



Alaska Marine Policy Forum

Summary from Wednesday, July 17, 2024

Host: Ginny Eckert, Alaska Sea Grant

Notes by Darcy Dugan, Alaska Ocean Observing System

The Alaska Marine Policy Forum is a bimonthly teleconference for Alaskans to network and share information about marine policy, budgets, and legislation at state, national, and international levels, sponsored by Alaska Sea Grant and the Alaska Ocean Observing System (AOOS). Contact dawn.montano@alaska.edu to receive email reminders and agendas for upcoming calls, and summary notes following each call.

Alaska Congressional Delegation Updates

Matt Robinson, Senator Murkowski's Office

- The Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies mark up is underway. Senator Murkowski's office submitted Alaska requests a month ago and they are now being checked by the committee for eligibility.
- Appropriations and Congressionally Directed Spending includes 1-time projects and programmatic requests. Each year the priorities are different. This year the programmatic requests are level funding at best. Congressional offices can identify any programs that the president's budget reduced or cut and comment/request those.

Carina Nichols, Senator Sullivan's Office

- Congress is in recess this week so it's a little quieter. Session resumes next week for two weeks and then the August recess will start. There is limited time for Congress to pass bills between now and the end of the year, so there's a lot of focus on must-pass items.
- The annual National Defense Authorization Act legislation has been a hot topic with numerous amendments filed; members are looking to attach legislation to a bill in motion. There is also a Coast Guard Authorization bill which needs agreement from the Senate Commerce Committee.
- Senator Sullivan wrote the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force bill; the report from that came out last week.
- Seafood trade is also a big focus currently. Senator Sullivan was recently in King Salmon and met with seafood processors and other representatives from the fishing industry. He's been working with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to implement the Russian seafood prohibition secured late last year and is working to elevate additional trade challenges facing the industry right now.

Jillian Everly, Representative Peltola's Office

- Rep. Peltola's office is mostly focused on re-election at the moment
- Rep. Peltola introduced the Fisheries Improvement and Seafood Health (FISH) Act which draws

on bipartisan provisions from previous fisheries bills. The FISH Act would direct the GAO to conduct a study on US seafood competitiveness in international markets and assess Federal programs to support domestic seafood production. It would also create a Fisheries and Ecological Resilience program to help increase fisheries resilience through coordinated data collection, innovative management tools, and cross-agency and Fishery Management Council collaboration.

- Rep. Peltola's office has also been working on the Domestic Seafood Production Act. This addresses a variety of needs faced by the domestic seafood supply chain, especially in low-income communities. Through competitive grants, the Act would fund a variety of eligible community development projects to support seafood and mariculture processing. It focuses on uplifting low-income communities and seafood harvesting practices that would benefit local fishing and mariculture producers from those communities, and address their processing needs to provide healthy seafood to local and regional markets. The bill is complete and they are waiting for some final review to introduce it.
- Rep. Peltola's office is also working on legislation that would increase Tribal representation on the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council.

Alaska Legislative Updates

Rep. Sarah Vance, House Fisheries Committee Chair

The Legislature moved many bills to provide support to fisheries this session.

- [HB273](#): Assistance loans for commercial fishermen, passed in January, doubling the amount of loans and reducing the interest rate.
- [HB19](#): Eliminating the need for duplicate registration of vessels; vessels registered with the federal government no longer need to register with the state.
- [SB93](#): Increasing vessel owner claims for insurance
- [HB295](#): Allowing a legal request for permits to stock lakes
- [HB329](#): Assisting mariculture growers and provide security in leases

There were also several resolutions: endorsing Congressional efforts to include fishermen in the Farm Bill with access to loans, and initiating a legislative seafood industry task force to develop legislation to support industry.

Invited Speakers

Reducing killer whale bycatch in the Bering Sea deepwater flatfish trawl fishery

Hannah Myers, University of Alaska Fairbanks

- Killer whale interactions occur with longline and trawl fleets in the Bering Sea, primarily through gear entanglement and depredation. This is not a new problem but the scale has changed (27 trawl entanglements since 1991; 15 are since 2020.)
- The Alaska Seafood Cooperative asked for research support to address this issue, and fieldwork started in May 2023.
- Hannah deployed hydrophones and studied behavior, position, number of killer whales and other aspects on a vessel. The vessels provided catch composition, depth of tows, etc.
- Within 30 minutes of the first net in the water, killer whales approached the vessel and stayed with the vessel the whole time!
- Possible reasons for increased entanglements could be: changing prey (chinook and chum are priority orca prey but aren't doing well; sablefish are meanwhile booming), or some halibut and

other vessels have switched to pots which are harder for orcas so they're less interested and looking for other options.

- There has been collaboration between academics, fishermen and agency managers to develop gear modifications to reduce entanglement in trawl nets. An idea moving forward is a large mesh "fence" across the net entrance.
- This was tested in a flume tank in Newfoundland and was found to be successful. Starting this past May, all vessels of this type are required to use the intervention. Feedback from captains has been positive.
- Partners include NOAA Fisheries, the Pollock Conservation Cooperative, the Alaska Seafood Cooperative, captains and crew of Amendment 80 vessels.
- Hannah can be reached at Hmyers8@alaska.edu.

Scenarios Planning Workshop at the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council meeting in June

Katie Latanich, *North Pacific Fisheries Management Council fishery analyst and climate project manager*

- Climate change is hitting Alaska fisheries hard, and rapid changes and shocks are creating uncertainty and instability. This is bringing climate change to the forefront of NPFMC discussion.
- The Council held a 2-day scenarios planning workshop during their June meeting in Kodiak. The purpose was to generate ideas for short and long term management approaches and tools to improve climate resiliency of federally managed fisheries in the North Pacific.
- There were over 200 contributors (150 people in person) including all council members and council committees
- This was not a decision making workshop; the focus was on generating ideas and not developing consensus around recommendations.
- The discussion included exploring the definitions of resilience and readiness as well as 'robust and inclusive'. These terms can mean different things to different people. The forum provided a feedback loop for thoughts and observations to help inform the council process.
- A theme from the discussion included the diversity of information inputs going into decision making (predictive tools, regular surveys, local and traditional knowledge, subsistence perspectives, industry observations, cooperative research, etc).
- Participants looked at examples of rapid change and how to detect early warnings so we can identify red flags, mechanisms for timely response, and more time for planning and adaptation.
- The workshop was the beginning of a process. There will be a meeting report released in September, in October the council will consider whether and how to incorporate the ideas into new or existing initiatives, and what additional public input is needed.
- [More details](#) from the meeting. [Sign up](#) to get updates about workshop follow up. **Contact:** katie.latanich@noaa.gov

Announcements

Ginny Eckert, Alaska Sea Grant

- European Green Crab awareness day is July 18. This invasive species is moving up the coast and has been found on Annette island near Metlakatla. It is a risk to habitat, native crab, eel grass, clams, and other shellfish. [Learn more.](#)

Jason Lessard, Alaska Mariculture Alliance

- The Alaska Mariculture Alliance and World Wildlife Fund are hosting a viewing of 3 videos WWF has put together spotlighting seaweed farmers. One of the videos is set in Kodiak, Alaska. The event will be at 49th State Brewing on Aug 18 at 6pm, hor d'oeuvres will be served.

Kodiak Kelp Festival, July 24-26

Alaska Sea Grant, Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference, Kodiak Ocean Growers, and Kodiak Island Brewing Company and Still are hosting three days of celebration and recognition of Kodiak, and Alaska's growing kelp and seaweed industry. Look forward to the release of our Sea Level Kelp Gose, seaweed based cocktails, short seaweed focused films, information on kelp harvesting, cultivating, and farming, seaweed science, Live Music featuring Kodiak's Joey Houck (Thursday), locally made foods, kelp focused arts and wares, and plenty more!

Please reach out to [Ginny Eckert](#) or [Sheyna Wisdom](#) if you would like to hear about a particular topic during future forums.

The next Alaska Marine Policy Forum call will be Sept 18, 2024 at 1pm Alaska time. To register for this Forum or all of 2024 Forums visit: <https://alaskaseagrant.org/events/alaska-marine-policy-forum/>