

PUBLIC COMMENTS during Staff tasking  
October 15, 2021

Waqaa, Council Members, thank you for taking my testimony today. My name is Serena Fitka, Executive Director for the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association better known as YR DFA. YR DFA is an association of subsistence and commercial fishermen from the 42 rural communities along the Yukon River and their tributaries.

My Yup'ik name is Cuucitcuar and I grew up on the Yukon. I subsistence fish along the Yukon and I teach my children the importance of fish, which is the same for every family along the Yukon River. I cannot express the devastating conditions we have been facing. I would like to reiterate that for the first time in history the people of the Yukon River were not able to harvest salmon. I've traveled and talked to many people along the river and usually when their days are filled with fishing, traditionally processing of their salmon, and tending to their smokehouses, they stated they felt depressed because of their inactivity of fishing for the last few years. I too felt the same. I would walk to the bank of the Yukon River and wish I could go out on the boat and throw my net in the river.

During these hard times I think about my oldest daughter, Hali. When she was 7 years old, we sat down and ate egamaarlluq, which is half dried salmon, with seal oil. She was really enjoying her dinner. She looked up at me with the biggest smile and said, "Mom, when I grow up I'm going to teach my kids how to cut fish, so we can have egamaarlluq." My heart was beaming with pride, but at the same time I couldn't help but feel an overwhelming sense of despair. As I sat there I thought "I sure hope there will be fish for her to catch, so she can teach her children how to harvest the salmon." She is now 11 and I often think back to that memory during these hard times. She has not been able to cut fish for 2 years because of the Yukon River closures.

This is why we are participating in your process, we fight for our next generation to be able to fish, we fight for our elders so they will be able to continue to pass down their knowledge of fish. You have heard testimony from many about the situations they are facing and the Council can help this situation by taking both immediate and longer-term action to move towards zero bycatch. I ask you to take the actions outlined in the original unamended AP motion. I would like to reiterate that this issue affects all fishermen, in-river and in the ocean. The survival of salmon in the Bering sea is much like the pollock, dependent on availability of food, environmental conditions, and predation.

I await the actions you make today to share with 42 Yukon River communities as the ED of YR DFA. All factors to the salmon decline point towards the marine life stage. We cannot disconnect what happens in the Bering Sea to the impacts along the Yukon River. The people of the Yukon River have been sacrificing their needs for years and we all need to work together to sustain our fisheries, not only for us, but for the next generation of fishermen that follow us. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide this testimony. Qu yana