



KAWERAK, INC.



Tungwenuk Family Qupak Design, used with permission

To: United States Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs

REPRESENTING

Brevig Mission

Sitaisaq

Council

Akauchak

Diomede

Injaliq

Elim

Neviarcuarluq

Gambell

Sivuqaq

Golovin

Chinik

King Island

Ugiuvak

Koyuk

Kuuyuk

Mary's Igloo

Iglaaruk

Nome Eskimo

Sitnasuami Inuit

Savoonga

Sivungaq

Shaktolik

Saktuliq

Shishmaref

Kigiqtaq

Solomon

Anjuutaq

St. Michael

Taciq

Stebbins

Tapraq

Teller

Tupqaḡruk

Unalakleet

Uḡalaqḡiq

Wales

Kinigin

White Mountain

Natchigvik

Thank you, committee members, for inviting me and giving me the opportunity to testify today..

Kawerak, Inc. is the regional nonprofit organization that provides many services to the 20 Federally recognized tribes in the Bering Strait/Norton Sound region. One of which is advocating for subsistence user's and subsistence resources alike.

There are a lot of effects that are difficult to quantify into the parameters of this committee hearing, the "impacts" are widespread and heartfelt as is evidenced by many testimonials given to both the State of Alaska; Board of Fish, and the Northern Pacific Fisheries Management Council for decades and have fallen on deaf ears. Alaska Communities have long voiced their opposition through testimony to both Fisheries Management bodies. Over the history of the state of Alaska and federal Management of Fisheries both bodies have operated with the Commercial Harvest given the priority even when stocks originating from our waterways and rivers are depleted to the point that Subsistence Fishing is not allowed. In times of hardship subsistence users bear the burden of conservation, not allowed to harvest a single salmon. Not only have subsistence users faced closures, but we have also been given citations and confiscation of gear. Where is the equality in the decision making process when subsistence users are not allowed to harvest a single salmon to feed themselves or family members, river systems cannot meet escapement goals, yet the commercial fishing industry is allowed to either target salmon in the State of Alaska intercept fishery in the millions where almost a single salmon cannot pass or the federal high seas trawling industry is allowed to bycatch hundreds of thousands of salmon and toss them all over board. Another area where both the state or the federal agencies pass the blame is climate change, lets blame climate change for everything that is happening and still allow millions of salmon to be targeted or wasted. While climate change is a serious issue, that is nothing that any of us have control over. Sound management would be to take control over the things we can manage and let's work together, state & feds, on how more salmon will make it western Alaska to meet or exceed escapement goals and make the state or federal fisheries accountable. For decades Area M fisherman denied allegations that they were "chum chucking" or throwing dead salmon overboard. During the 2023 intercept fishery season the Alaska State Troopers cited several Area M boat captains for "chum chucking". Again, in times of closure how is it fair that the subsistence user is not allowed to harvest a single salmon, bear the burden of conservation, our river systems cannot meet escapement goals, yet industry is allowed to waste thousands upon thousands of salmon.

Traditional subsistence activities for salmon have included Set Net, Seining, Drying, Smoking and storing frozen salmon in our freezers. In the olden days not only were salmon caught to feed families, but salmon were caught to feed dog teams which were

KAWERAK, INC.

PO Box 948 • Nome Alaska 99762 • 907.443.5231 • www.kawerak.org

Advancing the capacity of our people and tribes for the benefit of the region.

the work horse so to speak of the native communities across Alaska, as well as bartered with amongst other communities.

Traditional Subsistence Activities were not just to sustain us but became a part of who we are and how we lived in Alaska. The definition of Subsistence in Websters Dictionary is this “the action or fact of maintaining or supporting oneself at a minimum level.” Obviously or not, this definition is not totally accurate in how we view subsistence. This is not who we are. We take pride in our traditional subsistence activities because we do this to feed our loved ones and our communities . For instance, families divide the salmon we catch and dry them into bundles of 50 dry fish to give to our sisters and brothers families and our close relatives who we know do not have access to make their own dry fish. This is Traditional Subsistence.

As an Inupiaq man I cannot comment with any authority on the impacts to our Health. What I can speak with authority on are the impacts to our subsistence way of life and the resource, Salmon.

The southern Seward Peninsula faced a chum salmon closure that lasted nearly 30 years. Fishing gear was limited to Rod and Reel only, this was in an effort to conserve any chum salmon caught and they were to be released back in to the river system alive. When chum salmon stocks finally started meeting escapement goals on the southern Seward Peninsula we were the only subregion in the state that had a Tier II Chum Fishery. Consequently, during the late 1980s and early 1990s Kawerak has tried to bring up the Area M intercept Fishery which has been proven to be taking salmon in the millions bound for western Alaska and the federal high seas fishery where hundreds of thousands of salmon are tossed overboard and wasted. .

Salmon By-catch. By law trawlers are allowed to catch and discard species that are not targeted in their harvest of a species. In this case Pollock.

The current system will only recognize that there are fewer fish in the by-catch category because there were fewer fish caught at the time of harvest and not that there are just less fish in the population. If this inability or unwillingness to recognize salmon populations being affected remains the norm, then we will see the by-catch numbers continue to fall until the salmon populations become extinct. And the same will be true of all species of fish caught as by-catch.

Thank you for the chance to testify and warmest regards

Charles & Menadelook

Charles Menadelook
Subsistence Resource Program Director
Kawerak, Inc.
P.O. Box 948
Nome, AK 99762
(907) 443-4265 Office
(907) 891-2819 Cell

KAWERAK, INC.

PO Box 948 • Nome Alaska 99762 • 907.443.5231 • www.kawerak.org

Advancing the capacity of our people and tribes for the benefit of the region.