



Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance

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February 18, 2025

House Special Committee on Fisheries

Alaska State Legislature

Alaska State Capitol

Juneau, AK 99811

RE: SUPPPORT HB 33 – CONFLICT OF INTEREST BOARD OF FISH/GAME

Dear Representative Louise Stutes and Committee Members,

Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance (SEAFA) strongly supports HB 33 which allows Board of Fish (BOF) and Board of Game members to deliberate on regulatory proposals. SEAFA supports this legislation that would allow participation in the deliberations, sharing the Board members knowledge of the area/fishery but not voting as a compromise to current practices. Our testimony will focus on the Board of Fish aspect of this legislation. This is the most critical piece of legislation that can be passed to help strengthen the Board of Fish process as a transparent public process. The strength of the Board process is that it is a lay board with members having a variety of knowledge and different backgrounds. **When board members aren't allowed to use their knowledge to inform the process and educate fellow board members it discourages highly qualified individuals from submitting their name for the board.**

Currently at the beginning of the meeting, a Board member declares and discloses any possible conflicts. For those proposals, the Board member does not serve on the committee hearing on that proposal, and the Board member must leave the table when the proposal is being discussed, deliberated and voted on. Before the board even considers the proposal during deliberations, the meeting is actually stopped so the Board member can walk to the public portion of the meeting room, like sending a kindergarten kid to the corner of the room when they get in trouble. Often the Board member in conflict is the only Board member with an understanding of the issue being discussed. **A Board of Fish member is vetted by the Governor's office and the Legislature before being confirmed, we should have some trust in that process.**

If HB 33 passes, the other board members are reminded when a proposal is first introduced during deliberations that a member has a conflict, the remaining board members will then view any information provided during deliberations with a lens of understanding that the Board

member has a financial conflict and may be affected by the outcome of the proposal similar to the current process at the State Legislature.

When I first started attending Board of Fish meetings in 1988, this was the process used and it worked. With changes to the ethics act, this changed and has not been a healthy change for public transparency of the process. With the current conflict of interest process in place, discussions with the board member with the knowledge of the issue and the conflict takes place in the background and not in front of the public as it should be because they know they won't be able to share their expertise on the proposal during deliberations. **Similar to the State Legislature, board member expertise provides the crucial and educational information to ensure that those allowed to vote are informed prior to voting.**

Commercial fishermen tend to have more conflicts from proposals than other members involved in the sport or subsistence fisheries. This is probably a combination of more commercial proposal as well as being able to define a financial conflict of interest easily by the fisheries they participate in and hold limited entry permits for. It is important to have fishermen with a variety of background, gear types and fisheries because fishing and fishing gear can be complicated with small nuances that even the Dept of Fish and Game and Enforcement do not always understand.

It is our opinion that the Board of Fisheries has gone too far to the letter of the law of the Executive Branch Ethics Act and has forgotten that the State want the industry members to participate as is true with the State Legislature. If you look at the majority of the Boards and Commissions in the state that are tied to types of licenses, they are exempted from the Executive Branch Ethics Act so that the members involved in the industry are full able to participate (i.e. barbers, teacher, medical professions, professional Guide board, Marine pilots etc.). **This legislation by allowing participation but not voting on a proposal, we believe meets the intent of the Ethics Act. Please pass HB 33 to provide the Board of Fish the benefit of the knowledge of the Board member and a clear and transparent public process.**

SEAFA is a multi-gear/multi-species membership based commercial fishing association representing our 300+ members primarily involved in the salmon, crab, shrimp fisheries of Southeast Alaska as well as longline fisheries in SE and the Gulf of Alaska.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kathy Hansen', followed by a long horizontal flourish line.

Kathy Hansen
Executive Director