



Cordova District Fishermen United
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April 6, 2015

Representative Louise Stutes
Chair, House Fisheries Committee
State Capitol Room 416
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Re: OPPOSE HB 110 – Personal Use Fishing Priority

Dear Chairman Stutes and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Cordova District Fishermen United Board of Directors, our membership and their families to oppose HB 110 – “Personal Use Fishing Priority”.

CDFU has been the voice of commercial fishermen since 1935 and currently represents over 800 fishing families in the Prince William Sound and Copper River region of Alaska. It is our mission to preserve, promote and perpetuate the commercial fishing industry and fishing resources of our region for the mutual benefit of both current and future generations of fishermen. The majority of our members are Alaskans living in Cordova, a small coastal Alaska community whose economy depends almost entirely on the commercial salmon industry. It is our position that HB 110 is not a bill that serves the best interests of all Alaskans.

The general understanding of the state’s commercial fisheries appears nearsighted with focus only on the number of harvesters. Yet that number does not illustrate the true impacts of Alaskans whose livelihoods are connected to commercial fishing, it includes all families throughout the industry, folks employed in supporting businesses and tax contributions to community infrastructure, urban and rural. Equally numerous and also overlooked are the urban Alaskan consumers whose access to Alaska’s sustainable natural resources depend on healthy commercial fisheries, illustrating that not all Alaskans are Personal Use participants.

Alaska has set the world standard for sustainable management of its fishery resources and has achieved a delicate balance that provides opportunity and access for a multitude of users. It has done so through the establishment of a unique multi-tier system of management that delegates authority to make allocation and management decisions that ***ensure the health and vitality of our fishery resources for maximum benefit of Alaska.***

When the Alaska legislature established the Board of Fisheries (BOF), it granted the authority to manage allocation of Alaska’s fishery resources among all users. The Board makeup includes a panel of Alaskan representatives chosen based on their ability to represent all fishery user groups and make balanced decisions using sound judgment. The BOF has the authority and expertise to make decisions in the best interest of the State of Alaska to protect, preserve and develop Alaska’s fishery resources.

The Copper River, as an example, is a unique area in which the Personal Use fishery occurs before both Federal and State Subsistence fisheries. The BOF has taken this situation into consideration in allocation decisions and development of the Commercial and Personal Use management plans. ***It is our concern that HB 110 attempts to undermine that authority and dismantle this balance.***



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CDFU respects the importance and value of Personal Use fisheries in the state of Alaska, however feels it significant to point out why this special category was originally developed. In 1982 under statutory authority, the BOF developed language to provide a special opportunity for Alaska residents to harvest salmon *when surplus fish stocks were available and "...when that taking does not jeopardize the sustained yield of a resource and either does not negatively impact an existing resource use or is in the broad public interest"*. Since this time, Personal Use fisheries have evolved into an important part of the Alaskan lifestyle affording residents significant opportunity to supplement food they purchase at the store with locally harvested seafood.

Our organization does not believe that Personal Use fisheries should be managed with any degree of priority over Alaska's long established and economically significant Commercial and Sport fisheries. Commercial, Personal Use & Sports fisheries EQUALLY provide Alaska and its residents economic opportunity and food security. ***The need for all users to share in the conservation burden to ensure our fishery resources are sustainable into the future is lost in the fever of the moment. Throughout our history we have managed to work together to address the health of the resource as the priority and THIS has allowed for maximum opportunity for ALL Alaskans over time.***

Both Commercial and Sport fisheries are economically significant to Alaska. These fisheries create jobs. They stimulate Alaska's economy. They bring small communities to life, and support thousands of families across the State. The proposed legislation attempts to circumvent the existing priority classification structure, the significance of which dilutes the state's recognized Subsistence priority.

Legislative intervention is unnecessary and only serves to disrupt well-established and effective fishery management systems already in place. This is a solution looking for a problem and we urge this committee to leave the authority of fishery allocation and regulatory decisions within the Board of Fisheries and preserve the ADF&G system of science-based management.

Sincerely,

Alexis Cooper
Executive Director

CC: Senator Gary Stevens
Commissioner Sam Cotten
House Fisheries Committee