

The decision to permit the source and number of eggs taken by hatchery operations is one of my authorities under Alaska statute. I want to assure you I take this responsibility seriously.

When I became Commissioner 6 years ago one of the numerous controversies I faced with was the issue of hatchery-wild interaction. To ensure we could sort out the science I made a policy decision that I would not permit an increased egg take for pink salmon. And I have not permitted an increase in egg takes over the past six years.

This past year I have spent considerable time reviewing the literature and talking with scientists and many stakeholders. What I have found is that the science is unclear. Yes, the Ruggerone paper says one thing, but much of it is based on correlation, not cause and effect. Other papers show the opposite.

I also reviewed the level of biomass from Alaska pink salmon hatchery releasees. Alaska hatchery releases represent 2.1% of the total adult and immature pink biomass in the North Pacific. Also, I reviewed the preliminary data from the International Year of the Salmon marine cruises that showed little overlap in the distribution of marine rearing pink and chinook salmon.

Given this, I have concluded that the science regarding hatchery-wild is inconclusive at this point in time. As such, I will not be using my authority to reduce permitted pink salmon egg take levels at this time.

This said, I encourage further research on this topic with the hope of getting more definitive science. We will continue our efforts to finalize the study on genetic impacts of hatchery straying on wild stocks and continue our involvement to address the larger questions regarding hatchery food competition through the NPAFC.