

**From:** [Austin Ahmasuk](#)  
**To:** [House Tribal Affairs](#); [House Resources](#); [Senate Resources](#); [Senate Community and Regional Affairs](#)  
**Subject:** public testimony on HB125  
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My name is Austin Ahmasuk from Nome and I am making public comment on HB125.

HB 125 seems to be presented as a reform bill. From the perspective of Western Alaska I wonder if it functions largely as a rearrangement of authority but still leaves the root causes of salmon decline untouched.

For decades western Alaska has experienced collapsed runs and repeated emergency closures. They are signals of systemic failure as a result of a system of management that chronically over exploits salmon resources. Our people did not suddenly lose the ability to fish. The fish disappeared under a management system that privileges the commercial sectors over the subsistence sectors.

If I were to measure salmon health across generations not by Board of Fish cycles this generation is probably dealing with the least healthy salmon populations ever. Without change the next generation is likely to see worse. The decline of salmon in Western Alaska now reflects chronic harvest pressure in Area M and Bering Sea trawl fisheries.

The bill proposes to reorganize the Board of Fisheries by labeling seats according to user groups. I wonder if it assumes that the failure of salmon management is rooted in unfair representation rather than in flawed governing assumptions. Western Alaska is not simply underrepresented. It is misunderstood. The voices missing from the table are not just subsistence users but people whose knowledge is embedded in the rivers themselves.

In my many years of watching the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and Board of Fisheries it seems that they have treated uncertainty as permission to exploit. HB 125 does nothing to reverse this logic. It does not require precaution when data is incomplete. It does not require rebuilding when stocks fail repeatedly. It does not require accountability when closures become annual events.

The expansion of the subsistence definition to all state residents is especially troubling. Subsistence in Western Alaska is a nutritional and cultural necessity. The Constitution prohibits arbitrary discrimination. However, it does not prohibit the state from recognizing the material differences between people in urban centers and rural areas. Recognizing domicile in the current definition of subsistence fishing is a factual acknowledgment of our dependence. The Alaska Constitution does not demand that the state ignore geography. I believe Article VIII guarantees common use and equal access to fishery resources. I am not convinced it requires the state to treat all residents as if they experience scarcity of resources in the same way.

I am convinced the best management regime for Alaska should demand responsibility. A balanced board gets us there but it must also confront decades of exploitation that has lead to salmon collapses in Western Alaska. When salmon fail repeatedly the appropriate response is not compromise among users but protection of the run.

Western Alaska communities already practice this ethic. When fish are late we stop fishing. When fish are weak we share what little remains. When conditions change we adapt. The state system does not model this behavior. It redistributes hardship instead of preventing it.

The absence of Western Alaska representatives on the Board is an issue that must be addressed with representation. Western Alaska deserves better than the continuation of patterns where decisions are made far from the rivers they affect. HB 125 does not correct this. It leaves intact a system where people most harmed by decline bear the consequences of failure.

In the end HB 125 improves the appearance of fairness but does not address the decades long collapses.

Does this bill increase the likelihood that salmon will return in sufficient numbers for future generations?

Does it reduce risk before damage occurs?

For this bill to have meaning for all of Alaska three changes are required. First it must ensure the presence of Western Alaska Indigenous knowledge in decision making. Second it must require precaution and rebuilding when runs fail by binding the Board to act early and transparently rather than after repeated collapse has already erased subsistence. Third it must protect subsistence during times of scarcity by recognizing that dependence is shaped by our history and hundreds of years of use. Without these changes the bill may improve how the process works but it may not change outcomes.

Thank you for your time and consideration.