

Remarks from David Witherell at NOAA Admiral Gallaudet's Town Hall meeting in Juneau AK, August 31, 2018

Thank you Admiral Gallaudet and Mr. Oliver, for coming to Alaska to discuss opportunities to promote fisheries and the blue economy. In the short time I have available, I would like to list a few of the key points from the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

The Council works as a close partner with NOAA to maximize the production and value of fisheries off Alaska. The Council relies on NOAA Fisheries for scientific information, monitoring, enforcement, and implementation of fishery regulations and management plans.

Regulations are numerous but necessary to support effective conservation and management of fisheries. These fishery regulations, which are developed through a transparent and participatory bottom-up approach, result in a high degree of support by the regulated community. Nearly all of regulations that arise through the Council process are initially proposed by members of the fishing community as needed to promote sustainable and profitable fisheries.

Through the Council process, Federal regulations are continuously reviewed and revised to address new or changing conservation or management concerns, and to improve the effectiveness of the regulations. Although not always explicitly stated, part of this review process is determining whether the benefits of the current regulations outweigh the costs.

The Council also relies on a non-regulatory approach for management where possible, by using incentives and providing tools for industry to achieve the Council's conservation and management objectives. For example, the Council has authorized fishing quotas for Rockfish in the Gulf of Alaska, and Flatfish in the Bering Sea, to be allocated among industry cooperatives. The Council requires accountability from the cooperatives for achieving management objectives (such as reducing bycatch), but provides the cooperatives with the flexibility to identify the best tools to achieve them. These measures are given effect through civil contracts and cooperative governance, and our experience to date suggests that in many cases, the non-regulatory approach can achieve the Council's conservation objectives better, and with less expense, than regulatory means.

One of the most important aspects of building and maintaining a profitable fishing industry is the sustainability of resources available for harvesting. This requires, among other things, the establishment of biologically-based catch limits to maintain abundant fish stocks, marine protected areas to protect fragile habitat, and a comprehensive observer program to monitor the catches of all species. NOAA fisheries provides the scientific support through surveys, stock assessments and other applicable scientific information. Of particular interest to the Council is maintaining the NOAA standardized bottom trawl and acoustic surveys, which are critical for stock assessments and sustainability. In addition, the large disruptions in the ecosystem as

occurred recently with the warm blob in the Gulf of Alaska and loss of the cold pool in the Bering Sea, would not have been documented or the impacts understood without these critical surveys.

In closing, I would just emphasize that, here in the North Pacific, we have created an adaptable, science-based, public process that can effectively address issues that arise due to climate change or other factors, and can provide sustainable and profitable fisheries for generations to come.

Once again, thank you Admiral Gallaudet and Mr. Oliver for your interest in promoting the fisheries off Alaska.

David Witherell is the Executive Director of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, which is the Federal/state/public policy body that develops management plans and regulations for the groundfish, crab, and scallop fisheries in the Exclusive Economic Zone off Alaska. As Director, David oversees a staff of biologists and economists who prepare environmental and economic impact analyses that form the basis of policy decisions by the Council. Mr. Witherell has over 25 years of experience in fisheries management in the North Pacific, and holds a Masters Degree in Fisheries from the University of Massachusetts.