



April 9, 2025

House Fisheries Committee
House Resources Committee
Senate Resources Committee
Alaska Legislature
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Re: Opposition to the Confirmation of Olivia Irwin to the Alaska Board of Fisheries

Dear Committee Members,

Cordova District Fishermen United (CDFU) appreciates the opportunity to express our views on the recent appointments to the Alaska Board of Fisheries. We previously sent a letter of support for Tom Carpenter. We write today to oppose the appointment of Olivia Irwin.

CDFU is a non-profit organization that represents more than 900 commercial fishing families participating in fisheries within Alaska's Area E, which includes Prince William Sound, the Copper River region, and the northern-central Gulf. Our organization values the critical role the Board of Fisheries plays in sustaining our fisheries and ensuring fair and informed representation for all stakeholders. While our mission is focused on commercial fisheries, we also recognize that our membership and neighbors participate in subsistence and sport sectors as well, and respect the need for balance between these important groups, and across Alaska's diverse fishing geographies.

Our concern is based on several factors regarding board balance and capacity:

1) Representation for Alaska's Rural Coastal Communities

While board members have personal or professional ties to Alaska's rural coastal communities, the majority of the board is currently from Alaska's urban center, or rural interior. CDFU strongly encourages a focus on candidates rooted in a diversity of Alaskan communities and we believe there is a significant deficit of coastal representation. There are no board members connected either by residence or prominent ties to Southeast Alaska, Unalaska and the Aleutian Islands, or Bristol Bay. These are substantial gaps in representation and foundational knowledge.

Ms. Irwin's appointment would be a *second* representative from the Yukon/Kuskokwim river watershed, in addition to Mr. Curtis Chamberlain. While we recognize the importance of this region, and the subsistence sector both Chamberlain and Irwin are focused on, we are opposed to duplicating that representation when so many other critical fishery areas are not represented at all.



2) Knowledgeable and Experienced Board Capacity

We understand that board members are appointed based on their “interest in public affairs, good judgment, knowledge, and ability in fisheries management,” per AKS 16.05.221. Respectfully, CDFU does not believe that Ms. Irwin meets these criteria at this stage in her career.

The resume and professional summary submitted with her letter of interest indicates that she has been active in fisheries public process since 2023. We are deeply concerned that someone so new to fisheries management is not prepared to fulfill the complex and challenging role of a Board member. Frankly, appointing an individual that is at the very beginning of her engagement in fisheries policy is a disservice to the many thousands of Alaskans whose lives and livelihoods are substantially impacted by board decisions.

While Ms. Irwin’s interest in fisheries issues is apparent and we commend her drive to study regulation and engage in public process, she lacks the fundamental experience and informed perspective that is critical for a fair and functional board.

3) Demonstrable Understanding of and Respect for All Sectors

Lastly, CDFU supports appointees who – regardless of personal affiliation – demonstrate a foundational knowledge of and respect for all of Alaska’s important stakeholder groups. In a recent interview with the podcast Northern Hunter, Ms. Irwin expanded upon her views of fishery challenges and what she hopes to bring to her Board service. In that interview, she states that she attended her first Board of Fisheries meeting in 2023. That reaffirmed our concerns that she lacked broad experience in the process, alongside a clear lack of exposure to a broad range of fisheries and stakeholders.

In the podcast, Ms. Irwin spoke to the need to educate consumers outside of Alaska that buying wild Alaska seafood is unsustainable, and expressed major concern over the entire concept of wild seafood being commercially viable. The dialogue equated commercial fishing with the destruction of the American bison in the 19th century.

CDFU strongly supports sustainable management, and ongoing review of conservation priorities and strategies. However, we do not support disparaging Alaska’s seafood market and commercial food providers as a tool for conservation. While Ms. Irwin stated that she’s not anti-commercial fishing, her comments largely suggest otherwise. We believe they *do* indicate a focus on broadly opposing the entire commercial sector, rather than an intention to work collaboratively for the betterment of all stakeholders and resources. Conservation work must be nuanced, localized, informed by expert science and deliberated by knowledgeable stakeholder representatives. Blanket



statements about the overall viability of an entire stakeholder group do not indicate attention to those critical elements.

We ask that Alaska's elected leaders consider a candidate that expands the geographic representation of the board, rather than duplicating existing representation. We also ask that such a candidate have a greater depth of experience with and exposure to Alaska's fisheries policy issues, process and diverse stakeholders.

CDFU is committed to ongoing engagement with the State of Alaska regarding Board of Fisheries processes. Ensuring fair, informed and representative decision making requires us to periodically scrutinize all aspects of this process, from appointments to Board practice. We look forward to continuing this dialogue with Alaska's policy makers and fishing communities.

Sincerely,

Ezekiel Brown