



UNITED FISHERMEN OF ALASKA

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March 15, 2011

Representative Steve Thompson, Chairman
House Special Committee on Fisheries
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, 120 Fourth Street
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Chairman Thompson and Committee Members,

United Fishermen of Alaska opposes HB 20.

United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA) represents 38 Alaska Commercial fishing organizations, and hundreds of individual fishermen and related businesses.

Fisheries management in Alaska is renowned throughout the world for its emphasis on sustainability. While most of the world long ago lost their historic runs of wild salmon, Alaska shows a remarkable history of restoring salmon runs throughout the state, after a long period of decline during the period before Alaska gained statehood.

Among the most important tools that have helped Alaska restore and retain healthy salmon populations are the Board of Fisheries process by which allocative actions are made on a case by case basis based on science and public input, and real time management by the Department of Fish and Game based on scientifically established escapement goal ranges.

Alaska's constitutional mandate to manage fisheries for the maximum benefit of its citizens requires careful consideration of the range of benefits that fisheries provide, including nutritional needs, history and usage by residents and non residents, importance to the economy of the state, region and local area, and recreational opportunity. These factors are considered for each regulatory proposal in the deliberative process of the Board of Fisheries, as well as management decisions of the Department of Fish and Game.

We strongly caution against creating a priority for personal use fisheries, because it will shift allocation and opportunity away from commercial fisheries that provide income to state and local governments, to fisheries that do not. It also would increase the perception of "entitlement" by Alaska residents to fisheries resources that are limited by nature.

Personal use fisheries are open to all Alaska residents, with only the requirement to hold a resident sport fishing license. As the population grows in one area of the state, the perceived entitlement to fisheries resources in other areas of the state that have established personal use fisheries pits one region against another.

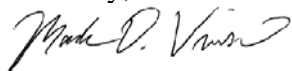
The intent by the Board of Fisheries in establishing Personal Use fisheries is clear in 5 AAC 77.001 (4) (b): "...allowed when that taking does not jeopardize the sustained yield of a resource and either does not negatively impact an existing resource use or is in the broad public interest." Since that time in 1981, we see extreme population growth primarily in one area of the state, and we can expect this to continue. We currently have 95 personal use fisheries that have been established throughout the state that are open to all residents. If HB 20 were to pass and establish a priority for the Personal Use fisheries over other uses (besides Subsistence), the growth of one region of the state will have detrimental impacts on other regions and historical patterns of use.

We are also concerned that such a priority would handcuff the Board of Fisheries and Department of Fish and Game in the ability to allocate and manage fisheries, and leave many allocative and management decisions open to lawsuit based on a perception of interference with a Personal Use fishery.

If Alaska is going to avoid the decline of salmon runs as has occurred elsewhere, we need to avoid the pattern of fighting over the fish, pitting one region or user group against another, while industrial development and population eliminate one stream or run at a time until the fish are gone.

We strongly urge this committee, and the Alaska State Legislature, to leave the prioritization of fishery allocations within the Board of Fisheries, and the management within the Department of Fish and Game, and reject HB 20.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mark D. Vinsel", with a stylized, flowing script.

Mark Vinsel
Executive Director