



North Pacific Fisheries Association, NPFA

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House Fisheries Committee
Representative Stutes, Chair
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK 99811

House Resources Committee
Representative Lincoln, Co-Chair
Representative Tarr, Co-Chair
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK 99811

RE: Support for HB 35 – Board of Fish Conflict of Interest

Dear Committee Members,

North Pacific Fisheries Association (NPFA) supports HB 35 which will allow Board of Fish (BOF) and Board of Game members to participate in Board deliberation around regulatory proposals, but not vote.

This legislation would improve the Board process by drawing on the knowledge and strengths of Board members. This would also demonstrate more trust in the vetting process of the Governor's office and Legislature. Existing BOF conflict of interest rules have driven discussions out of the public forum and into private ones. We support the passing of this bill to strengthen and increase transparency in the public process.

Board members currently declare all conflicts of interest and leave the room if anything on that list is discussed, deliberated, or voted on. Often when a Board member is "conflicted out" they are the only member with any regional or specific knowledge and thus the Board is left to deliberate with no depth of experience to draw on from within. The remaining Board is also more acutely aware that the outcome of a decision may impact a Board member's financial interests. Commercial fishermen, under the existing rules, see more conflicts of interest when serving on the BOF than those with sport or subsistence interests. Any participation or permits owned in fisheries around the state result in disqualification due to financial conflicts in addition to conflicts presented by family members, however distant. Alaska has diverse fisheries that cannot be represented by any single fishery or region. The ability for Industry to participate and inform discussions and deliberations on issues a Board member understands first-hand provides insight that the Department of Fish and Game and Enforcement would not have.

NPFA supports HB 35 allowing Board of Fish (BOF) and Board of Game members to participate in Board deliberation on regulatory proposals, but not vote. NPFA is a multi-species, multi-gear commercial fishing organization representing over 60 members, their families and fishing businesses. Our members are directly impacted by decisions made by the Board of Fish. HB 35 is a reasonable compromise that will greatly improve the Board of Fish and Board of Game process for all.

Respectfully,

G. Malcolm Milne
President, North Pacific Fisheries Association