

Testimony of  
Captain Keith Colburn  
F/V Wizard  
United States Senate Committee on  
Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
October 11, 2013

Chairman Rockefeller and Ranking Member Thune, members of the Committee, thank you for your invitation to appear today. And Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for carrying on the legacy of the late Senator Inouye and advancing legislation to combat pirate fishing.

I would also like to thank Senators Begich, Murkowski, Cantwell, and Murray from the Alaska and Washington Congressional Delegations for their strong support of Alaskan crab fishermen.

My name is Keith Colburn and I am an Alaskan crabber. Some of you may also recognize me as the Captain of the fishing vessel Wizard on the Discovery Channel series, the Deadliest Catch. While I am honored to be before the Committee today, I would rather be 4,000 miles away from here awaiting the opening of the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery. This is the first time in my 28 years of fishing that I haven't been in the Bering Sea in October getting ready to go fish.

I am here today on behalf of fishermen. While I'm here to talk specifically about the impacts to my fishery, I want the Committee to understand that this shutdown is causing impacts to fisheries nationwide. In the Alaskan cod and Pollock fisheries, lack of personnel to perform routine administrative functions such as managing quota allocations will result in the loss of millions in revenue to that sector of the industry. The Federal observer program will also be impacted the longer this

shutdown continues. Across the country vessels that are required to carry Federal observers will be forced to stay tied to the docks. Many fishermen and coastal communities are already facing tough times. This unnecessary shutdown may be the tipping point if the situation isn't resolved soon.

The Alaskan king crab fishery is the model of sustainable fishery management practices. It is managed under a strict quota system where each fisherman is allocated a percentage of the total catch. The Alaska king crab stock is healthy and with a scientifically based conservative management approach, overfishing does not occur. The fishery results in hundreds of millions in economic activity and provides thousands of jobs for fishermen, processors and support businesses such as welders, mechanics, shippers, distributors and retailers.

I want to be very clear. Bering Sea crab fishermen fund the management costs of the crab fishery through the cost recovery program. We are taxed on our landings to cover management costs. NOAA has money in the bank left over from previous years that could be used to pay the personnel we need to issue our permits. Despite this fact, NOAA has furloughed the employees that are necessary to start the fishery on the October 15th season opener. We ask the Secretary of Commerce to direct NOAA employees to do the task that we've already paid for and issue our quota.

The delay in opening of the fishery will have significant impacts on our fishermen and Alaskan coastal communities. Collectively the fleet already has millions of dollars out of pocket just gearing up for the season. Each day tied to the docks will cost these boats thousands more. While these short-term impacts are relatively easy to measure, the longer-term market impacts are the scary part.

For a majority of our crab we rely on the holiday market, both in the US and Japan. If the crab isn't caught, processed, and shipped out of Alaska by the second week in November, we stand to lose access to that market. We can't afford to lose any more days to the government shutdown if we want to meet that timeline. Losing the holiday market will decrease the revenue we earn by 20-25%. In the case of the Japanese market we also stand to lose market share. If the Japanese buyers don't have Alaskan product on hand for the New Year's holiday they will source their crab from Russia. Market watchers are already noticing uncertainty in the Japanese trade press over the Alaskan supply.

The Russian king crab fishery is unsustainably managed and subject to a significant amount of pirate fishing. This pirate fishing has already cost the Alaskan crab fleet an estimated \$500 million since 2000. If this shutdown continues that amount will only increase.

Time is critical. The Wizard is one of many small, family run businesses that make up the Alaskan crab fleet. My wife manages the shore-side end of the business. My brother is on the boat with me. My crew depends on me to feed their families. We have been racking up bills getting ready to go fishing. If we're tied to the docks waiting for the government we can't pay those bills. I'm a small businessman in a big ocean with big bills. I need to go fishing.

Thank you and I'll be happy to answer any questions.