

From: Ricky Gease [<mailto:ricky@krsa.com>]

Sent: Thursday, April 04, 2013 12:34 PM

To: Sen. Cathy Giessel

Subject: KRSA opposes confirmation of Vince Webster to Alaska Board of Fisheries

April 4, 2013

Dear Senator Giessel;

Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA) opposes the reappointment of Mr. Vince Webster to the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF). When actions by a member of the board undermine public confidence in the board process, it is incumbent upon the Alaska Legislature to act to restore confidence in that board through its oversight responsibility in the confirmation of board members.

Mr. Webster has a pattern of behavior that is problematic and contrary to a healthy public process. He imposes his own personal agenda on specific proposals at the last minute through substitute language that is not open for proper public review, comment and debate.

The most recent example of this behavior was at the BOF Statewide Finfish meeting, where discussion centered on Cook Inlet king salmon issues. Mr. Webster authored the substitute language in RC 88. That proposal considered paired step down measures for all user groups that harvest Kenai kings in order to share the burden of conservation, as outlined in the Policy for the Management of Sustainable Salmon Fisheries (5 AAC 39.222).

In RC 88 Mr. Webster, without consultation with other board members, stakeholders on the Cook Inlet King Salmon task force or members of the public, inserted harvest prohibitions on the personal use fishery (30,000 families in South-central Alaska) with no other step down measures for any of the other user groups. His idea to exclude dip netters from the harvest of kings while no other user group took harvest restrictions runs against board policy.

Mr. Webster co-chaired the Cook Inlet King Salmon task force and the subject never came as an option in more than six months of public testimony. Yet he injected this substitute language into the board process after the start of board deliberations when the public no longer had opportunity to review or comment, and provided other board members with little time for careful consideration of an idea that had yet to be properly vetted. His use of last minute substitute language is problematic at best and runs counter to a healthy public process.

In recent testimony to the Legislature, Mr. Webster stated that he did not think it was proper to consider allocation issues outside of the board's normal three year cycle. However, in this board meeting, out of cycle for Cook Inlet, he was perfectly content to take fish exclusively from one specific user group, the personal use fishery, and allocate them to the other user groups. His unilateral action was a significant reallocation of fish – and he did so without no public input or support. Mr. Webster readily took action that intentionally short-circuited the public process.

Another such example occurred last year for the personal use shrimp fishery in Prince William Sound. Mr. Webster inserted last minute substitute language on a proposal that sought to disperse commercial harvests to spread out effort. Only after board deliberations began, Mr. Webster used substitute language that had large allocative implications that had not been debated during the public process. He unilaterally took away the Department's ability to change gear to increase the harvest ability of the public, and set a fixed allocation for the personal use fishery – none of which had any public vetting prior to board deliberation. His personal agenda once again stuck a highly allocative tone, with no opportunity for public review or comment. That type of action reflects poorly on the integrity of the public process.

A final example is perhaps the most troubling of all: in order to expand and promote his own interests in the Bristol Bay commercial set net fishery, he has pushed for set net permit stacking across the state. Such an agenda runs contrary to the original intent of a House Bill sponsored by Rep. Samuels (HB 250) that provides relief to the Bristol Bay drift fleet, allowing two permit holders to fish from the same vessel with a reduced amount of gear. At no time was there discussion in the Legislature to authorize a different gear group, set netters, to hold two permits with full compliments of gear.

Since joining the board Mr. Webster has actively worked throughout the state to push for set net permit stacking. At a Southeast BOF meeting, a proposal based on the safety of fishermen sought to allow two set net permit holders to fish from the same vessel. Once again Mr. Webster struck at the last moment with substitute language. During board deliberation, he changed the very nature of a proposal and submitted language that authorized set net permit stacking in a Southeast fishery; the issue was never given public notice, was not on the agenda, and was never talked about before or during the meeting prior to board deliberations. Through last minute substitute language, he turned the original intent for user safety on its head and pushed his own agenda for set net permit stacking.

Mr. Webster's habit to use last minute substitute language as a means to intentionally circumvent the public process in order to promote his own agenda is corrosive. This pattern of behavior provides the public with no opportunity for review or comment. It undermines public confidence in the integrity of the Board of Fisheries.

KRSA respects the need to have a diversity of user groups and geographical areas represented on the BOF. We are not seeking to disrupt what many see as a balanced board. However, to restore good governance and respect for the public process, we ask that Mr. Webster not be confirmed to another term on the board. If he is not confirmed, we have the expectation that the Governor would select a qualified person to maintain the existing "balance" on the board.

KRSA respectfully asks that you vote No on the confirmation of Mr. Vince Webster to the Alaska Board of Fisheries. Thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Ricky Gease, Executive Director

Kenai River Sportfishing Association