

Dear Resources Committee Members:

My name is Doug Rhodes and I live in Craig on Prince of Wales Island. I am a commercial salmon and halibut fisherman, an avid sport fisherman and a subsistence fisherman as well. I also own a small DEC certified fish processing facility in Coffman Cove and provide fish to the schools on POW Island through the Fish to Schools program. I am also an avid hunter and have hunted in the area for 40 years or so.

I am opposed to CSHB 179 for several reasons. On first glance it would seem that this is a bill that is reasonable, however upon study it is a bill that is full of potential problems.

I just attended a conference in Juneau where fishermen and processors were working together with the school districts to offer fish to local schools. Fishermen and processors have been donating or offering reduced fee fish to schools for the past few years, and are quite proud of our accomplishments.

The prime sponsor of the bill has pointed out the merits of the Sitka fish to school program, and that is a program that is done with donated fish from commercial fishermen or processors exclusively. It is a great program, and all of the fish is processed in licensed DEC facilities ensuring quality food for our children. In addition, each fish that is caught is entered on an Alaska Department of Fish and Game fish ticket and is accounted for.

Allowing sport caught fish to be used for schools or any of the other facilities listed in HB 179 is fish that is not accounted for as no fish ticket is required. In addition, the commercial fishermen and the processing facilities have quality assurances that help maintain better quality for the fish.

Allowing subsistence fish to be used for schools or other facilities listed in HB 179 may not be accounted for as well. Halibut, for an example, can be harvested by long line and up to 20 per day could be caught and used for food in these institutions. The halibut quota, established by federal regulations is already quite regulated and contentious between user groups, and this could become a larger allocation issue down the road. Instead, I would favor the current use of allowing halibut bycatch from trawlers to be processed in a licensed facility and distributed to these institutions, or by simply buying product from processors.

As far as game goes, I also could see allocation issues arising as well as other unintended problems. An example would be black bear in Southeast Alaska, where a hunter must salvage the meat along with the hide. Under this bill, I could see many hunters from down south simply dropping garbage bags of meat off at schools and hospitals saying they had complied with the law. I don't think schools and hospitals are going to want mounds of black bear meat in their kitchen every spring.

So although I see the intent is good, and it would seem on paper to make more sense for our kids to eat caribou chops over corn dogs, there needs to be a better vehicle for that than this bill. I urge you to vote against HB 179, or at the very least modify it to remove commercially caught fish from the current bill.

Sincerely,

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