

Dear Representative Stutes and members of the House Fisheries Committee,

Letter of support for HB 117

No fiscal note is attached to this bill!

My name is Kevin Fisher, my parents and I own a family setnet camp on the south end of Kodiak Island in Moser Bay. I started fishing as a crewmember in the Alitak District in 1989. In 1992 my parents and I were offered the opportunity to purchase our own camp.

Without HB 117 passage, we will be forced to change how we have fished for more than thirty years. That change would include safety hazards above and beyond what we already face, financial hardship, higher environmental impacts, less efficiency, reduced effort, market impacts, and the further dismantling of small family businesses. This affects every setnet camp in the Alitak district, and likely almost every setnet fisherman in Alaska.

Setnet fishing is unlike any other fishery in the state, we use small open skiffs, we are shore based, we are small, family operations usually owning multiple permits, that when combined can hopefully catch enough to continue fishing. Our elderly parents and young children are with us, it is not uncommon to have 3 and 4 generations contributing as best they can to the operation. We share the work load, not everyone does everything all the time. While picking the nets can take a great deal of physical effort, delivering only requires one permit holder. This makes it possible for someone to deliver while the others do necessary tasks, such as mending nets, maintenance of boats and motors, cooking the meals, tending the garden, repairing the cabins, and do not forget many camps have small children that cannot be left alone. Sharing the work load is essential in Setnet fishing, a great deal of effort is used to work the nets and shore support, one person simply cannot be in two places at once. While it is necessary for all permit holders to be onsite in order to fish, requiring every permit holder in a co-op to be at the tender for every delivery, increases the level of difficulty and will result in reduced effort and safety. As well as increased risk to fishers, higher cost of doing business, require further investment in equipment and even less take-home revenue.

My parents are aging, at 76 and 80 years old they still actively work the nets, as well as work shore support. Some families have small children that can not be left alone. It would be insane to force these valuable contributors into the skiff, in rough weather to deliver every single time. The risk of injury is too high, medical attention is too far away.

It would be next to impossible to separate each permits fish, and physically deliver each permits fish separately, on every delivery, by each permit holder. Not only is it wildly inefficient but it would also cause new unnecessary safety hazards and added cost.

It is essential to operate as efficiently as possible because we are already running a thin line to stay in business. Less fish, lower value, and higher expenses has pushed all but a few single permit operations out of business. It simply does not pencil out to go fishing if you cannot at least cover your expenses.

All operations are unique in some way, and all net locations are not equal. Meaning some nets in a co-op catch the majority of the fish in our operations. We have set up our operations to accommodate all the fish we catch together, not per permit bases. We rely on combining all our fish together on any given day to have enough to justify stopping the tender to deliver. Some camps have two permit holders in one skiff and pick both permits worth of gear with one boat. That means the fish are comingled, after picking the gear we will head back to camp to do the next task, when the tender comes by, only one of the two permit holders needs to go out to deliver while the other can continue to do shore support. Sometimes we get most of our fish in one permit and only a few in the others. For example, one net might get 50 fish and the next only 3. As common sense would dictate you simply put your 3 fish into the same slush ice bin with the 50 and go to the next net. Imagine the equipment, effort, and time it would take to have three people go out to the tender to deliver 3 fish each. This would include weighting 3 fish separately, lifting each bag individually, writing three separate fish tickets, so that each permit holder has his own ticket every time. I would also like you to consider how that would affect our fish quality. This would cause the tender operator to take 3 times as long to take a delivery and move on to the next camp. Tenders can come any time day or late into the night. This extra time and effort would cause unnecessary burden on our tender operators and would impact their ability to move efficiently through the district.

We already separate out specific species Red, Pink, Dog, Silver. Creating another separate bin to put fish in for each permit makes no sense, there simply is not room in our skiffs. Often, we use two boats on the same net, or go back and forth between nets to more efficiently keep the nets clean of fish or floating debris. We have some skiffs that are better suited for picking the Trap/Pot end of the net and others that are best for picking the lead. That means that one boat will pick one section of each of the nets comingling the fish from multiple permits. This increases efficiency and quality by speeding up the processes and ease of picking all the nets.

It has never been a problem to have all the fish caught by a group of setnet fishermen delivered by one permit holder. Why now, suddenly is this a problem? And is that perceived problem worth potentially destroying this family fishery that is unique to Alaska and the nation?

We would like to be able to continue to fish like we always have, without fear of being cited under some new interpretation of the rules, and dealing with all that entails.

Thank you,
Kevin Fisher
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