

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES**

March 18, 2002

3:36 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Gary Stevens, Co-Chair  
Representative Peggy Wilson, Co-Chair  
Representative Drew Scalzi  
Representative Fred Dyson  
Representative John Coghill  
Representative Mary Kapsner  
Representative Beth Kerttula

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

All members present

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 46

Relating to the moratorium on fish farming in British Colombia.

- MOVED CSHJR 46(FSH) OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS ACTION**

BILL: HJR 46

SHORT TITLE:BC MORATORIUM ON FISH FARMING

SPONSOR(S): FISHERIES

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
02/19/02	2308	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/19/02	2308	(H)	FSH, RES
03/04/02		(H)	FSH AT 3:30 PM CAPITOL 124
03/04/02		(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard
03/18/02		(H)	FSH AT 3:30 PM CAPITOL 124

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JEAN ELLIS, Staff  
to Representative Peggy Wilson  
Alaska State Legislature  
Capitol Building, Room 409  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HJR 46 on behalf of the House Special Committee on Fisheries, sponsor.

DOUG MECUM, Director  
Division of Commercial Fisheries  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game  
P.O. Box 25526  
Juneau Alaska 99802-5526

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during hearing on HJR 46 about the threats of farmed salmon.

SUE ASPELUND  
Cordova District Fisherman United (CDFU)  
P.O. Box 939  
Cordova, Alaska 99574

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 46.

AURAH LANDAU  
Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC)  
419 6th Street  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in favor of HJR 46 on behalf of SEACC.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

TAPE 02-9, SIDE A  
Number 0001

CO-CHAIR PEGGY WILSON called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 3:36 p.m. Members present at the call to order were Representatives Kerttula, Dyson, Scalzi, Stevens, and Wilson. Representatives Coghill and Kapsner joined the meeting as it was in progress.

#### HJR 46-BC MORATORIUM ON FISH FARMING

CO-CHAIR WILSON announced that the matter before the committee was HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 46, Relating to the moratorium on fish farming in British Columbia.

Number 0120

CO-CHAIR STEVENS made a motion to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HJR 46, version 22-LS1582\J, Utermohle,

2/25/02, for purposes of discussion. There being no objection, Version J was adopted as the work draft.

Number 0154

JEAN ELLIS, Staff to Representative Peggy Wilson, Alaska State Legislature, explained HJR 46 on behalf of the House Special Committee on Fisheries, sponsor. The bill requests that the government of British Columbia reinstate the moratorium on finfish farming. She said the moratorium had been in place for several years but had been removed. This removal would become effective at the end of April. Ms. Ellis said she had worked with Representatives Kerttula and Dyson on the issue. She expressed her feeling that the proposed CS had taken care of some of the concerns that might have been raised about accuracy in the first version.

MS. ELLIS listed various supporting statements that had been included in the bill packets.

Number 0390

MS. ELLIS read the sponsor statement for HJR 46. She said:

On January 31, 2002, the Government of British Columbia announced that the provincial moratorium on fish farming would be lifted. This decision could have a substantial effect on the Alaskan economy and environment, both directly and indirectly.

This resolution strongly encourages the Government of British Columbia to reinstate the moratorium on fish farming.

In 2001 there were 29,000 accidental releases of farmed fish from British Columbia salmon farms. Escaped farmed Atlantic salmon have been caught in Alaska commercial fisheries. The escaped Atlantic salmon pose a threat to Alaska's marine environment and the ecology of Pacific Salmon.

Escaped Atlantic salmon from farms in British Columbia are now spawning in approximately 80 streams on the West Coast. These escaped salmon compete with wild Alaskan salmon for food, and there is continuing concern with possible disease transfers.

Seafood is Alaska's number one international export, and the commercial fishing industry is Alaska's largest private-sector employer.

Therefore, the Fisheries Committee strongly encourages the Alaska State Legislature to support the reinstatement of the British Columbia moratorium on fish farming.

Number 0512

CO-CHAIR STEVENS asked what changes were made to the original bill by the proposed CS.

MS. ELLIS said the changes were mostly to make small, technical corrections. She gave the example of the change from language that read "native Alaska wild salmon" to "native wild salmon" with regard to disease transfer. She listed other examples of technical changes.

Number 0717

REPRESENTATIVE COGHILL took issue with the resolution's claim that seafood is Alaska's number one export. He said that oil was the state's largest export.

Number 0738

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON corrected Representative Coghill by pointing out that all of Alaska's oil goes to domestic markets, most of them in Washington and Oregon.

Number 0769

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON proposed an amendment to page 2, line 3. He suggested inserting the word "escaped" between "Whereas" and "farmed".

Number 0814

REPRESENTATIVE SCALZI moved to adopt the foregoing as Amendment 1. There being no objection, the amendment was adopted.

Number 0848

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON offered [Amendment 2]. He suggested inserting "Alaska" between "80" and "streams" on page 2, line 8.

Number 0910

DOUG MECUM, Director, Division of Commercial Fisheries, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, testified before the committee. He said there have been almost 400,000 reported escaped Atlantic salmon since 1991, and he added that most escapes go unreported. There is very little monitoring or enforcement of the farms. There have been three documented recoveries of Atlantic salmon in Alaskan fresh waters.

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON withdrew Amendment 2.

Number 1020

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON proposed Amendment 3, on page 2, line 20. He suggested changing "Alaska [State] Legislature strongly supports the reinstatement of the British Columbia moratorium on fish farming" to "Alaska [State] Legislature requests the reinstatement of the [British Columbia] moratorium on fish farming until Alaskans can be assured that all possible steps have been taken to preclude further escapes of farmed fish."

Number 1043

REPRESENTATIVE SCALZI moved to adopt the foregoing as Amendment 3.

Number 1067

REPRESENTATIVE KERTTULA said she did not like the amendment because she does not like fish farming, even without escaped fish. She said there are myriad problems with fish farming outside of the economic [repercussions for Alaska's fisheries]. Pollution and destruction of estuaries were two other reasons she gave for not supporting fish farming.

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON said the danger to [Alaska] is escaped fish. What [the British Columbians] do to their own waters is "kind of their business." He said British Columbia has its own economic problems it is trying to deal with. He said, "We can't tell them 'Don't compete with us.'" He said [Alaska] can tell British Columbia to not "mess up our fish and our waters."

Number 1200

REPRESENTATIVE SCALZI agreed with Representative Dyson's point. He said the state's concern should not be an economic one.

Number 1289

REPRESENTATIVE KERTTULA said she appreciated the point of not interfering with other governments, but said she did not think it wrong to have broader concerns about the environment. She said she would go further [than the present language in the bill]. She said [the British Columbia government] could assure Alaskans by writing a letter [that more fish will not escape].

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON pointed out that he did not say ["assure Alaskans"]; he said until "Alaskans are assured".

Number 1368

REPRESENTATIVE KERTTULA suggested that the language at least state, "until Alaskans are assured that there is no escapement".

Number 1438

REPRESENTATIVE KERTTULA moved to amend Amendment 3 to say, "until Alaskans are assured there will be no negative impacts on Alaskan waters or fishery resources".

Number 1480

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON wondered if that language "would water it down." He warned there might be dangers unapparent, but the only real danger he could see was escaped fish surviving and spawning in [Alaska's] streams. He said he was not sure if Representative Kerttula's amendment [to Amendment 3] was stronger or not.

REPRESENTATIVE KERTTULA said she thought it was stronger because it says, "no negative impacts".

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON made it known he did not want to hold the bill up for that.

Number 1508

MR. MECUM told the committee the issue of escapes was amplified by a [British Columbia] auditor general's report that proclaimed escapes of less than 5 percent as acceptable. He posited that

as long as [British Columbia] is willing to allow some level of escapes - that could be in the order of hundreds of thousands of fish - the department has a problem with that. That is why the department is supporting the resolution to keep the moratorium from being lifted. He pointed out that the ability to show no negative impact is a much tougher standard to document.

REPRESENTATIVE KERTTULA relented, saying she would be satisfied with the original language.

Number 1607

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON mentioned he had read somewhere that there had been a transmission [of disease] to chum salmon near Vancouver Island.

MR. MECUM said Atlantic salmon were infected, but it was believed to be from sockeye salmon. He said [infectious hematopoietic necrosis virus] was being transferred from wild stocks to [farmed] stocks. He characterized this as dangerous because the wild salmon swimming by the net pens near the Nass and Skeena Rivers - two large sockeye producers - could be infected. He also said he was concerned about escaped farmed salmon with the disease. He stated that a fish farm could become a "disease sink."

Number 1700

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON used colorful metaphors to illustrate the initial tenor of the language in his first draft. He assured the committee he had toned it down with the new version.

Number 1757

CO-CHAIR STEVENS asked Representative Dyson whom he was asking to do what.

REPRESENTATIVE DYSON asked that page 2, line 20 become the first "Resolved", to ask that British Columbia reinstate the moratorium. He said that the [U.S. Department of State] would be asked to pay attention and "hold this big club" when negotiating over the North American Free Trade Agreement or the Pacific Salmon Treaty [with Canada]. He said he was open to better wording and amendments.

Number 1827

REPRESENTATIVE SCALZI restated Amendment 3 and made a motion to make it be the first "Resolved" of the bill on page 2, line 15 as follows:

**[BE IT] RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature requests the reinstatement of the British Columbia moratorium on fish farming until Alaskans can be assured that all possible steps have been taken to preclude further escapes of farmed fish from British Columbia waters

There being no objection, [Amendment 3] was adopted.

Number 1969

REPRESENTATIVE SCALZI [moved to adopt Amendment 4] on page 2, line 12, to add language to read:

**WHEREAS** Canada is now entering into finfish farming for halibut and sablefish

As part of that amendment, the next "Whereas" clause on line 13 would be changed to read:

**WHEREAS** the long-term health of Alaska's wild salmon stocks, as well as halibut and sablefish, is of vital economic and cultural importance

REPRESENTATIVE SCALZI said the reason for the [Amendment 4] is that there has been \$50 million allocated to finfish farming of halibut and sablefish in British Columbia. He had no problem with its being done on land [in tanks], but the Canadian program would take place in ocean pens. He expressed his concern about the same issues for halibut and sablefish as the resolution speaks of for salmon. The resolution would "just add these two species to the pot."

Number 2086

CO-CHAIR WILSON asked whether there was any objection. There being none, Amendment 4 was adopted.

Number 2108

SUE ASPELUND, Cordova District Fisherman United (CDFU), testified via teleconference. She characterized HJR 46 as an excellent resolution. She said it addresses many of the

concerns that Alaskans have about fish farms being adjacent to Alaskan waters. She called it a piece of good work and urged its passage.

Number 2143

AURA LANDAU, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC), testified before the committee. She echoed thanks to the committee for bringing the resolution forth. She reiterated that wild salmon are the mainstay of many families in Alaska. She characterized salmon as the "heart of the rainforest" from British Columbia through Alaska. She said SEACC supports the legislation.

Number 2201

REPRESENTATIVE SCALZI moved to report CSHJR 46, version 22LS-1582\J, Utermohle, 2/25/02, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the zero fiscal note. There being no objection, CSHJR 46(FSH) was moved out of the House Special Committee on Fisheries.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 4:09 p.m.