. The complete documents are accessible electronically on the NMFS Alaska Region's website at <http://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/sustainablefisheries/bycatch/default.htm>. CDs or printed copies of the Final EIS and Final RIR may be requested from this website. You may also call NMFS at 907-586-7228, to obtain a printed copy or CD.

NMFS has special obligations to consult and coordinate with tribal governments and Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) corporations on a government-to-government basis pursuant to Executive Order 13175 and the Executive Memorandum of April 29, 1994, on "Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Governments." If you represent a tribal entity or ANCSA corporation, you have the opportunity to consult with and provide comments to NMFS at any time. We will continue to inform you of each stage in the federal process and provide you the opportunity to comment or consult at each stage.

In April 2009, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) recommended measures to minimize Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery as Amendment 91 to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area. The Final EIS and RIR incorporate the Council's final recommendation, public comments on the draft EIS, comments by Alaska Native Tribes and organizations, the results of government-to-government consultations with tribal governments. The Final EIS and Final RIR will serve as the central decision-making document for the Secretary of Commerce to approve, disapprove, or partially approve the recommended measures and for NMFS to implement them through federal regulations.

First, you can comment on the Final EIS and Final RIR. Note that while NMFS is not required to respond to comments received as a result of the issuance of the Final EIS, NMFS will respond to comments received from a tribal entity or ANCSA corporation. Comments received by February 16, 2010, will be reviewed and considered for their impact on issuance of a record of decision (ROD).



Next, NMFS will publish a notice of availability for Amendment 91 and proposed implementing regulations. We will notify Alaska Native and community representatives once these documents are published in the *Federal Register*. I encourage you to review these documents and provide comments.

Once we have reviewed all public comments, the Secretary of Commerce will take final agency action to approve, disapprove, or partially approve Amendment 91 and issue the ROD. If the Secretary of Commerce approves Amendment 91, NMFS will then publish the final implementing regulations. The preamble to the final rule would include responses to all comments received on Amendment 91 and the proposed rule.

I look forward to working with you through the completion of this project. For more information on this project, please call Gretchen Harrington or Sally Bibb at 907-586-7228.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert D. Mecum". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Robert D. Mecum
Acting Administrator, Alaska Region

Enclosure