



40610 Kalifornsky Beach Road, Kenai, AK 99611

907-283-5761

info@ciaanet.org

907-283-9433

www.ciaanet.org

April 29, 2022

Sent via electronic mail

Senate Finance Committee Members
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: House Bill 54 - An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game and management of invasive species

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Finance 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 these fish rely upon. The purpose of this letter is to give our support to House Bill 54 (HB54), and to urge you to prioritize it in the Senate Finance Committee this legislative session.

HB54 takes advantage of lessons learned in other states and regions—it allows the State of Alaska to take a coordinated effort through the establishment of a council to deal with harmful aquatic invasive species before they spread and cause ecological and/or economic impacts to our valuable resources, especially salmon.

Compared to other areas in the country, Alaska has the opportunity to eradicate aquatic invasive species threats such as the current elodea infestations found in different areas around the state. Elodea is the first invasive submerged aquatic weed discovered in Alaska waters and it was commonly used and sold in pet stores for use in aquariums. Discards of invasive plants and fish from aquariums in Alaska waters is the source of many invasive species introductions. A rapid response to eradicate an invasive species as close to its introduction is paramount. 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.

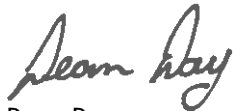
The swift and rapid response by a partnership of government and private organizations to this threat on the Kenai Peninsula showed that eradication can be successful and is much more cost effective than letting this threat grow into detrimental economic and ecologic impacts on our resources and landscapes. Unfortunately, due to permitting delays, an elodea infestation in Alexander Lake in the Mat-Su spread from 10 acres in 2014 to over 500 acres by 2016. The cost for treatment has grown from less than \$15,000 to over \$1 million because of this delay, funding the State of Alaska has had to seek through grants and other sources. This two-year delay also allowed for the spread of elodea into neighboring lakes, putting more environments and resources at risk.

Recent research by UAA's Institute of Social and Economic Research showed that elodea can significantly threaten Alaska salmon. 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 to ensure permitting, planning, coordination, and resources are available to address existing and emerging threats such as elodea.

We also strongly support the response fund provision in this bill. In an economic climate where funding is stretched thin, it only makes sense to establish and fund early detection and rapid response to address harmful aquatic invasive species in Alaska. Ultimately such efforts will save the State of Alaska millions if not billions of dollars, and maintain the thousands of job created by Alaska's robust salmon fisheries.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean Day". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dean" and last name "Day" clearly distinguishable.

Dean Day
Executive Director