

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

March 19, 2024

10:14 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 14

Calling on the United States Congress and all federal agencies to adopt policies and engage in certain efforts to improve the competitiveness and resiliency of the state's seafood industry.

- MOVED HCS SJR 14(FSH) OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 195

"An Act relating to the powers of the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission; relating to administrative areas for regulation of certain commercial set net entry permits; establishing a buy-back program for certain set net entry permits; providing for the termination of state set net tract leases under the buy-back program; closing certain water to commercial fishing; and providing for an effective date."

- SCHEDULED BUT NOT HEARD

HOUSE BILL NO. 329

"An Act relating to state tideland leases; and relating to aquatic farming or related hatchery operation site leases."

- BILL HEARING POSTPONED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SJR 14

SHORT TITLE: SUPPORT STATE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) BISHOP

02/15/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/15/24	(S)	FIN
02/23/24	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
02/23/24	(S)	Heard & Held
02/23/24	(S)	MINUTE(FIN)
02/26/24	(S)	FIN RPT 6DP
02/26/24	(S)	DP: HOFFMAN, OLSON, WILSON, KIEHL, MERRICK, BISHOP
02/26/24	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
02/26/24	(S)	Moved SJR 14 Out of Committee
02/26/24	(S)	MINUTE(FIN)
02/28/24	(S)	TRANSMITTED TO (H)
02/28/24	(S)	VERSION: SJR 14
03/01/24	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/01/24	(H)	FSH
03/05/24	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/05/24	(H)	Heard & Held
03/05/24	(H)	MINUTE(FSH)
03/07/24	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/07/24	(H)	Heard & Held
03/07/24	(H)	MINUTE(FSH)
03/12/24	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/12/24	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
03/19/24	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR CLICK BISHOP

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As prime sponsor, answered questions regarding SJR 14.

GREGG SMITH, Communications Director

Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the hearing on SJR 14.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:14:37 AM](#)

CHAIR SARAH VANCE called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:14 a.m. Representatives McCabe, McCormick, Carpenter, C. Johnson, Stutes, and Vance were present at the call to order. Representative Himschoot arrived as the meeting was in progress.

SJR 14-SUPPORT STATE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

[10:15:24 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE announced that the only order of business would be SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 14, Calling on the United States Congress and all federal agencies to adopt policies and engage in certain efforts to improve the competitiveness and resiliency of the state's seafood industry.

CHAIR CARPENTER moved to adopt Amendment 1 to SJR 14, labeled 33-LS1313\S.3, Gunther/Bullard, 3/12/24, which read as follows:

Page 2, line 29, following "seafood":

Insert "in a manner that is economically beneficial to small fishing-related businesses and that provides the highest quality of seafood for American families"

CHAIR VANCE objected for the purpose of discussion.

CHAIR VANCE explained that Amendment 1 would clarify that the request addressed to federal agencies is to economically benefit Alaska's fishing industry. The amendment emphasizes the high value of Alaska's seafood.

CHAIR VANCE removed her objection. There being no further objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

[10:16:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER moved to adopt Amendment 2 to SJR 14, labeled 33-LS1313\S.2, Bullard, 3/6/24, which read as follows:

Page 1, line 1:

Delete "**Calling**"

Insert "**Affirming the commitment of the Alaska State Legislature to supporting small fishing-related businesses, families engaged in fishing, and the preservation of the state's cultural way of life; and calling**"

Page 1, following line 4:

Insert new clauses to read:

"WHEREAS small fishing-related businesses, often family-owned, are the backbone of the state's seafood industry and contribute significantly to the economy of the state; and

WHEREAS fishing is not merely an economic activity, but a way of life for many families in the state and deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of the state; and

WHEREAS traditional knowledge and practices are passed down through fishing, ensuring that future generations may also benefit from the bounty of the sea, while preserving the state's unique cultural heritage; and

WHEREAS the sustainability of the state's fisheries relies on the continuation of this cultural tradition; and"

Page 2, following line 15:

Insert a new clause to read:

"BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature affirms its commitment to supporting small fishing-related businesses, families engaged in fishing, and the preservation of the state's cultural way of life associated with fishing and recognizes how small fishing-related businesses, families engaged in fishing, and the cultural way of life associated with fishing contribute to the state's identity, the state's economy, and the sustainability of the state's seafood industry; and be it"

Page 2, line 16:

Delete **"BE IT"**

Insert **"FURTHER"**

CHAIR VANCE objected for the purpose of discussion.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER explained his concern is that the resolution addresses industrial type of fishing. He sees the resolution as a request for the federal government to get involved in Alaska's fishing industry which would be a threat to traditional family-operated businesses. Amendment 2 would change the title of the bill slightly and make changes in the body of the bill. It emphasizes the resolution's intent to support traditional family businesses and Alaska's way of life.

[10:19:22 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES agreed with intent of amendment but said she thinks it should be a separate resolution. She expressed concern about calling out one sector over another. She agreed that small fishermen are a lot of the backbone of Alaska's fishing industry but so are processors. She posed the question, "If we didn't have processors, the fishermen wouldn't have any place to take the fish."

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT expressed similar concerns saying, "The whole thing is on fire right now, and I don't want to put out one part of the fire; I want to put out the whole fire." She explained that she felt the original resolution is inclusive of everyone. The original resolution does include the whole industry, including processors. She liked the concept of the amendment but said she would like to see it as a separate resolution.

[10:22:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked to hear from the bill sponsor.

[10:22:24 AM](#)

SENATOR CLICK BISHOP, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor of SJR 14, said he understood the intent of Representative Carpenter's amendment. In response to the discussion, he briefly described his background in the fishing industry and said he could see both sides of the discussion.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE explained he could also see it both ways.

[10:23:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether Amendment 2 could be revised to add processors to the language.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES suggested that Representative Carpenter's amendment be made into a separate resolution indicating that [Alaska] supports fishermen and processors. She opined that it would have more weight as a standalone resolution.

CHAIR VANCE agreed with the sponsor that the language in SJR 14 could include small processors. She said she would like to see support from the federal government to include the fishing industry as part of the agriculture program. It is important to

emphasize small businesses as the backbone of Alaska's fishing industry.

[10:26:43 AM](#)

SENATOR BISHOP pointed out that as a small fish processor, he sold to large processors, and the large processors were also important to Alaska's fishing industry.

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON asked whether [Amendment 2] would diminish the underlying intent of original resolution.

SENATOR BISHOP responded that is possible.

[10:28:10 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER referred to language in SJR 14 which asks that the United States Department of Agriculture treat Alaska's seafood industry similarly to land-based farming. He emphasized that small farmers in the United States are in crisis because of industrial farming. He described a scenario in which the seafood industry in Alaska is taken over by a centralized, government-run seafood industry. He suggested that care must be taken and referred to Pacific seafood processors trawling in the Gulf of Alaska.

[10:33:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES asked to clear up a misconception. Pacific seafood processors are shore-based processors rather than at-sea processors. She pointed out that fishing is a supply of food as is farming and posited that Alaska's seafood industry should be eligible for loans, grants, and the same types of programs available to farmers. The crux of this resolution is that Alaska processors and fishermen are in the business of supplying food and should have access to the same programs as farmers.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER highlighted that [Amendment 2] emphasized the same level of support for small businesses and small fishermen as big corporations receive. He thinks if large businesses receive subsidies, then small businesses should, as well.

CHAIR VANCE removed her objection to Amendment 2 and asked whether there was further objection.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES objected.

[10:38:08 AM](#)

A roll call vote was taken. Representatives McCabe, McCormick, Carpenter, C. Johnson, Himschoot, and Vance voted in favor of Amendment 2. Representative Stutes voted against it. Therefore, Amendment 2 was adopted by a vote of 6-1.

[10:39:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE moved to adopt Amendment 3 to SJR 14, labeled 33-LS1313\S.1, Bullard, 3/5/24, which read as follows:

Page 3, line 27, following "Commerce;":
Insert "Barry Thom, Executive Director, Pacific States
Marine Fisheries Commission;"

CHAIR VANCE objected for the purpose of discussion.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE explained that the amendment would add Barry Thom, the executive director of the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, to the list of addressees.

CHAIR VANCE removed her objection. There being no further objection, Amendment 3 was adopted.

[10:40:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER moved to adopt Amendment 4 to SJR 14, labeled 33-LS1313\S.4, Bullard, 3/18/24, which read as follows:

Page 2, lines 21 - 23:
Delete all material and insert:
"FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature urges the United States Department of Agriculture to include seafood harvesting and processing businesses in all programs that support American food producers; and be it"

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE objected for the purpose of discussion.

[10:40:31 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE explained Amendment 4 would clarify language asking that the seafood industry be recognized on an equal playing field with other American food producers.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT explained that she had no objection to the amendment but asked whether it could be added as a "further resolved".

CHAIR VANCE explained that the language of Amendment 4 defined a clearer purpose by specifying that the Department of Agriculture recognize the seafood industry as food producers.

[10:43:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON commented that sometimes the Department of Agriculture pays farmers not to work such as the corn farmers in Kansas and inquired whether the committee wants such a program for fishermen.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE responded that in Kansas farmers have to plant the corn. In Bristol Bay fish aren't planted, and fishing depends on the vagaries of whichever fish are out there.

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON noted that he was unsure of the difference between the two examples.

[10:46:10 AM](#)

GREGG SMITH, Communications Director, Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI), explained that the intent of the resolution is to provide support for Alaska's congressional delegation as it are advocates for the seafood industry throughout the federal government for the creation or enhancement of programs that would help Alaskans.

[10:47:27 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE C. JOHNSON emphasized for the record that it is the intent of this committee that nothing diminish or deter the harvesting of seafood.

[10:48:06 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER inquired about the farmed fish which are cheaper and more efficient to harvest. He pointed to the risk they pose to wild salmon.

SENATOR BISHOP observed that this was a great conversation, but at the end of the day, it is a resolution. Everyone has good intentions, and the seafood industry, the fishermen, and

processors will help drive the debate in Washington, D.C., as policy is being set.

[10:51:18 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE commented that if the federal government took a position that farmed fish was a more efficient way to feed people, it would be waging war directly on Alaska fisheries. Alaska does not produce farmed fish, and approximately 54 percent of the seafood in the U.S. is from Alaska. The mandate for ASMI is to market wild seafood. This resolution simply asks that the tools within the Department of Agriculture be made available to businesses in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE commented he would be happy if this resolution simply caused Trade Ambassador Tai to put Alaska seafood on her website.

[10:53:39 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE removed her objection to Amendment 4. There being no further objection, Amendment 4 was adopted.

[10:54:07 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE stated that SJR 14, as amended, was before the committee.

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER explained that he would let his previous comments on the resolution stand.

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES interpreted the resolution to say the USDA offers a lot of programs, and fishermen are farmers also, thus they should be able to participate in those programs.

[10:55:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER moved to report SJR 14, as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes and to give Legislative Legal Services permission to make all necessary technical and conforming changes. There being no objection, HCS SJR 14(FSH) was reported out of the House Special Committee on Fisheries.

[10:56:03 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 10:56 a.m. to 11:02 a.m.

11:02:49 AM

CHAIR VANCE announced the hearing on HB 329 would be postponed.

11:03:46 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 11:03 a.m.