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(Based on Meeting Transcript)

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Thank you Mr. Chairman. If Mr. Tillion is a ghost of Christmas past I feel like the poor schmuck in Groundhog Day. One of these days I'm going to get it right. Mr. Tillion is -- and I have worked together for many, many years and his perspective on these issues is I think very, very important. I'm going to try and be fairly brief. I've given you my written comments. There are some handouts that the Council has prepared that I would call your attention to and ask you to look at.

As Mr. Tillion's pointed out, we're pretty darn proud of our record up here in Alaska, and that goes for both state and federal management programs. Some of you have had the opportunity to work with me, or maybe the misfortune of working with me. Mr. Ruckelshaus and I have sort of been down the thorny path of U.S. Canada salmon negotiations and Mr. Rosenberg and I have dealt with some sea lion issues and a few other things over time. I think though that folks that have dealt with management entities here in Alaska, folks from outside of Alaska, I think have come to understand that we have tried -- as Mr. Tillion has said, we've tried to always put science and the resource first in our management decisions and our perspective on how we approach often controversial and very difficult issues.

I'd like to touch on maybe just a couple of successes and things that we have accomplished and then talk a little bit about why that's come about. The first thing, as Mr. Tillion has said, is when -- at the Council level when we set overall harvest rates and harvest quotas; those are very much driven by the science involved. We have planned teams and we have a scientific and statistical committee and they have scientists from multiple disciplines, multiples agencies. They bring a variety of perspectives to the science debate. It's a very open scientific process. At the end of the day when they bring their recommendations to the Council for allowable biological catches we don't debate that. We basically take what they give to us and we say fine. Now then, after we have that number we're go -- we may mess around with it, but the way that we do that is we may lower the amount of harvest available, we don't raise it, ever, and we stick within that context. And there's a tradition and a history there and a procedure that I think the Commission would be well advised to sort of look at in terms of how -- why things are working up here and maybe they didn't work in other parts of the country. Because I don't think that tradition has been in place in many of the other Council jurisdictions.

As Clem pointed out, we have a lot of areas closed. Well, what does that mean? What that means is in the Bering Sea 30,000 plus square miles of territory are closed. In the Gulf of Alaska 40 some odd thousand square miles. We have an area closed that's several times larger than Georgia's bank, larger than Indiana, larger than Maine. We didn't do that because environmental interests came to us and forced us to do that, we did it long before they showed up at the table. And we did that because the Council and the Council process said we have real conservation problems, we need to protect bottom habitat, and we need to protect rearing areas for crab stocks that are in a depressed condition, a variety of reasons. But we did that.

And the reason that I want to call your attention to that, not so much to pat ourselves on the back, but to say the Council process as it currently stands can lead to those kinds of decisions without the threat of litigation, without the sort of public pressure that's now coming in place. I'm not saying that public pressure is bad and I'm not saying that litigation doesn't have its place in the public policy arena. I'm just calling attention to the way the process is set up right now it can lead to those kinds of results.

As Mr. Tillion pointed out, we have an observer program. That observer program was first put in place I want to say around 1989 or 1990, I'm not exactly sure when. It was one of the first, you know, sort of global observer programs in the country. It's right now one of the largest observer programs in the world. It's funded by industry, through contractors that are approved by National Marine Fisheries Service. It is a central part of our management regime in the offshore fisheries. We could not manage those fisheries if we did not have observers on those vessels. That's the basic data that you use to open and close fisheries and ensure that you're staying within your catch limits and you're staying within your by catch limits and that kind of thing.

We really need as a nation, I believe, to look at having those kinds of monitoring programs in place around the country. And I know that NOAA and National Marine Fisheries Service have been trying for a long time to get the authority and the resources to have those kinds of observer programs in other parts of the world. We have the luxury here of having healthy fisheries that can help sort of pay the freight for that kind of program. So funding obviously becomes an issue.

Bycatch and discards and waste in fisheries is something that has been high on the national agenda. Before the passage of the Sustainable Fisheries Act in 1996 our Council had imposed very strict limits on bycatch of what we call prohibited species. Those are species such as halibut, crab, herring, salmon. We impose those limits on all the ground fish fisheries depending on the characteristic of the fishery. And when those limits are reached the fishery closes. We have areas -- we have time and area closures of, for example, the

Bering Sea to protect Chinook salmon or other salmon and so when a cap is reached the fleet has to move out of those areas. We have a number of management tools to address bycatch.

One of the unfortunate things that has gone on in the last couple of years, and I'm going to come back to this, but it's the litigation gridlock that the agency is finding itself in fisheries management, National Marine Fisheries Service is finding itself. I'm sure you've heard that before. One of the unfortunate things is one of the perverse results of that litigation has been in our part of the world to stop work on bycatch reduction and habitat protection and some of the other kinds of actions that the Sustainable Fisheries Act requires Councils to do. And the reason for that is we have limited staff, limited resources, just like everyone else and we get caught up in this litigation that is -- deals with procedural issues so we have to take all that -- all the staff and the resources that should go into implementing conservation measures to put together what basically turns out to be oftentimes more or less a paper chase exercise that in the end of the day, while it -- you know, legally it's important, at the end of the day it doesn't make a difference in what's going on in the water. And that's unfortunate. That's something that I believe the Commission should look at very closely in terms of overall policy. How do we reconcile some of these various Acts so that we don't have the catch 22 on procedure?

The only other thing that I guess I want to mention has to do with sort of social and economic considerations. Our Council has I think been at the forefront over many years in terms of looking at how do you protect communities, what role do communities have in fisheries, what role do fisheries have in the economic and social well being of communities? Part of that comes about because, Mr. Chairman as you noted, Alaska is a state that's very closely tied to the sea and fisheries are the mainstay of the economy of a lot of our part of the world.

We've looked at all kinds of different ways to incorporate community concerns into our fisheries. The community development program in the Bering Sea which Mr. Tillion helped institute at the Council has been I think one of our flagship programs. It's the single largest private sector employment program in western Alaska now, in these little western Alaska villages. It has taken and transformed very quickly the role of people that live in western Alaska, primarily Native Alaskans, from sort of folks that are sitting on the beach watching all these big vessels out there to people that are actually -- they're on the vessels, they own the vessels, they're participants at all levels in the fishery. It's been a very successful program. You're going to hear more about that I think during the next day or so of your meeting.

We've done a number of other things, we did inshore offshore allocations in the Pollock fishery, we did -- we've done a modification recently to our halibut sablefish, IFQ program to allow communities to purchase quota share and hold it in trust for use by fishermen in their communities, sort of a entry level kind of

program to ensure that especially in the smaller communities that quotas don't migrate out or that they could be repatriated into the town so that people -- young people coming up could actually get involved in the fishery and have a livelihood.

And probably the most controversial issue that we've done recently in June was the proposal for crab rationalization which has quota shares that would go to harvesters, quota shares that would go to processors, would have allocations set by regionalization to ensure that deliveries go back to communities that historically participated and also recognized and gave a stake in the fishery to skippers and crew. It's controversial in part because of all those components. Probably the largest one is the role of processors in that program. It's in a report going to Congress; we'll see what the Congress has to say about it. Our Council felt that we had to look at fisheries I think as a system, not as individual competing components that are always at war with each other and that were our first stab at it.