



HB 117: PROTECTING ALASKA'S SET GILLNET FISHING FAMILIES

Grounded in history, safety, and statewide support



House Bill 117 maintains Alaska's long-standing set gillnet fishing practices. It does not create new fishing opportunities, alter allocations, or increase harvest. Instead, it provides legal clarity so fishing families can continue operating cooperatively, transparently, and safely—just as they have for generations.

STATEWIDE SUPPORT FOR HB 117

HB 117 is supported by setnet fishermen across Alaska, including Bristol Bay, the Alaska Peninsula, Kodiak, Cook Inlet, Prince William Sound, and Yakutat. The bill is supported by United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA) and passed unanimously through the House Fisheries Committee, the House Resources Committee, and the House Floor.

LONGSTANDING COOPERATIVE PRACTICES IN ALASKA'S SET GILLNET FISHERY

For more than a century, Alaska's set gillnet fishery has operated as a cooperative, family-oriented enterprise where fishermen have worked together to fish multiple set gillnet sites.

Fish are frequently harvested by more than one skiff from several nets fished under multiple permits, then commingled in a single skiff and delivered to a holding skiff or directly to a tender. Traditionally, a single CFEC card was used per delivery by one permit holder acting on behalf of the cooperative operation. The permit holder often changed from delivery to delivery, reflecting shared labor among permit holders who were all actively fishing on site.

All fish harvested through cooperative set gillnet operations are fully accounted for in the appropriate statistical area and reported to fisheries managers for management purposes. This system has functioned effectively for more than a century.

WHY IS THIS BILL NEEDED?

Since the inception of the fishery, setnetters have traditionally worked together in this manner. However, recent enforcement efforts would require setnet operations across the state to account for and hold the salmon from each permit separately, as well as have each permit holder deliver and sign for their own fish.

This fundamentally alters traditional cooperative practices and introduces significant operational, safety, and economic challenges. The expectation that fish harvested from each permit must be kept separate and delivered independently is, in practice, unworkable.

Setnet fishermen attempted to resolve this issue through the Board of Fisheries and the ADF&G Commissioner, but were advised that legislative clarification is required. HB 117 provides that necessary clarity.

Effects on the Fishery

This reinterpretation marks a major departure from Alaska's historic salmon set gillnet fishery and threatens its long-term viability.

1. Safety Risks

Safety is central to set gillnet operations, with multiple skiffs working together and commingling fish to support one another in rough conditions. Permit holders often remain on shore to coordinate safe operations. Requiring permit holder presence at every delivery removes these safeguards and increases risk.

2. Capacity Barriers

Set gillnet operations use small skiffs and holding vessels. These skiffs are not designed to segregate fish by individual permit and lack the capacity to maintain separate totes, ice, and documentation. Enforcing such separation would require additional vessels, significantly reduce efficiency, and negatively impact fish quality.

3. Impacts on Family Participation

Set gillnetting has long been structured to allow families—often spanning multiple generations—to work together in operations that are both shore-based and sea-based. Under the new interpretation, permit holders—including parents with young children, elders, shore-based support, and fishermen working nets miles from the tender—would be required to be physically present at every tender delivery, often multiple times per day. The reinterpretation threatens the multigenerational sustainability of Alaska's salmon set gillnet fishery.

4. Loss of Labor Efficiency

Multiple skiffs often work together to quickly clear heavy sets and protect fish quality. Limiting skiffs to individual permits would increase labor, reduce efficiency, and harm quality. The reinterpretation also dramatically increases paperwork. For example, five cooperative family operations fishing four permits each have historically completed about 15 fish tickets per day (approximately 2.5 hours). Under the new interpretation, those same operations would be required to complete approximately 60 fish tickets per day—about 10 hours spent shifting hours from fishing to forms—with no management benefit and added safety risk.

"WHAT THE BILL PROPOSES IS CONSISTENT WITH HOW WE HAVE OPERATED OUR SETNET SITE OVER THE PAST 67 YEARS."

— LOREN LEMAN