

Josh Wisniewski Comments on Proposal 171 in support of slinky pots in State managed Pacific Cod fishery in the Prince William Sound management area.

Chairwoman Marit Carlson Van Dort, Alaska Board of Fisheries
Alaska Board of Fisheries
P.O. BOX 25526
Juneau, Alaska 99802-5526
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My name is Josh Wisniewski. My partner Marissa Wilson and I live in Seldovia and are "small" small-boat, community-based fishermen and subsistence fishermen. We request the board adopt Proposal 171 to allow the use of slinky pots in the Prince William Sound Pacific cod fishery and develop appropriate gear marking requirements that are manageable for a small boat to comply with to help alleviate conflict with other pot and longline fisheries.

To illustrate what I mean by describing myself as a small-scale community-based fisherman: I set net where I live at Barabara Point near Seldovia, and I also longline halibut and jig out of a 24ft boat that I built to fish my home waters in Kachemak Bay, lower Cook Inlet and the outer Gulf Coast. My boat is also small enough that my partner and I can trailer it to Whittier to participate in open access Prince William Sound area fisheries.

We are requesting the Board adopt Proposal 171 in order to allow for longlining slinky pots in the Prince William Sound Pacific cod fishery, within the existing pot limits and with appropriate gear marking regulations. Proposal 171 addresses previously unforeseen gear type issues, as slinky pots had not been developed when regulations regarding pot fishing for Pacific cod were developed. Currently, their use is allowed in other state-managed groundfish fisheries.

We support establishing reasonable gear marking requirements, though we do not support proposal 172 regarding gear marking as written; this is incredibly burdensome and prohibitive for a small vessel to comply with. We do support a reasonable requirement to label gear to distinguish it from other gear types.

The gear types allowed in the Prince William Sound and Cook Inlet area Pacific Cod fishery currently are limited to single pot and jig/hand troll gear. Under the current pot gear restrictions, which were developed before the advent of slinky pots, a small-boat fisherman such as myself whose vessel is not large enough to fish single pots cannot currently participate in the pot fishery. Yet a larger boat can fish in the same waters we would fish were we to have the opportunity to do so. In fact, the inventor of slinky pots developed them so he could fish with pots using his 25-foot vessel. This innovation provided opportunity to vessels that are affordable and have a low cost of maintenance. This sector of the fisheries is often underrepresented but very important for local food security, as many of these fishermen direct market fish locally to increase the value of their catch, and skiffs are essential for subsistence fishing in communities off the road system. Additionally, slinky pots have a proven success rate in the sablefish fishery and have a demonstrable benefit in limiting bycatch and whale predation, and therefore have a conservation benefit that supports all Alaskans.

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If we were allowed to longline slinky pots we would immediately be able to participate in this fishery. While we can currently jig, that is not viable at times when cod are not as aggregated or weather conditions are prohibitive for small boats.

Adoption of Proposal 171 would allow small-scale fishermen greater diversification, in our case providing the opportunity to supplement salmon, halibut and jig fisheries by extending the fishing season. This also provides economic benefit to the economies of small fishing communities.

For fishermen like us, this is not about pursuing a high-volume fishery: it is about creating an opportunity for diversification for small boat operators in one of the few remaining open access fisheries. The Gulf of Alaska is undergoing significant and rapid ecological changes, resulting in changes in species distribution and abundance. Creating access opportunities for small-scale fishermen to be able to adapt to these fluctuations is critical. Small-scale fisheries have supported life here for millennia.

Proposal 171 addresses previously unforeseen gear type issue, based on the advent of slinky pots in period after Pacific cod gear restrictions were developed. It promotes a clean way of fishing and provides an important opportunity for small-boat fishermen.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this request and for your service to Alaskans.

Sincerely,

Josh Wisniewski and Marissa Wilson
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