



North Pacific Fishery Management Council (June 2011)

By Jim Stotts, ICC Alaska President

My name is Jim Stotts and I'm the President of the Alaska branch of the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). ICC is an international organization that advocates on behalf of approximately 160,000 Inuit from Chukotka/Russia, Alaska/United States, Canada, and Greenland/Denmark.

ICC has consultative status as an Indigenous Peoples Organization (IPO) at the United Nations and consults to the UN on matters concerning the Arctic on a wide range of issues. ICC is a permanent participant to the Arctic Council, the eight nation intergovernmental organization that works together to develop Arctic policy. ICC celebrated its 30th anniversary last summer.

On behalf of Inuit, ICC seeks full and active partnership in the political, economic, and social development of the circumpolar north. We are intimately involved in all activities occurring on our lands and waters. Obviously this includes matters up for consideration before this meeting of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council).

ICC Alaska is in favor of the hard cap alternative to the bycatch problem, although we believe the lower suggested limit of 50,000 is too high and suggest a limit of 30,000. We also believe the 10.7% allocated to CDQs is too low and would suggest a higher allocation of at least 13%. Together these actions would show a good faith effort to address the stated goal of reducing adverse impacts to fishery dependent communities and, I would add, Inuit. We believe these two actions should be implemented together as an interim solution to the bycatch problem.

There are reasons we believe these actions should be viewed as an interim solution. We believe the Council needs to adjust to recent U.S. national policy changes that will affect

commercial fisheries in U.S. waters. Laws need to be modified to accommodate these changes, including changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Act itself.

Last year, in July, the President signed Executive Order 13547 which created the National Ocean Council. The Ocean Council will oversee implementation of comprehensive national policy for the stewardship of U.S. oceans, coasts and the Great Lakes. The Governance Coordination Committee of the Ocean Council mandates indigenous representation. The Ocean Council has a stated special interest in the priority areas of the Arctic Ocean. This will impact the Arctic Fishery Management Plan approved by the U.S. Department of Commerce and, likely affect the North Pacific Council as well.

Also, last year, in December, the President announced U.S. support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Declaration). In the 15 page document that further defines the U.S. approach to implementing its support, federal agencies are to ensure that indigenous rights are not compromised. Food security is one of those basic rights. ICC assumes the Department of Commerce, which has oversight responsibility for the Council, will take a close look at Council activities and regulations to fulfill U.S. support for the Declaration.

Discussions concerning an Arctic fishery have begun within the Arctic Council. ICC believes that any fishery development in the Arctic Ocean will likely have an international element to it, stressing international cooperation. The prevailing thought is that there is not enough science to enable Arctic fisheries to be managed. Discussions between the eight Arctic nations at the Arctic Council forum will likely impact the Arctic Fishery Management Plan.

Next week in Anchorage the five Arctic coastal states will meet to discuss commercial fishing in the Arctic Ocean. Their objective is to compare notes to find out where scientific gaps exist and work together in a spirit of cooperation.

ICC will work with the Department of Commerce and the Arctic Council as these policy changes are implemented to ensure Inuit perspectives are considered.

Clearly, further work is necessary to better manage fish resources to include the needs of Inuit and fishery dependent communities. Inuit depend on these fish for nutritional and cultural survival. Food security is a global concern and a critical concern for Inuit as well. Despite the best efforts of the Council to manage the fishery, Inuit find themselves losing

access to these food resources. It's not an exaggeration to say we are getting starved out. This is not the first time the Council has heard this characterization.

Changing national policy should not be viewed as a threat to commercial fishing. It should be viewed as an opportunity to do a better job managing the fishery for sustainable yield while ensuring all users, including Inuit, have access to these fish for food. Inuit food security must be protected under any management regime. This principle should be extended to all Fishery Management Councils where indigenous peoples are affected. It's time for a paradigm shift in how we approach the fishery. It's time to change our way of thinking.

Thank you for this opportunity and we pledge to work cooperatively with the Council moving forward to our mutual benefit.