



**SEAGO chair Tom Ohaus testimony to
North Pacific Fisheries Management Council
April 2008**

1. Thanks Chairman Olsen and Council members.
2. Introduction – My name is Tom Ohaus. My family and my partner’s family own two lodge buildings and operate 8 boats in Sitka. We have borrowed substantial amounts of money to finance our business and invested much in Sitka since we opened our doors in 1995. Our business in Sitka sells multi-day packages. We fish for halibut and salmon. We have 25 employees in the summer. We pick up our customers at the airport and deliver them back to the airport – they come to Sitka exclusively to fish. Charter fishing provides a major benefit to Alaska’s coastal communities. In Sitka, nearly all our customers come from outside our state (see MacDowell study). They come to experience the natural beauty, they leave money, and they go home. They also like to bring home some fish to enjoy. This creates extremely high value for Alaskans for the use of a small portion of our sustainable natural resource. Charter fishing requires two things to succeed – a sustainable resource and regulations that support a predictable, sustainable industry.
3. I’d like to share a little information about the lodge business in Sitka. According to a MacDowell report published in January 2005, non-cruise charter operators in Sitka brought 10,400 anglers to town generating \$31 million dollars in economic activity in 2004. 350 to 400 people are employed in the non-cruise charter industry in Sitka each season. On average our customers book their trip 8 months from the time of travel. They book their airfare nearly a half year prior to travel. When regulations change suddenly, the customers show up, feel burned, and often choose not to make the long term commitment to book again. This happened to us in a big way in June of 2000 with king salmon and it has taken years for us to fully book early June dates again.
4. We encourage the council to get a more comprehensive economic analysis of the charter industry. It would be good to have a clearer picture of the effects of regulations and allocation shifts on both the charter and commercial sectors. .
5. I support expanding the range for analysis in both areas 2C and 3A in the fixed, floating, and mixed alternatives. We believe that the latent capacity, Community Qualified Entity permits and military boats that are mandated by the Council’s action on the charter fishing moratorium can only be accommodated by a higher allocation. The recent study completed by the ADFG of the logbook charter halibut data shows that the present options may not reflect the current harvest of halibut.
6. I think the option of leasing is not particularly viable and it should not be seen as a way make up for an inadequate allocation.
7. I appreciate that the council has a tough task before here. This has gone on a long time, but a decision that severely disadvantages either the guided sport or commercial sector will not make this problem go away.