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Sent via electronic mail

Senate Resources Committee Members

Alaska State Capitol

Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Senate Bill 174 - An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing for an effective date.

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Resources Committee,

Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association (CIAA) is a private, non-profit corporation organized under the laws of the State of Alaska, engaged in salmon enhancement work throughout the Cook Inlet Region. We are strong proponents of protecting and preserving salmon resources and the habitat salmon rely upon.

The purpose of this letter is to give our support to Senate Bill 174 (SB174). One of the primary features of this bill is to establish an Alaska Invasive Species Council (Council) that will ensure agencies are coordinating efforts and resources in protecting Alaska's natural resources and ways of life from harmful invasive species.

Why this is so important is because invasive species are threatening Alaska's economy and environment with each passing day. It is critical that there is coordination among agencies because currently there is no central authority for management of invasive species in Alaska. A Council will ensure that there is coordination and cooperation among the federal and state agencies, as well as local and tribal governments, non-governmental organizations, policy makers, and the public.

As an example of why we need a Council is the discovery of European green crab during the summer of 2022 near Metlakatla. This seemingly innocuous, little crab is one of the most damaging marine invasive species. Since the first discovery of green crab in Alaska, thousands have been captured in near Metlakatla. Even with this localized effort, in 2024 it was discovered that green crab are expanding their territory in Alaska.

Green crab populations have exploded on the West Coast, where they have devastated native environments such as eelgrass, which provides shelter for juvenile salmon. Green crab were first found in Washington State in 2016, and by 2022 the governor of Washington signed an emergency declaration to address the rapidly expanding population. We need a coordinated response among all the agencies and stakeholders now to get ahead of the European green crab invasion to ensure we are not faces with the multi-million dollar response the State of Washington has invested in their crab issue.

Another example of why we need a Council is Elodea—the first invasive submerged aquatic weed discovered in Alaska waters. Elodea is a typical harmful invasive species because left unchecked, it will establish itself and dominate habitats, choking out native vegetation and fish, such as salmon. In recent years, some Elodea infestations have been eradicated around the state. But significant infestations have faced response delays and cost increases caused by permitting issues and lack of financial resources, especially at the State agency level.

Research by UAA's Institute of Social and Economic Research shows what is at stake for Alaska salmon if we are unsuccessful in slowing Elodea's spread. The odds for Alaska salmon in elodea-infested habitats to not exist beyond 20 years from now are 4 to 1. That is an 80% probability of extirpation. It was estimated that elodea could potentially cost the commercial sockeye salmon fishing industry \$159 million per year in damages should it go unmanaged. Alaska needs a Council, as would be established by SB174, to ensure permitting, planning, coordination, and resources are available to address existing and emerging threats such as elodea.

Thank you for your time and consideration of SB174.

Sincerely,



Dean Day
Executive Director