

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

April 23, 2024  
10:04 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**

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 8

Encouraging the Department of Fish and Game to adopt certain regulations relating to fisheries bycatch.

- HEARD & HELD

CS FOR SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 10 (FIN) AM

Establishing the Joint Legislative Seafood Industry Task Force.

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HR 8

SHORT TITLE: FISHERIES BYCATCH REGULATIONS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) VANCE

04/20/23	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/20/23	(H)	FSH, RES
04/25/23	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
04/25/23	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
04/27/23	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
04/27/23	(H)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
04/23/24	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: SCR 10

SHORT TITLE: JOINT LEGIS SEAFOOD INDUSTRY TASK FORCE  
SPONSOR(s): FINANCE

03/01/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/01/24	(S)	FIN
03/07/24	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
03/07/24	(S)	Heard & Held
03/07/24	(S)	MINUTE(FIN)
03/21/24	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
03/21/24	(S)	Heard & Held
03/21/24	(S)	MINUTE(FIN)
04/17/24	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
04/17/24	(S)	Moved CSSCR 10(FIN) Out of Committee
04/17/24	(S)	MINUTE(FIN)
04/19/24	(S)	FIN RPT CS 5DP SAME TITLE
04/19/24	(S)	DP: STEDMAN, WILSON, KIEHL, MERRICK, BISHOP
04/19/24	(S)	TRANSMITTED TO (H)
04/19/24	(S)	VERSION: CSSCR 10(FIN) AM
04/22/24	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/22/24	(H)	FSH
04/23/24	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

#### WITNESS REGISTER

JAKE ALMEIDA, Staff  
Representative Sarah Vance  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Introduced HR 8, on behalf of  
Representative Vance, prime sponsor.

BRIAN GABRIEL, Mayor  
City of Kenai  
Kenai, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Reviewed a report on the findings of the  
Bycatch Advisory Council during the hearing on HR 8.

SENATOR GARY STEVENS  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As the prime sponsor, introduced CSSCR  
10(FIN) AM.

TIM LAMKIN, Staff  
Senator Gary Stevens  
Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** On behalf of Senator Stevens, prime sponsor, explained CSSCR 10(FIN) AM and answered questions.

GREG SMITH, Communications Director  
Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided invited testimony on CSSCR 10(FIN) AM.

TRACY WELCH, Executive Director, Lobbyist  
United Fisherman of Alaska  
Petersburg, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided invited testimony on CSSCR 10(FIN) AM.

JULIE DECKER, President  
Pacific Seafood Processors Association  
Wrangell, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided invited testimony on CSSCR 10(FIN) AM.

BRIAN O'LEARY, Chief Operating Officer  
OBI Seafoods  
Seattle, Washington

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided invited testimony on CSSCR 10(FIN) AM.

#### **ACTION NARRATIVE**

[10:04:01 AM](#)

**CHAIR SARAH VANCE** called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. Representatives McCabe, McCormick, Himschoot, and Vance were present at the call to order. Representatives C. Johnson, Stutes, and Carpenter arrived as the meeting was in progress.

#### **HR 8-FISHERIES BYCATCH REGULATIONS**

[10:04:46 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE RESOLUTION NO. 8, Encouraging the Department of Fish and Game to adopt certain regulations relating to fisheries bycatch.

[10:05:06 AM](#)

JAKE ALMEIDA, Staff, Representative Sarah Vance, Alaska State Legislature, introduced HB 8, on behalf of the prime sponsor, Representative Vance. He paraphrased from the sponsor statement [copy included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

House Resolution 8 encourages the Department of Fish and Game, through the department's regulatory authority and through the commissioner's seat on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) to support actions and regulatory changes on both the state and federal levels to reduce bycatch.

Alaska's rich marine resources support thriving fisheries managed by the NPFMC under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. However, alongside the targeted harvest of seafood, these fisheries inevitably result in bycatch – fish caught incidentally and often discarded due to regulatory constraints or unsuitability for commercial use.

Bycatch poses significant challenges to the health and sustainability of marine ecosystems, as well as to the economic viability of fishing operations and ultimately Alaskans' way of life. Current regulations allow for the annual discard of tens of millions of pounds of fish in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska waters, representing a substantial loss of potential food resources and economic value. Moreover, this resolution acknowledges the recommendations of the Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT) and the Bycatch Advisory Council which emphasized the importance of incremental regulatory changes to improve bycatch reduction, particularly for species caught with non-targeted gear or discarded due to regulatory requirements.

In essence, HR 8 represents a proactive step towards more sustainable fishing practices in Alaska's federal fisheries by emphasizing the need to reduce bycatch. It underscores the importance of balancing economic interests with environmental conservation to achieve a more resilient and prosperous future for Alaska's fisheries and way of life.

10:07:37 AM

MR. ALMEIDA stated that the draft of the proposed resolution before the committee focuses on the utilization of bycatch; however, in reaction to public comment, the sponsor has changed the focus to reducing bycatch. He pointed out the decline in the state's fisheries resource and that Alaskans need solutions. He pointed out this could be done by utilizing bycatch or by furthering regulatory restraints, but he argued that all bycatch is wanton waste and needs to be reduced as soon as possible. He stated that the Bycatch Advisory Council held a meeting last week and adopted findings based on the utilization of bycatch. He stated that Brian Gabriel would speak to these findings.

10:10:33 AM

BRIAN GABRIEL, Mayor, City of Kenai, gave invited testimony on HB 8. He stated that he held a seat on the Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force, which finished its work in November 2022. He explained that in March 2023, the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council was created with the purpose to advise the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) on ways to implement the recommendations from the final report of the task force. He stated that a Bycatch Utilization Subcommittee was created to report on this issue. He stated that he served as the chair of the subcommittee.

MR. GABRIEL addressed the recommendations from the report, titled "Bycatch Utilization Subcommittee Report to Bycatch Advisory Council," [copy included in the committee packet]. He stated that the purpose of the subcommittee was to identify issues that would need to be addressed when considering utilization of bycatch. He defined "bycatch" as fish that are harvested in a fishery but are not sold or kept. He stated that the subcommittee had met four times, taking public testimony each time. He discussed the presentations given to the subcommittee, of which SeaShare's model was the most relevant for bycatch utilization. He explained that SeaShare is a federally permitted, prohibited species donation program.

MR. GABRIEL stated that the subcommittee's focus was on paring down the information, as bycatch is present in every fishery. He stated that the focus was on the high value bycatch, such as salmon, halibut, and crab, and the subcommittee chose halibut bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska as its starting point.

MR. GABRIEL, in paring down the topic, stated that the subcommittee chose the following categories as a focus: regulatory, economic, logistical, and political. He stated that the report did not produce a "revelation;" rather it created a roadmap of areas that need to be addressed in utilizing bycatch.

MR. GABRIEL stated that because the fisheries are both federally and state managed, regulatory change would need to be addressed, which would include the International Pacific Halibut Commission. He moved to the issue of economic factors, stating that there would need to be a plan on how the proceeds would be utilized and how bycatch would be marketed, which would involve processors.

[10:17:26 AM](#)

MR. GABRIEL warned that on the regulatory side, bycatch retention could cause a higher mortality rate to endangered species. On the economic side, he discussed how retention would affect processors who are only set up for processing targeted species, as the retention of bycatch could cause processing concerns. He noted that retaining undersized fish could create a negative market effect for that species. He pointed out that per the regulation side, subsidies may need to be implemented to facilitate utilization.

MR. GABRIEL, per the harvest side, discussed the gear, deck space, and storage space issues for fishermen on the grounds. He reiterated that small fish could negatively affect marketing, as this would be seen as poor quality. He noted the struggle the seafood market is currently having, and he offered the advice that utilization requirements could be an issue.

MR. GABRIEL, per the logistical side, discussed the transportation challenges, noting that SeaShare is heavily subsidized. On the political side, he offered the advice that there could be public resistance to requirements of retention and utilization before further reduction measures are implemented. He also noted that there could be concerns about incentivizing or institutionalizing bycatch. He stated that this theme was heard during the public comment period. Another common point made during the public comment period was that bycatch should be minimized before any program on utilization moves forward. He observed that because all fisheries have bycatch, there could be different strategies for each fishery.

MR. GABRIEL discussed the conclusion of the report, which included that a mandatory rather than a voluntary program would need to have a full economic analysis. The analysis would address the issues discussed, along with other issues which might be identified. He stated that there was no final recommendation, as the discussion is very complicated, particularly when noting all the species that pertain to bycatch and how each one would need to be dealt with differently.

[10:23:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT expressed excitement about the advisory council. She questioned whether the subcommittee was able to investigate international strategies for bycatch.

MR. GABRIEL stated that there had been some discussion on Iceland, but no specific reports were provided.

CHAIR VANCE noted that the 2022 Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force's report is in the committee packet. She commented that the report is robust and expressed appreciation for the original intent of reducing wanton waste. She questioned whether the complicated nature of bycatch was the main take away for the subcommittee.

MR. GABRIEL responded that this was the main takeaway, as there are many moving parts. He offered the advice that throughout the entire process, every element would need to be considered.

[10:26:10 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE referenced his participation on the task force and questioned some of the other considerations by the council.

MR. GABRIEL recommended referencing the website, as it would take time to review it all now. He pointed out that the website lists recommendations and categories, showing the progress on each recommendation. He noted that the recommendations are easily understandable. He expressed gratitude that the task force's recommendations did not "just go on a shelf."

CHAIR VANCE reiterated that the report is robust, and the advisory council is looking at implementation of the recommendations.

[10:28:42 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE sought to give full transparency on the intention of the proposed legislation. She discussed the desire to make fish waste beneficial to Alaskans; however, she stated that this would be complicated to do. She expressed the intention to remove the utilization parts of the resolution. She requested that members provide amendments that would encourage the commissioner of ADF&G to implement regulations on the avoidance and reduction of bycatch. She encouraged interaction with stakeholders and expressed the importance of every voice being heard.

[10:30:40 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE announced that HR 8 was held over.

[10:31:07 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 10:31 a.m. to 10:35 a.m.

**SCR 10-JOINT LEGIS SEAFOOD INDUSTRY TASK FORCE**

[10:35:52 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE announced that the final order of business would be CS FOR SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 10(FIN) AM, Establishing the Joint Legislative Seafood Industry Task Force.

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, Alaska State Legislature, as the prime sponsor, introduced CSSCR 10(FIN) AM. He pointed out that the Seafood Industry Task Force would be created by the proposed legislation. He discussed the background idea for this, which came from the success of the Salmon Industry Task Force. He pointed out that he was a member of this task force, which was created in 2002. The Salmon Industry Task Force had addressed how to raise the quality of salmon. For example, fishermen had been helped with engine replacements and ice machine installations.

SENATOR STEVENS stated that the proposed legislation would be an effort to explore ways that the state could help the seafood industry recover from "a terrible tailspin." He pointed out that the seafood industry is the largest manufacturing sector in the state, employing around 48,000 workers. He added that it is also one of the largest sources of municipal revenue in 11 communities throughout the state. He remarked on several of the economic and market headwinds, including depressed consumer demand, a weakened U.S. currency, and international

overharvesting. To help turn the seafood industry around, he said that the proposed task force would be an attempt to find solutions at a state level, federal level, and in global markets. He stated that the goal would be to have specific bills for introduction by the beginning of next session.

[10:39:41 AM](#)

TIM LAMKIN, Staff, Senator Gary Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Senator Stevens, prime sponsor, addressed CSSCR 10(FIN) AM. He stated that the proposed resolution is an effort to put specifics on the table for the task force to evaluate. He expressed the understanding that the seafood industry is complex, with many moving parts. He suggested that the task force would discuss many different ideas. He noted that the proposed legislation was drafted broadly so the task force would be represented by many different stakeholders in the industry.

[10:40:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER, concerning the makeup of the task force, expressed the understanding that there would be three members from the seafood-processing sector and three harvesters. He questioned whether a representative could be both a processor and a harvester.

SENATOR STEVENS expressed agreement that this is possible. He expressed the desire to have every aspect of the seafood industry represented on the task force.

[10:41:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT expressed the concern that the task force would have six months to do the work; however, this timeframe would be during prime fishing season. She questioned whether a delineated structure could apply. She recommended that anyone from the commercial sector, who felt he/she could do the work, should be able to apply.

SENATOR STEVENS expressed acceptance to any ideas presented, suggesting that the job would be done no matter who is at the table. He added that this job would be ongoing through the winter as well, as there should be some legislation to consider by the beginning of next session.

[10:43:21 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE suggested that the report be sent directly to the U.S. trade ambassador or trade delegation, so this can be included in the delegation's report. He expressed the understanding that currently this report does not mention the Alaska seafood industry.

SENATOR STEVENS concurred that the trade delegation needs to know what is happening in Alaska.

[10:45:51 AM](#)

GREG SMITH, Communications Director, Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, provided invited testimony on CSSCR 10(FIN) AM. He stated that while the seafood industry is used to having ebbs and flows, the current situation is unprecedented. He added that all species are under market pressure. He pointed out that one of the reasons for this is the large size of the Russian harvest combined with the lower value of Russia's currency. He stated the list of economic challenges continues, with a multitude of geopolitical obstacles that are effecting trade. He addressed inflation, high interest rates, and the growth of fixed expenses. He expressed the opinion that the industry is resilient, but it is at a crossroads, and it needs a way of vetting better ideas, with better courses of action. He expressed support for the proposed legislation as a way to investigate and collaborate with key stakeholders regarding new opportunities for the long-term economic health of the seafood industry in Alaska.

[10:48:52 AM](#)

TRACY WELCH, Executive Director, Lobbyist, United Fisherman of Alaska (UFA), provided invited testimony on CSSCR 10(FIN) AM. She stated that UFA is a statewide fishing trade association, and it represents 36 different member groups participating in state and federal fisheries. On behalf of UFA, she expressed strong support for the proposed legislation. She commented on the unprecedented challenges the state's seafood industry is facing across the entire state. She stated that fishermen, processors, workers, and communities are facing extremely low prices, which is resulting in plant closures, lost markets, barriers to business, and forgone fishing opportunities. This in turn is effecting state and local tax revenues. She estimated that the loss to the state's economy in 2023 was over \$2 billion. She expressed the opinion that the task force would be an important mechanism for the industry and policy makers to

provide recommendations on legislative and administrative actions. She stated that this should not just be an immediate action, but a long-term vision for the industry.

[10:51:40 AM](#)

JULIE DECKER, President, Pacific Seafood Processors Association, provided invited testimony on CSSCR 10(FIN) AM. She shared her history in the seafood industry. On behalf of the Pacific Seafood Processors Association, she expressed support for the proposed legislation. She stated that the association represents 11 major seafood processing companies, operating over 30 facilities in over 20 communities in Alaska. She summarized that these companies buy millions of pounds of seafood from fishermen in the state and send it to markets around the world. She maintained that these companies are invested in the state for the long term.

MS. DECKER noted that the Alaska seafood industry has not seen a collapse such as this since the 1990s; however, this time the collapse is across multiple species. She explained that in 2023 multiple economic and geopolitical factors occurred simultaneously to create the environment today, with the downturn still occurring. She mentioned the seafood processors who do not expect to open in 2024, which will leave some communities without markets and tax revenue. She stated that there are systemic challenges to competitiveness and fairness globally. She stated that the association has been advocating for several state and federal actions; however, she suggested that the challenges are larger than any one sector of the industry or region in the state, and this downturn will affect coastal communities and state revenue. She suggested that in creating the task force, various stakeholders will be brought together to focus on the economic challenges in the seafood industry.

[10:55:16 AM](#)

BRIAN O'LEARY, Chief Operating Officer, OBI Seafoods, provided invited testimony on CSSCR 10(FIN) AM. He shared his background in the fishing industry in Alaska. He addressed the unprecedented seafood market dislocation, with multiple seafood species being affected simultaneously. On behalf of OBI, he expressed support for the proposed legislation. He noted coastal Alaska's heavy economic reliance on the seafood industry and the state's fisheries. He expressed the opinion that the dialogue created by the task force would help stabilize the

seafood industry. He discussed the success of the previous task force created [in 2002] for the fishing industry in the state. He remarked that Alaskans are resilient in tough conditions, expressing the opinion that the state will find a way forward.

[10:57:11 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE questioned Mr. Lamkin on the timeline for the appointments to the task force. She questioned the anticipated date the task force would begin its work.

MR. LAMKIN expressed the expectation that, with passage of the resolution, work could begin as soon as May. Between this time and May, he expressed the hope that interested stakeholders would come forward, so the appointment process could begin even before passage. He stated that the first organizational meeting could be as soon as late May in Anchorage, followed by virtual meetings throughout the interim. He noted that this was written to keep the cost down. He stated that the plan is for a final meeting in January to review the recommendations.

[10:59:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER referenced the representation of coastal communities. He questioned which entities this refers to, such as municipalities or Tribes.

MR. LAMKIN answered that it is open to either, as the intent would be to keep it general, and this could include Western Alaska quota holders, mayors, city councils, and others in rural areas.

[10:59:51 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE pointed to page 2, line 20, of CSSCR 10(FIN) AM, which referenced ways to improve the coordination of harvesting, processing, and marketing seafood. She questioned the intent behind this.

MR. LAMKIN explained that this language was drafted and modeled after the legislation passed in 2002, and this was duplicated from that effort.

CHAIR VANCE expressed the idea that there should be more communication between harvesters and processors. She referenced the "outcry and confusion" around the price of fish in 2023. She expressed the understanding that many fishermen felt that

they were not communicated with clearly. She stated that expectations should be better communicated, along with the anticipation of harvest goals. She pointed out that many fishermen went into debt because they did not know how bad the market was. She expressed the hope that the task force could address this. She explained that if entities feel they are partners in the global market, they will work harder to improve the quality of fish. In this way fishermen may feel they will be taken care of with the price of the fish, and their confidence would be regained.

[11:03:08 AM](#)

CHAIR VANCE announced that CSSCR 10(FIN) AM was held over.

[11:03:48 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 11:04 a.m.