



Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute

Salmon Committee Meeting
Monday, May 13, 2024
9:30 AM - 12:30 PM Alaska Time
Virtual

Draft Minutes

Call to Order: Chair Jackson called the meeting to order at 9:31 AM Alaska Time.

Roll Call & Introduction of guests

Members present:

Chair Michael "MJ" Jackson

Vice Chair José Montero, Jr.

Nicholas Dowie

Matt Alward

Vanessa Aslanian

Melanie Brown

Robert Gershberg

Carleigh Hugh

Eric Jordan

Ted McDermott

Alex Pihl

Sandy Souter

Adam Drouhard, Ex Officio

John Daly, Board Member

Quorum established.

Members absent: Marta Heacock

Others present: Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang, Jeremy Woodrow, other ASMI staff and members of the public

Alward made a motion to approve the agenda. Souter seconded it. All were in favor.

Souter made a motion to approve the minutes from All Hands on Deck, November 2, 2023. Aslanian seconded it. All were in favor.

ASMI Antitrust Statement was read by Chair Jackson.

Chair Remarks: Chair Jackson when we met last time, it was dark times for the industry, but it is more positive now with demand balancing out and the trend is up.

Vice Chair Remarks: VC Montero agreed with Chair Jackson about seeing light at end of tunnel. Inventories are aligned, and we have the right arena for success.

There was no public comment.

New Business

Wild Fish Conservancy Lawsuit: Dani Evenson, ADFG & Linda Behnken, ALFA

Evenson began by explaining that the Wild Fish Conservancy's lawsuit is a challenge to the national marine fisheries service biological opinion for the Southeast Alaska salmon fishery. This is the document that gives Alaska incidental take coverage under the Endangered Species Act and allows our Pacific Salmon Treaty salmon fisheries to operate. The State of Alaska and Alaska Trollers Association intervened in this case to defend Alaska's fisheries and Alaska's interests. The suit specifically attacks Alaska's management of its Chinook salmon troll fisheries under the Pacific Salmon Treaty. The district judge ruled on behalf of Wild Fish Conservancy in August 2022. The next step is remedy, so NIMM's biological opinion needs to be rewritten. The State filed an appeal and was granted a stay June 21, 2023. Litigation is still active and what happens next is in the hands of the court. In the meantime, fisheries are proceeding. NOAA has been rewriting the biological opinion and conducting the NEPA process. They decided to split the biological opinion and NEPA into each into two separate documents – one for fishery and funding that goes to the State to implement the treaty and one for the mitigation program of the southern resident killer whale. It is anticipated that the two biological opinions and two environmental impact statements will be available by November.

Behnken said this issue is important to the members of Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association. They haven't intervened but have supported ADFG. Behnken referenced the letter that was shared with the committee and spoke about the Wild Fish Conservancy and how they've filed many suits. She is asking ASMI to step in. Commissioner Vincent-Lang asked if she had spoken to them directly. She replied that she reached out to the new director to try and share with her about the commitment of fishermen up here to maintain stocks and healthy habitats and the departing director was on the call also; she feels they are very committed to this campaign to close down hatcheries and to close down fisheries that they see as a threat to their wild runs in Washington. Chair Jackson asked how she thinks ASMI can help. She said they'd like to see media responses and a positive campaign that counters the pressure they are seeing in Washington in media and outreach to restaurants & high-end markets about why they shouldn't carry Alaska Chinook and it bleeds out to Alaska salmon. Jordan was complimentary of Linda Behnken and shared examples of how Southeast Alaska has done work to protect salmon and feels the attack is wrong. Jeff Farvour spoke and shared examples of businesses that are not carrying King Salmon any longer; he shared a link in chat as an example of the misinformation out there confusing the consumers: <https://www.tastingtable.com/1537189/vanishing-king-salmon-why-eat-less/> Chair Jackson said he needs to find out what can be done by the ASMI committee.

Endangered Species Proposal: Dani Evenson, ADFG

NIMM's received a petition to list all Chinook salmon flowing into Gulf of Alaska as endangered. Commissioner Vincent-Lang shared that if ever there was a petition to throw out, this is it, but they are still taking it seriously. Evenson also shared that recently Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) received two objections to the recertification of salmon fisheries. Commissioner Vincent-Lang agreed that we need to move away from MSC and towards a certification that is fair and equitable.

Alward asked if the committee thinks it is time for the committee to make a recommendation to the ASMI board to take a stand against MSC. There was discussion.

Alward made a motion that the salmon committee recommends to the ASMI board and relevant committees to consider writing a letter to, at a minimum, point out the misinformation on the MSC certification process. Jordan seconded the motion. Roll call vote. All were in favor.

Break until 10:55 AM.

Industry Updates (roundtable committee discussion)

Chair Jackson invited VC Montero to run this part.

Vice Chair Jose Montero, Jr. gave high level overview of each salmon species.

Sandy Souter said that the exchange rate will still impact roe.

Nicholas Dowie said it is challenging to hire so feeling that production might be down.

Alex Pihl is curious about what was asked for and what the USDA purchased of canned salmon. Woodrow answered in the chat: "To Alex's question regarding USDA canned salmon purchase vs the ASMI Section 32 request. ASMI's requested 1.8M cases of pink to be purchased and USDA purchased 1.4M cases of Tall Pink cans. ASMI also requested 250k cases of sockeye cans be purchased and USDA purchased 300k cases of a mix of tall and half cans."

Souter shared his concern about the chum market's oversupply.

Chair Jackson asked the committee "what is the definition of quality?" He thinks it's a moving target. Pihl, as a seiner, he has a definition and thinks plant has a definition also and same for the retail counter, and it seems like a disconnect right now with the low price. Souter calls it quality maintaining. Chair Jackson said it's keeping it as close to the quality at harvest as possible throughout the cycle. Chair Jackson asked if RSW is the best method? Souter said yes, it's the most practical right now for the masses. Jackson said he's asking because we're competing against farm fish which is perfect. What can we do to change the paradigm in order to compete with that quality? Jordan said when processors reward with price there is incentive for better quality. Alward says it is about incentive for fishermen, but more so it is a supply chain issue. Chair Jackson asked the committee to keep this question in mind. Brown asked if production bonuses generate quantity or quality. Brown posed a question about roe and building the market in US.

Nicole Alba gave an international marketing program update including future activities.

Greg Smith gave an update on the communications program & consumer PR efforts. He shared a work in progress, which is species-specific pages on the website; it is still internal right now but would appreciate feedback. Alward asked if the communications team has put thought into how ASMI might counteract the misinformation out there whether on king salmon or the certification process. When the Wild Fish Conservancy lawsuit first came out, ASMI and ADFG did discuss it and felt ADFG would be better to respond. Using ASM's crisis communications plan, it was decided to not give focus on all the pieces of misinformation out there by different groups; it wasn't the strategic best move to elevate their claims and them more spread. ASMI's efforts were focused on positive storytelling.

Greg Smith also gave the update on the domestic marketing program's retail efforts since Director Megan Rider is traveling. VC Montero asked if there were any work being done with BJ's. Smith will find out.

Sarah Wallace gave an update on the foodservice programming. There has been recipe development and chef collaboration; there is also an upcoming fam. Shared mentioned relationships and promotions which include Jason's Deli, Nordstrom and Plate magazine. Other partnerships also include Holland America cruise line and their use of the Seafood U course. Roe will be featured at a "Hot Luck" event in a few weeks.

John Burrows gave an update on the technical program. Alward commented that American Fish Advisory Committee, which is in charge of the SK program, sent recommendations so hopefully the announcements will be made soon. Chair Jackson asked Burrows what the working definition of quality and its metric is. Burrows said it varies by study.

Chair Jackson thanked everyone and asked if there was anything else for the good of the order. Alward shared that he was in Japan as part of group of Alaskans invited over to advise on recovery from earthquake in Japan in January. There is so much devastation in the fishing towns, including the sea floor rose 2-4 meters so there are now dry harbors – the biggest of which now has 250 boats stuck in it. We have some big issues we are dealing with, but this puts things in perspective.

Alward made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jordan seconded. Meeting adjourned at 12:24 PM Alaska Time.