

March 19, 2003

The Honorable Frank Murkowski
Governor, State of Alaska
Post Office Box 110001
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0011

Dear Governor Murkowski,

We have reviewed House Bill 159 and Senate Bill 113, each introduced by the respective Rules Committee at your request.

We note that Section 2 of each bill provides for the repeal of AS 44.81.270(d), which authorizes and directs annual examination of the Alaska Commercial Fishing and Agriculture Bank. This is problematic to us, and we are wondering if a modified approach might be crafted; one which would support the bills' purposes and intents while continuing to meet the needs of CFAB and other interested parties.

To that end, we would offer the following points of perspective. They may seem somewhat lengthy, but our purposes are (1) to provide sufficient information to permit full consideration of an alternate approach; and (2) to emphasize that the examination function has been extremely useful to CFAB and its resident member-owners.

AS 44.81.270(d) was the result of 1987 legislation. CFAB had begun operations in early 1980. By the end of 1984, and into 1985, it had become clear that cumulative losses and other effects of inappropriate credit judgments and practices threatened CFAB's failure. During the late '80's, and into the early 90's, CFAB was "in recovery." (At that time, the State of Alaska owned \$32.0 million of CFAB's preferred stock.) Among the ancillary effects of the publicity and perceptions concerning CFAB's circumstances were the generally unfounded yet understandable allegations of a wide range of improprieties within CFAB and the expressed frustrations that "nobody knows what the real story is." These emanated

from both the legislative and executive branches, as well as from member-owners, competing lenders, and various media, etc.

Thus, one of the practical, and successful, purposes of the 1987 legislation was establishment of a process by which a professional, credible, and independent periodic evaluation of CFAB's loan/asset quality, management, practices, and statutory compliance may be submitted to authorized and interested parties. Over the years many examination reports – or elements thereof – have been noted by, or discussed with, a range of administrators, legislators, lenders, and others. Those examination reports have proven to be extremely useful.

Quite often the value of a safeguard, or a safety element such as a fire extinguisher, may become "invisible" because it has never been called upon. That may be the case here. CFAB has the statutory authority, unique among private lenders, to acquire and administer a consensual lien on a Commercial Fisheries Limited Entry Permit. CFAB has always exercised this authority within a context of fiduciary responsibility, and has attempted to adhere to the spirit, as well as the letter, of the comprehensive statutory limitations. There has never been a sustained, or even substantial, suggestion of CFAB failure in this regard.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, it should not be overlooked that the annual examination has been a most effective means of oversight of this area, and AS 44.81 in general, for the benefit and protection of the thousands of Alaska residents potentially affected. Similarly, these examinations have provided an element of protection for those Alaska residents who are the collective owners of over \$19.0 million of CFAB equity. This is not unlike the efforts undertaken by the State to protect the depositors and/or owners of other institutions.

We note the suggestion that the annual examination is redundant to the statutorily-mandated financial audit. However, those processes encompass significantly different professional disciplines and emphases, and are complimentary to each other. Simply put, an examination is focused on the quality/value of assets, whereas an audit is concerned primarily with appropriate accounting for the assets and liability of the subject. If CFAB makes a \$100,000 loan to Bill Jones, who confirms to the auditors that he indeed owes CFAB \$100,000, the auditors are satisfied that \$100,000 has been accounted for. However, the examiners' process is concerned with whether or not it made professional sense

for CFAB to make the loan, and with whether or not Bill Jones has the intent and capacity to repay.

We do not consider the annual audit and annual examination, each of which we value, to be at all redundant. For over 15 years CFAB's management has viewed the annual examination to be a necessary and valuable check on its own analyses and judgments. Its officers, while not lacking in confidence, have welcomed the scrutiny of objective and professional eyes. In short, the examination has proved a valuable tool in assuring the effective management of CFAB, to the benefit of Alaska residents. Similarly, CFAB's Board of Directors has utilized the examination and the resultant report and examiners' presentation as an element of its ongoing evaluation of management, in keeping with the Board's fiduciary duty to member-owners. Finally, CFAB's lender – without which CFAB could not function – has clearly viewed the annual examination as an important element of its evaluation of CFAB's creditworthiness.

Your letters transmitting HB 159 and SB 113 suggest that certain fiscal objectives will be served through passage of this legislation. Obviously, we have no insight into the agency finances involved, and would not presume to offer comments in that regard. Neither would we suggest that a reduction in agency net expense is inappropriate. However, we are somewhat confused as to the relevance of AS 44.81.270(d) to that issue. Through 1992 CFAB, like each other state-chartered financial institution, was charged a maximum of \$7,500 (or actual costs, if less) for each examination. Beginning in 1993, premised on a change in the relevant statute, CFAB has been charged – and has paid – what has been expressed as the “actual costs” of each examination. CFAB has paid a total of \$117,684 for the ensuing examinations – an average of \$11,768, with a high of \$16,338 and a low of \$6,308. If those charges have indeed reflected the actual costs of examination, it is difficult to understand how a cessation of those examinations will have a significant fiscal impact.

As a closing observation, we would like to assure that a modification of the required examination interval to 18 months, as your bills provide for other non-banking entities, would be a workable approach from CFAB's standpoint.

Governor Murkowski, we are somewhat troubled at the appearance of “opposing” your legislation; we would have preferred an earlier discussion. CFAB is a private cooperative institution with unique purposes, authorities, foundation,

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and history, and is charged with serving a public interest. We believe that routine professional examinations are an important element for the protection of the State, the public, the cooperative, and its member-owners. And, of course, CFAB is willing to continue to pay its own way on the same bases as in the past.

Very truly yours,

Lela F. Klingert
President