

Testimony of Mr. Harrison Ibach

**Submitted to the
House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife**

Regarding “The State of Water Supply Reliability in the 21st Century”

February 26, 2019

Good morning Chairman Huffman, Members of the Committee. It's good to be with you today. My name is Harrison Ibach, I'm the President of the Humboldt Fishermen's Marketing Association and I'm the owner and captain of the fishing vessel Oceana from which 100% of my income is generated. I fish for salmon, Dungeness crab, and groundfish out of Eureka in northern California. I've come here today so you can hear directly from the North Coast about the devastation that water mismanagement has caused to my family and my community. I'm going to give you the salmon industry's perspective on California's water resources, the ways these resources are being managed and abused, and what Congress might do in order to save the Central Valley from itself and assure a more equitable use of our vital water system to benefit all of the food producers of our state who rely on it.

Commercial fishing has been a noble occupation since before the founding of this country. The ocean's bounty has been a cultural and culinary mainstay of the West Coast for thousands of years. And in our part of the world, salmon is king. Or at least it was.

Salmon are part of a cycle that nature has managed well for millions of years. But in the last century, water mismanagement in the West has sent our salmon into a death spiral.

When I was born, in the early 1980s, there were around 4500 commercial salmon fishermen in California. Today, there are fewer than 450 who can afford the time and financial investment to fish for salmon each summer. It has become so bad that we've lost 90 percent of our fishery.

When king salmon fisheries are healthy, they're an economic powerhouse, feeding America. These fish support 23,000 jobs in CA and 11,000 in OR in a "normal" non-drought year. The industry serving both sport and commercial salmon generates about \$1.4 billion in economic activity by the time you add in all the multipliers, and about half that much again in jobs and dollars in Oregon, where as much as 60 percent of their ocean caught salmon originate in California's Central Valley.

We haven't had a decent salmon season since 2013, and the fishery hasn't been reliable

since long before. Decisions at the Federal level have a tangible impact on salmon stocks, and on our incomes.

I have personally witnessed the devastating effects of mismanagement of water. I saw the largest salmon kill in the western united states on the Klamath River in 2002. Up to 70,000 adult salmon died when water was diverted away from the river for use inland.

Relaxed regulatory oversight and maximized Delta pumping between 2003 and 2006 led to the complete closure of the salmon fishery in 2008 and 2009. Imagine that for a second. For two years straight an entire industry was told it couldn't go to work. This shutdown was a nightmare for the fishing industry. We had to rely on federal disaster relief to scrape by. Fishermen don't favor handouts – we know how to work hard and we prefer to go to work.

2013 was a good season because of the strong salmon protections coming from the Endangered Species Act's 2009 salmon biological opinion and a wet spring in 2011. In the years since, California went through the worst drought it's had in decades.

The 2009 Biological opinion gave salmon a break for a couple of years. If it hadn't been implemented, the drought would have wiped us out for good.

The overwhelming success of the 2009 Biological Opinion was short lived due to the stressors of the 2012 – 2016 drought. But now, the federal administration wants to erase the gains we made by installing an even more regressive water regime than we had before 2009. And if this subcommittee doesn't pump the brakes and stop this callous action, we won't have a salmon fishery. And that's the truth.

Today's Bureau of Reclamation appears to me to be run more like a cash faucet for irrigators than a water agency that owns and operates storage and flood control infrastructure. The Bureau has recently released a Biological Assessment for a new Central Valley Project operations program. According to experts who my organization works with, this new management regime be ruinous to our salmon. It would certainly bring economic devastation to coastal communities like mine. Members of the Subcommittee, this administration's war on salmon must be stopped in its tracks.

We know that water management can make or break a fishing season and can determine if a fisherman will be able to provide for his family. Sending water to the ocean is not wasting it – it is an investment in biodiversity, in the fishing industry, and our coastal communities. The industry is looking towards our Federal and State water managers to determine the

future of salmon, and of our industry.

Looking forward, the projects and standards being pursued at the Federal level will only help push salmon, and West Coast commercial fishermen, to extinction.

We have a saying in California fisheries: are you here for the salad, or are you here for the main course? Honorable members of the Subcommittee, please make sure salmon fishermen are protected so we can continue to share nature's bounty with you and our fellow Americans. Thank you.