



RESIDENT HUNTERS OF ALASKA

unapologetically **FOR ALASKAN RESIDENTS**

Working hard to ensure our wildlife is managed sustainably with an emphasis on protecting and enhancing resident hunting opportunities!

www.residenthuntersofalaska.org

March 25, 2025

To: House Fisheries Committee

Re: HB 125 – Board of Fisheries Membership

Dear Chair Stutes and members of the House Fisheries Committee,

We want to thank Representative Jimmie for introducing HB 125 and getting this discussion going in the legislature. While this bill pertains only to the Board of Fisheries, we want to stress that the Board of Game has similar issues, and both boards need reforms.

Commercial interests are also dominating the membership of the Board of Game, resulting in decisions that aren't necessarily in the best interests of our wildlife or resident hunters. Whether rural or urban, it's affecting us all.

We have been asking legislators for reforms to the Board of Game for some time. When we have brought up the issue, the idea of designated seats always comes up. Designated seats are one way to reform the boards, but there are other ways as well.

What we have recommended is reforms that require both boards to strictly adhere to article 8 of our state constitution and hold our fish and wildlife as a public trust for the common use and maximum benefit of Alaskans.

The priority should always be doing what's best for the resource and managing sustainably, with an emphasis on protecting the fishing and hunting opportunities of Alaskans. We need reforms that ensure and require that resident Alaskan fishing and hunting opportunities are protected at all costs. When Alaskans lose fishing and hunting opportunities, the commercial sector should be the first user group to be restricted. With that kind of mandate, the membership of the boards isn't as much a determining factor in decision making. We have to stop allowing the boards to make decisions based on what user group brings in the most money. That's not what our state constitution intended.

The legislature has given both boards very broad authority with little to no oversight. Guardrails are needed to limit some of that authority and require both boards to adhere to our state constitution.

There are statutes that we have requested changes to that would also help. Wherever there is a “may” within a statute that speaks to a state subsistence priority, that should be a “shall.” For example, AS 16.05.256 says that “Whenever it is necessary to restrict the taking of big game so that the opportunity for state residents to take big game can be reasonably satisfied in accordance with sustained yield principles, the Board of Game **may**, through a permit system, limit the taking of big game by nonresident and nonresident aliens to accomplish that purpose.”

The “may” in the above statute should be a “shall.”

This is the problem on the fisheries side as well. There are no requirements that the commercial sector will see their harvests reduced when our salmon returns on the Yukon and Kuskokwim have collapsed and Alaskans can no longer fish.

This bill starts a long overdue discussion in the legislature, and we support the intent and hope legislators also look at reforming the Board of Game membership.

Sincerely,

Mark Richards

Executive Director Resident Hunters of Alaska