



**Mike Williams, Sr., Chair**  
**Testimony to NPFMC**  
**June 12–13, 2022**

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My name is Mike Williams Sr. of Akiak, Alaska. I am a Yupik fishermen and advocate for my people, and Chair of the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, which represents the 33 Tribes of the Kuskokwim River drainage. I am speaking for the Fish Commission today.

Since 2015, the Fish Commission has collaborated with Federal, State, and Tribal managers and regional stakeholders to conserve and rebuild Kuskokwim salmon populations, specifically Chinook salmon and, more recently, chum salmon. Our work is guided by our Yupik and Athabascan values, which call for unity, sharing in abundance and scarcity, and avoiding all waste.

However, what we are seeing in the bycatch of the Bering Sea-Aleutian Island commercial pollock industry is waste. The discard of even a single salmon – let alone thousands – is wasteful for us and against our ways of life.

The Fish Commission urges this Council to take immediate and extensive action to reduce Chinook and chum salmon bycatch to zero. We support the motion passed at the Advisory Panel on Friday, June 10, which calls for the Council to initiate a discussion paper to look into options for a chum salmon PSC limit, Chinook salmon bycatch cap reductions, industry avoidance measures, and salmon genetic comparisons. We support the Council collaborating with Tribes and including Traditional Knowledge in its work as we find ways to reduce bycatch and improve salmon returns to our region.

We encourage more funding for more research on Western Alaska salmon bycatch and salmon declines. And we want this research to be done in consultation and collaboration with Alaska Native Tribes and Tribal organizations.

Already this year, over 5,100 Chinook salmon have been caught and discarded in the pollock industry. Even if this number – and the 2021 Chinook salmon bycatch number of almost 16,000 fish – is below average, I repeat that the waste of a single fish is wrong and unjust for Indigenous fishermen. It is especially hard to understand this waste when Chinook salmon harvests by Kuskokwim subsistence fishermen are 1/3 the size of historical harvests because our runs have declined so much.

Chum salmon bycatch so far in 2022 is low, but the pollock fleet has just begun its B Season. Over 540,000 chum salmon were caught and discarded in 2021, most of them after the B Season began on June 11.

Meanwhile, in 2021, subsistence fishermen on the Kuskokwim experienced the lowest return of chum salmon on record. I normally put away 2,000 chum salmon to feed my dog team. Last year, I caught only 2 chums. Chum salmon returns to the Kuskokwim this year are likely to again

be extremely low. So far this year, there have not been any chum harvest reports from fishermen I know, even though they normally have a couple chums in their smokehouse by now.

The low salmon returns have led federal managers, along with our Tribal In-Season Managers, to implement fishing closures to conserve and protect salmon. These closures are sacrifices to our people who rely on fish for our food, culture, and well-being. In fact, today, June 12, is the first subsistence drift gillnet opportunity of this season. Many fishermen wished to testify to the Council about the issue of salmon bycatch, but they could not risk missing one of the only opportunities to fish for salmon this season.

We understand that not every salmon caught by the pollock fishery is bound for Western Alaska. We understand that other factors, like climate change and competition with hatchery fish, have impacts on salmon in their marine environment. But we know that this Council has the power to enact regulations and plans to reduce salmon bycatch.

Our goal at the Fish Commission and along the Kuskokwim is to restore our salmon runs to abundance. We ask this Council and the commercial industry to please do everything in your power to help us reach this goal by acting now to reduce the waste of Chinook and chum salmon bycatch.

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