



11 April 2009

Representative Bryce Edgmon
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 416
Juneau AK 99801

Dear Representative Edgmon,

Let me begin by saying that the Southeast Alaska Seiners Association would like to comment on the recent "UCIDA" resolution. For the record, we are opposed to any activities and actions, legal or otherwise, that might jeopardize state control and state management of our fisheries. We never want to see the day in which return to a Washington D.C. based Federal management scheme; one that we fought against so hard the first half of last century and finally dissolved with statehood in 1959. To that end, we oppose any and all such transfers of autonomy and authority. And to this end, we proudly support the spirit and intent of such legislative resolutions with regard to maintaining state of Alaska management authority and the ability of Alaskan residents to access the fisheries resources of this great state of ours.

Certainly the focus on the resolution could be narrowed to include those issues that are material and relevant to the real problem of the proposed legal action. We might add that there are 3 legal actions to which SEAS is opposed: the aforementioned UCIDA action, the AOC Chitina dipnet court action, and the Herb Jensen/Prince William Sound lawsuit. SEAS believes that these are all misguided and that the disposition in favor of the plaintiffs would ultimately change and usurp the management authority of the state of Alaska over its fisheries resources.

This is why we are also very interested in the recent appointments by Governor Palin to the Board of Fisheries. For while the Board of Fish is an imperfect process, we are convinced that it is the best process and if we need to refine it we are ready to rise to that occasion. The Board and its attendant processes are where we deal with the management and allocation of our fisheries resource, not at some judge's bench.

And not in the Alaska State Legislature *(while certainly we support any legislator's prerogative to be involved in aspects of the process of fisheries management and allocation resolution, the Alaska state legislature itself was not formed and established for this purpose).*

As such, both the balance and the talent on the Board at this time are of great importance. One of the major issues, and in many quarters, THE major issue confronting the state's salmon fisheries management is the resolution of a longer term approach to returning the Mat-Su drainages to healthy and productive conditions.

Mr. Johnstone, with his legal background, will provide structure and leadership on this board in dealing with these stock rebuilding issues. Mr. Johnson, as President of Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association and with his background in land use and planning, will inevitably be in a great position to help with any enhancement and rehabilitation of the Mat-Su salmon stocks and the attendant habitat issues. His commitment to the sustainability of the salmon resource is first and foremost and we have been told by his own fishing partners to be prepared for an objective approach to fishery management across the state of Alaska. The fish will come first and the fishermen, be they commercial or sport, will come second.

This is why we support the appointments of BOTH Mr. Johnstone AND Mr. Johnson to the Alaska State Board of Fisheries. They are the right men for the right job at the right time.

In recent days there has been talk about lack of native Alaskan representation. Western Alaska has always had one seat at the table of the seven. For a short time that representation was a native Alaskan. Many prominent and wise native leaders have served on the board over the years. A longtime past Board of Fisheries member, the late Joe Demmert, was one of our finest Southeast Tlingit leaders as well as a founder, in 1968, of our organization, the Southeast Alaska Seiners Association (SEAS).

But aside from Robert Heyano, there has not been a native Alaskan on the Board of Fisheries since Tony Knowles took office in 1994 and after all these years we have not heard any murmurs about the lack of native participation during either the Murkowski or the Knowles administrations. (And let us remember that it was Murkowski who put a native Alaskan, Robert Heyano, back on the Board of Fish). Vince Webster is the current Board member representing Western Alaska right now. Sometimes this seat migrates north to Bethel (or even further north), but right now it is in Bristol Bay. Mr. Webster has lived in western Alaska long enough to appreciate western Alaskan values and he is a main conduit through which western Alaskans can access the Board of Fisheries.

Since 1992, Fairbanks has had a seat at the table. This seems a fair shake for the Interior region- 17 years with a specific seat at the table. **It is our belief that although Mr. Delo (of Big Lake) and Mr. Johnstone (of Anchorage) do not reside in the Interior, they**

certainly can be very approachable board members for the Interior's access to the Board of Fish process and deliberations. While we sincerely feel the pain of Fairbanks folks, one should can recognize the irony of the Southcentral Alaska sports groups' concern for the lack of a Fairbanks seat when they failed to support the prior Fairbanks board member, Mrs. Bonnie Williams. We fully expected her to return and had seen her mature and grow a great deal in the 3 years she served on the Board. **Commercial fishing groups did not oppose her reappointment, even though she has never been a commercial user. Likewise, we do not oppose the reappointment of Mr. Johnstone,** even though he is widely considered to be a sport user at this time.

Let me now turn to the Cook Inlet commercial fishermen. While Fairbanks has had a seat on the Board for 17 consecutive years, **Cook Inlet commercial fishermen,** with well over 1500-2000 "boots-on" fishermen, providing direct and indirect jobs for many thousands more, **have been without a seat at the table for 31 years, since 1978.** *So while it may seem unfair to Fairbanks, what was fair about the way Cook Inlet commercial fishermen have been treated for these past 31 years? Over a dozen Cook Inlet sport seats were placed on the Board of Fisheries during this prolonged absence.* **We have a Governor who has the political will and courage to face the public opposition she knew could potentially result from this decision from sectors of Anchorage, Fairbanks and particularly her own Valley. We are hopeful that the legislature sees the wisdom in this very balanced choice of Mr. Johnstone and Mr. Johnson, regardless of their zip codes.**

We applaud the Governor's wise choice at this time and we remain unconvinced that just because past Board of Fisheries members Dr. Bouse, Mrs. Williams or Mr. Umphanauer will not be at the table that somehow Fairbanks and the Interior will be shortchanged.

Likewise, we find it disingenuous that certain sport-oriented groups would complain and portend to speak about the lack of native participation on the Board of Fisheries while the last Alaskan native on the Board (Robert Heyano, of Dillingham, whose seat was up two years ago) heartily endorsed Mr. Brent Johnson at the House Fisheries Committee last Thursday. And Mr. Johnson is not a native Alaskan----although, Mr. Johnson is a lifelong Alaskan whose family first made their home in Chugiak, where they were the 2nd family to settle in 1947, then Seldovia and, finally, Clam Gulch.

Lastly, it is amazing how fate intercedes in our lives, our careers, and our geographic locations. Today Alaskans have a much broader spectrum of life experiences and cultural differences than we did at statehood. When my great grandfather first came to Petersburg in 1903 and moved there permanently in 1910, when Anchorage hadn't even yet been founded. *Some of the old timers joke that when they came to Petersburg shortly thereafter they found no Caucasians living there-----only us Norwegians and our good friends the Tlingit people.* The Valley was a very sparsely settled area for another half century.

Many more of us now live in cities and suburbs and these populations tend to grow at much more accelerated rates than do the smaller, rural communities. But even in our more remote areas and villages where there has been little changed over thousands of years, the transportation, energy and infrastructure base is becoming modernized and this will have profound impacts on our access and allocation of fisheries resources. Had Brent Johnson's family stayed in Chugiak, he would perhaps had chosen a different profession and his opposition ironically would have perhaps come from the very neighbors on the Peninsula where he resides.

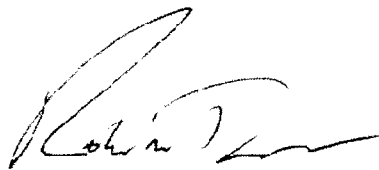
During a meeting in 1998, a hard-working former Senator and Representative from the Valley told a large group of us commercial fishermen that he had recently had a vision. And that vision was that someday we would all get along.... Commercial, sport, personal use, guided charter and subsistence users.... and that we would work on putting the fish first and setting aside our differences to do the best for the resource -and thereby it's users- as one large happy family.

While we have not yet had the pleasure to experience what the standard bearer from the Valley experienced in real terms, we share the hope that he had and will endeavor to work together with all the fish resource users to promote the best possible outcome for all users.

Together.

We need to get along here and while we fully understand the local nature of the disappointment of some of the Southcentral and Fairbanks constituent groups with Mr. Brent Johnson's appointment, we remain unconvinced that this is such a radical departure from good Board of Fish balance. One shot in 31 years and if he isn't just about perfectly balanced in his decisions, you can rest assured that it will be another 31 years before Cook Inlet Commercial fishermen get another crack at a seat on this board.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert M. Thorstenson, Jr.", with a stylized, flowing script.

Robert M. Thorstenson, Jr.

Executive Director, SEAS