

Alaska Senate Resources Committee
Senate.Resources@akleg.gov

Alaska House Special Committee on Fisheries
House.Fisheries@akleg.gov

May 1, 2026

Re: Appointments to the Alaska Board of Fisheries & Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission

Dear Chair Giessel and Members of the Senate Resources Committee,
and Chair Stutes and Members of the House Special Committee on Fisheries:

Area M Seiners Association is composed of commercial seiners and setnetters based mainly in the Aleutians East Borough. Our members are not only commercial fishermen; they are also sport fishermen and subsistence users. We care about balance and integrity on the Alaska Board of Fisheries, which is why we **support the appointments of Mike Wood and Paul Cyr** and **oppose the appointment of Blair Hickson**.

Mr. Hickson would join five other in-river voices on the seven person Board. We have deep concerns about his ability to remain impartial when making decisions that affect commercial fisheries, especially those in Area M.

On April 21, 2023, Mr. Hickson testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in support of SB 128, legislation aimed at closing the Area M salmon fishery.¹ Mr. Hickson owns a lodge on the Anvik River and stated in his testimony that the river is a key spawning ground for Yukon River chum salmon, which have experienced declining returns. He attributed these declines not to environmental factors such as rising water temperatures, but instead to the Area M commercial fishery, using that position to justify his support for closure.

This testimony reflects a clear bias against the commercial fishery. Given that Mr. Hickson's business directly benefits from increased salmon returns, he has a direct financial interest in the outcome of these policy decisions. He would be entering this board position with predetermined views. If confirmed, he should be required to recuse himself from any Alaska Board of Fisheries deliberations or decisions related to Area M salmon proposals.

We support the reappointment of Mike Wood, who has proven himself to be a fair and impartial member of the Board of Fisheries. Mr. Wood consistently engages with all sides of an issue, developing a thorough understanding that allows him to base his decisions on science and facts rather than pressure from any one group. He asks thoughtful, clarifying questions on the record and stands out for his

¹ KTOO Public Media. "Gavel Alaska: Senate Judiciary Committee Meeting." April 21, 2023.
<https://www.ktoo.org/gavel/video/?clientID=2147483647&eventID=2023041218&startStreamAt=4801>

professionalism and respect for board decorum. While Mr. Wood does not always vote in our favor, we trust that he carefully considers all perspectives before making his decisions.

We also support the appointment of Paul Cyr. He would restore a much-needed Southeast Alaska perspective to the Board of Fisheries, which has been missing since 2023. If confirmed, Mr. Cyr would be one of only two coastal representatives on the seven-member board, an important balance given that most of the Board's work focuses on coastal, saltwater issues.

Appointments to the Alaska Board of Fisheries are a delicate balance and one that we take very seriously. We want all user groups to feel represented, and we believe the appointments of Mr. Wood and Mr. Cyr are steps in the right direction toward a more balanced board. We also believe the appointment of Mr. Hickson would add another member whose views are already formed prior to deliberation. This is not conducive to a fair and impartial Board of Fisheries.

Lastly, we **support the confirmation of Tracy Welch for the Commissioner of the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC)**. Ms. Welch's knowledge of Alaska's commercial fisheries will greatly benefit CFEC. Over the past three years, she has built a strong relationship with CFEC while serving as Executive Director for United Fishermen of Alaska, giving her valuable insight into its process and responsibilities. In addition, Ms. Welch also holds a law degree which will serve her well in navigating the complex regulatory and statutory framework that governs limited entry and permitting. Ms. Welch is the ideal candidate for this position and will prove to be a thoughtful and informed leader at CFEC.

Thank you for your consideration and for allowing us to weigh in on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Kiley Thompson
President Area M Seiners Association