

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

March 30, 2023  
10:00 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Sarah Vance, Chair  
Representative Kevin McCabe  
Representative CJ McCormick  
Representative Ben Carpenter  
Representative Louise Stutes  
Representative Rebecca Himschoot

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Craig Johnson

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 19

"An Act relating to the registration of commercial vessels; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 19

SHORT TITLE: REGISTRATION OF BOATS: EXEMPTION

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) STUTES

01/19/23	(H)	PREFILE RELEASED 1/9/23
01/19/23	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/23	(H)	FSH, RES
02/02/23	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
02/02/23	(H)	Heard & Held
02/02/23	(H)	MINUTE(FSH)
03/07/23	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/07/23	(H)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
03/27/23	(H)	FIN REPLACES RES REFERRAL
03/27/23	(H)	BILL REPRINTED
03/30/23	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

DONNA PAGE, Staff

Representative Louise Stutes  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Presented HB 19, on behalf of Representative Stutes, prime sponsor.

TRACY WELCH, Lobbyist  
United Fishermen of Alaska  
Petersburg, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Offered invited testimony during the hearing on HB 19.

JEFFREY SCHMITZ, Director  
Division of Motor Vehicles  
Department of Administration  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on HB 19.

GLENN HAIGHT, Commissioner  
Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on HB 19.

BRIAN HAWKINS, Port Director, Harbormaster  
City of Homer;  
Alaska Association of Harbormasters and Port Administrators  
Homer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Offered invited testimony during the hearing on HB 19.

JERRY MCCUNE, Lobbyist  
Cordova District Fishermen United  
Cordova, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 19.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[10:00:53 AM](#)

**CHAIR SARAH VANCE** called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Representatives McCabe, Stutes, Himschoot, and Vance were present at the call to order. Representative McCormick and Carpenter arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**HB 19-REGISTRATION OF BOATS: EXEMPTION**

10:01:22 AM

CHAIR VANCE announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 19 "An Act relating to the registration of commercial vessels; and providing for an effective date."

10:02:01 AM

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES, prime sponsor, reintroduced HB 19 and paraphrased the first few paragraphs of the sponsor statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

House Bill 28 exempts active commercial fishing vessels from duplicative registration requirements created by the passage of SB 92, "the derelict vessel bill," in 2018.

Specifically, the bill removes the requirement for U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) documented vessels with a current Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) license to register every three years with the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

Prior to the passage of SB 92, USCG documented vessels were exempt from DMV registration; however, that exemption was repealed by the bill and as a result, documented vessels now must register with the DMV.

10:03:02 AM

DONNA PAGE, Staff, Representative Louise Stutes, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Stutes, prime sponsor of HB 19, paraphrased the remaining portion of the sponsor statement [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The rationale for this requirement was to provide the State and local municipalities with a state-maintained database of who owns and operates vessels in Alaskan waters, as well as how to contact those individuals. However, the database CFEC maintains for commercial fishing vessels was overlooked. Active commercial fishing vessel owners must renew their vessel license annually with the CFEC and the commission provides the

necessary contact information in a publicly accessible, state database.

Alaska's commercial fishing fleet is the backbone of one of our state's most vital industries. We should not require those vessels to register every three years with the DMV, at additional expense, only to provide information that the State already has through the vessel's annual license renewal process.

MS. PAGE added that HB 19 would institute an \$8 annual fee for vessels registered with the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC), but this fee would be waived for vessel owners who have paid the current \$24 Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) fee in the past two years. The proceeds of the \$8 fee would go towards funding boating safety programs. She emphasized that it would not be an additional fee for vessel owners.

[10:05:01 AM](#)

MS. PAGE presented the sectional analysis for HB 19 [included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1:

Amends AS 05.25.055(i) to exempt U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) documented vessels with a valid license issued by the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission (CFEC) from the requirement to register with the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

Section 2:

Adds new subsection (e) to AS 16.05.475 that requires CFEC to assess an \$8 registration fee for USCG documented vessels upon a renewal or issuance of a license beginning on January 1, 2024. This fee is in lieu of the current 3-year, \$24 registration or renewal fee collected by DMV.

Adds new subsection (f) to AS 16.05.475 specifying that fees collected in subsection (e) will be accounted for as provided in AS 05.25.096(b), to be made available to the Department of Administration, the Department of Commerce Community and Economic Development, and the Department of Natural Resources.

Section 3:

Adds a new section to uncodified law that requires CFEC to waive the \$8 registration fee for years that USCG documented vessels have already paid through the 3-year, \$24 registration fee with the DMV.

Section 4:

Adds a new section to the uncodified law that makes Section 1 of this act retroactive to January 1, 2023.

Section 5:

Establishes an immediate effective date for the remainder of the bill.

[10:06:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER inquired about the purpose of including the provision on retroactivity.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES replied that this is important because it would allow individuals who have already paid duplicate fees to receive credit.

[10:08:00 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE proceeded with invited testimony.

[10:08:20 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease.

[10:09:48 AM](#)

TRACY WELCH, Lobbyist, United Fisherman of Alaska, thanked Representative Stutes and her office for their work on HB 19, especially their work with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to make sure boats would not be fined. She explained that swift action on this issue is important because currently many vessel owners have been exempted, but DPS has not been able to "turn the other way." She expressed the belief that HB 19 is a "fair fix" to the problem and related her organizations full support.

CHAIR VANCE asked Ms. Welsh to give a real-time account of the impact on the Alaskan fishing fleet when [Senate Bill 92 passed during the Thirtieth Alaska State Legislature].

MS. WELCH related her experience with some of the issues that occurred at local DMVs with the passage of Senate Bill 92. This included that DMV had run out of permit decals, resulting in wait times of 3 to 4 weeks in some smaller communities. Additionally, she shared that even bigger offices, like Juneau, ran out of stickers quickly. She relayed the sense of uncertainty among vessel owners at that time, and this still exists. She reported that DMVs are still facing a lack of stickers and a large backlog of permits waiting to be awarded.

[10:12:26 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked whether the CFEC database could be accessed by DPS.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES responded that DPS can access it through the DMV, as they are both state departments, but she deferred to the CFEC commissioner. She reported that HB 19 started as a request from the harbormaster's office, which led her to presume this access would be possible.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE restated his question about the two databases and gave the example of a hypothetical emergency where an Alaska State Trooper may need instantaneous access to permit information. He clarified that he was referring to the DMV's and CFEC's databases.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES deferred the question.

[10:14:56 AM](#)

JEFFREY SCHMITZ, Director, Division of Motor Vehicles, Department of Administration, responded that the databases are not connected.

[10:15:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE suggested that since the databases are not connected there could be a time delay for [DPS agents] receiving identifying information about a vessel during emergencies.

[10:15:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES suggested that the individual would be able to decipher which database to use depending on which sticker is on the vessel.

[10:15:57 AM](#)

GLENN HAIGHT, Commissioner, Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission, reported that the commission's database was online and [anyone] can access license information by entering the number found on the decal. He stated that the database is not on an app, but the commission has submitted a request for funding to make this happen. He added that troopers are usually able to access the information before they go onto the water.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE hypothesized that because troopers can radio into the base, the number of times a year a time delay in information would occur is probably insignificant.

[10:16:56 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE asked for clarification of the difference between the DMV and CFEC stickers.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES said the CFEC stickers are required for a commercial vessel actively taking place in a fishery, while a DMV sticker is required for a commercial vessel not actively in a fishery. She stated that the objective for having two kinds of permits would be to keep track of commercial vessels, as this would help in preventing owners from abandoning boats at harbors. In turn this would help avoid fees associated with abandonment and disposal.

[10:18:34 AM](#)

BRIAN HAWKINS, Port Director, City of Homer; Harbormaster, Alaska Association of Harbormasters and Port Administrators (AAHPA), testified that he and his organization support HB 19 and the elimination of duplicate permits. He reported that because ports and harbors have access to permit information through the state, a vessel that was registered through the CFEC process meets the [AAHPA] needs for vessel ownership information. He further stated that AAHPA has passed its own resolution which supports the exemption set forth in HB 19.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER inquired about the technical possibility of connecting the two databases.

MR. HAIGHT replied that this may be possible, and the CFEC's information technology staff would be more qualified to answer this question. He acknowledged that the commission regularly

works with law enforcement and state troopers are familiar with the CFEC's database.

[10:21:19 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE opened public testimony on HB 19.

[10:21:32 AM](#)

JERRY MCCUNE, Lobbyist, Cordova District Fishermen United, opined that [SB 92] is troublesome for fisherman. He said that HB 19 fixes the dual registration issues, noting that DMV permits apply to vessels under five tons. He mentioned that duplicate registration could be violating federal law.

[10:23:45 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 19.

CHAIR VANCE expressed the intention to investigate the possibility of a federal law violation in reference to duplicate registration requirements. She stated this may be something that the committee wished to highlight.

CHAIR VANCE [announced that HB 19 was held over.]

[10:25:08 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 10:25 a.m.