

# Alaska Dispatch News

Published on *Alaska Dispatch News* (<http://www.adn.com>)

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April 8, 2015

Main Image:

[AnchorageSkyline.jpg-1422397872](#) <sup>[1]</sup>

Former Alaska Board of Fisheries chairman Karl Johnstone wrote [an opinion published by Alaska Dispatch News March 31](#) <sup>[2]</sup> that Anchorage was going to be disenfranchised from representation on the BOF. With due respect to the former chair, and acknowledgment that he and members of the BOF give time and hard work to their duties, Johnstone's commentary misunderstands the Legislature's policy basis for BOF membership.

Article 8 of Alaska's Constitution provides that our state's fish are reserved to the people for common use, and that they are to be used, developed and maintained on a sustained yield basis, subject to preferences among beneficial uses.

To meet these ideals, the Legislature defines the requirements for BOF membership in Title 16 of Alaska's statutes, which are the opposite of Johnstone's views: "The governor shall appoint each member on the basis of interest in public affairs, good judgment, knowledge, and ability in the field of action of the BOF, and with a view to providing diversity of interest and points of view in the membership." Members are to be "appointed without regard to political affiliation or geographical location of residence."

Johnstone wrote that not appointing a person to the BOF from Anchorage deprived it of needed representation. But that would mean if a BOF member is not from a specific community, then that community is not represented on the BOF.

The BOF should not have an "Anchorage" seat, any more than it should have a "Sitka" or "Kotzebue" seat. The Legislature has "seats" representing our state's geographic diversity; legislators represent communities. While geographic diversity is a factor, BOF members must represent all the state's fisheries and do what is right for those fisheries based on the constitutional guidelines, not a specific community's or group's interests, which can provide valuable input to the BOF process.

Johnstone's commentary reflects exactly the opposite of what the Legislature requires of BOF membership. Members are not to be appointed based on where they are from and who they represent. They should not be on the BOF because they "represent" an interest or specific community.

Legislators must confirm BOF members to do what is right for long-term, sustained yields of fish based on constitutional principles. That framework provides security for Alaska's residents who are not from communities where board members live. The Legislature's criteria for BOF membership insures residents can rely on a BOF that makes decisions benefiting fish, not communities where BOF members live or interest groups.

The BOF sometimes seems to have become too politicized by groups who influence BOF membership and give to legislators who must confirm members. The result is the BOF could fail to adopt policies that put our fish first and place long-term conservation and development of our valuable fisheries above political interests.

Those who want to be on the BOF must first seek out fishery interests to help get an appointment by the governor, and then must rely on lobbying help to make it through legislative confirmation. A BOF member who survives that gantlet could tend to make decisions benefiting interests that supported their seat on the BOF, not fishery conservation and development interests.

Let BOF members do what they must: ignore representational politics and decide fishery conservation and development issues based on what will sustain Alaska's fisheries as the best managed in the world.

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*The views expressed here are the writer's own and are not necessarily endorsed by Alaska Dispatch News, which welcomes a broad range of viewpoints. To submit a piece for consideration, email [commentary@alaskadispatch.com](mailto:commentary@alaskadispatch.com) [3].*

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.adn.com/image/anchorageskylinejpg-1422397872>

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