

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES
HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

April 25, 2024
6:04 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

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

HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Tom McKay, Chair
Representative Kevin McCabe
Representative George Rauscher, Vice Chair
Representative Thomas Baker
Representative Stanley Wright
Representative Jennie Armstrong
Representative Donna Mears
Representative Maxine Dibert

MEMBERS ABSENT

HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

Representative Craig Johnson

HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE

Representative Dan Saddler

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) :

Board of Fisheries

Marit Carlson-Van Dort - Anchorage

Curtis Chamberlain - Wasilla

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

CURTIS CHAMBERLAIN, Appointee
Board of Fisheries
Wasilla, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the Board of Fisheries.

MARIT CARLSON-VAN DORT, Appointee
Board of Fisheries
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified as an appointee to the Board of Fisheries.

PAUL SHADURA, representing self
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to the appointment of Curtis Chamberlain and Marit Carlson-Van Dort to the Board of Fisheries.

ROBERT HEYANO, representing self
Dillingham, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Marit Carlson-Van Dort to the Board of Fisheries.

JOHN WOOD, Chair
Board of Fisheries
Willow, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Marit Carlson-Van Dort to the Board of Fisheries.

KIM LANDEEN, Assistant Executive Director
Southeast Alaska Guides Organization
Gustavus, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Marit Carlson-Van Dort and Curtis Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

VIRGIL UMPHENOUR, representing self

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Marit Carlson-Van Dort and Curtis Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

GALE VICK, Chair

Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Marit Carlson-Van Dort and Curtis Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

SHANNON MARTIN, Executive Director

Kenai Sportfishing Association

Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Marit Carlson-Van Dort and Curtis Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

GREG SVENDSEN, Member

Board of Fisheries

Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Marit Carlson-Van Dort to the Board of Fisheries.

EVA BURK, Contractor

Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission

Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of the appointment of Marit Carlson-Van Dort and Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[6:04:12 PM](#)

CHAIR SARAH VANCE called the joint meeting of the House Special Committee on Fisheries and the House Resources Standing Committee to order at 6:04 p.m. Representatives Baker, Wright, Armstrong, Mears, Dibert, and McKay from the House Resources Standing Committee, Representatives McCormick, Carpenter, Stutes, Himschoot, and Vance from the House Special Committee on Fisheries, and Representative McCabe from both committees were present at the call to order.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S) : **Board of Fisheries**

6:05:17 PM

CHAIR VANCE announced that the only order of business would be the confirmation hearings on the governor's appointees to the Board of Fisheries.

6:06:21 PM

CURTIS CHAMBERLAIN, Appointee, Board of Fisheries, testified as an appointee to the Board of Fisheries. He shared that he grew up in remote Alaska, fishing on the Kuskokwim River. He provided his educational background and work experience as a lawyer in the Lower 48 [resume copy included in the committee packet]. He stated that he returned to Alaska to reconnect with his culture and raise his children. He stated that he has served on the Board of Directors for the Kuskokwim Corporation and currently is the Assistant General Counsel for Corporate Governance and Litigation at the Calista Corporation. He added that he also serves on the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission Advisory Panel.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN expressed pride in growing up in Alaska with "the best fishing in the world." At that time, he said, all the fisheries were thriving. He expressed the desire to see the plentiful fish of the past return. He said he would work to bring user groups together to promote healthy fishing stocks in Alaska. He expressed the opinion that his litigation experience would help, especially in terms of negotiations.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN stated that he has participated in all types of fisheries, and he has witnessed the collapse of some. He stated that he would work to bring user groups together to seek innovative ways to meet the needs of communities and industries, while helping to rebuild the fisheries. He acknowledged that he has been appointed to a seat on the board that has traditionally been a sport-fishing seat.

6:11:22 PM

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES expressed concern that the Calista Corporation, which has encouraged federal control and management of Alaska's fisheries, employs Mr. Chamberlain. She questioned whether this would be reflected in his role as a board member.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN expressed uncertainty on the statement, as he has no recollection of making such a statement. He noted that

the Calista Corporation has opted to not take a position in the Kuskokwim litigation. He discussed the problems with understanding any dual management system, which has been difficult for shareholders to understand. He stated that he would welcome a unified management system; however, he acknowledged that there are hurdles to doing so. He stated that the Calista Corporation has never requested that he adopt any positions per his proposed seat on the Board of Fisheries. He stated that if the corporation's position differs from his, he would afford the same weight to this as any other person or entity. If the corporation did insist that he conform, he said, "I would be heart broken." He reiterated his desire for there to be one management system in the fisheries. In response to a follow-up question, he expressed his intent to support the state's management of the fisheries; however, he noted that there could be many lawsuits on this.

[6:16:51 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT questioned what factors he would consider in allocation decisions per the different gear types.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN responded that he would consider all possible factors, noting that there are specific statutes concerning this. He stated that he would consider the historical use, importance to the industry, and the subsistence priority. He added that he would take a holistic approach looking for the maximum benefit for the maximum number of people. In response to a follow-up question concerning allocation for user groups, he stated that the first duty is to the resource, ensuring that enough fish is reaching the spawning grounds for future generations. He continued that after this, his concern would be finding a way to effectively harvest the salmon stocks that are in abundance, while not harming those not in abundance. He offered the advice that this would require innovative thinking and difficult decisions, as one solution to make everyone happy does not exist. He stated that the historical use would be considered, and then the commercial use. This would be in conjunction with the effect of downstream and upstream effects. He spoke about the broader effects than just on fishermen.

[6:21:08 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES question his opinion on hatcheries in the state.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN responded that the science on hatcheries is evolving, but it is complicated. He stated that he has spoken on Calista Corporation's behalf as an advocate; however, he stated that on the Board of Fisheries his position would not be an advocate but more of an arbitrator, as his position would not be to advance the interest of the corporation. He further discussed the topic. He stated that his primary position is to not damage the native stocks, as any hatchery should be operated in a way to not cause collateral damage or pain to any other user groups.

[6:23:27 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE questioned whether a stakeholder or the resource should be more important to a board member.

MR. CHAMBERLAIN responded that the resource would be the most important issue. In response to a follow-up question, he stated that he would be impartial in resource allocation, no matter where the fishery is located.

[6:24:27 PM](#)

MARIT CARLSON-VAN DORT, Appointee, Board of Fisheries, testified as an appointee to the Board of Fisheries. She shared that she was born and raised in Alaska, living most of her life off the road system in coastal Alaska. She discussed her participation in the state's commercial fisheries and her participation in subsistence. She provided her education and work history, [resume copy included in the committee packet]. She stated that how Alaska protects, uses, and manages its natural resources is central to her personal and professional interests. She discussed her work as an aide in the legislature and as the legislative liaison to the Department of Environmental Conservation. She continued discussing her work in the state that involved environmental policy and resource development. She stated that she is currently the chief executive officer for Far West Inc., which is the Alaska Native Corporation for Chignik Bay.

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT stated that her initial interest on serving on the Board of Fisheries came about because of the shifts in the fish populations in the state. She expressed the interest in learning about these changes and being able to assure that management policies appropriately reflect what is observed locally and what is seen in scientific data. She stressed the importance of managing the fisheries for long-term

sustainability, which means a sufficient number of fish must return to reproduce the wild populations first. She stated that next in importance is that fisheries be managed in a way to maintain a sustainable surplus. She stated that subsistence policy should be upheld so Alaskans have the food needed to support their health.

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT expressed support for Alaska's commercial fishing industry as well. She explained that the industry supports the economy and food security in the state. She stated that during her time on the Board of Fisheries, she worked to develop relationships with resource users, and she has made herself available to individuals and groups statewide. She stated that her wide-reaching involvement has been challenging, as there has been disagreements and disappointments. She stated that she strives to be communicative and honest, while focusing on what is best for the fish. She offered the advice that board decisions should be based on sound science and local and traditional knowledge, and this would be so ecosystems remain healthy with a long-term resource that can provide for everyone. She expressed gratitude for the fishery resource in the state and expressed the desire to give back by continuing to serve on the Board of Fisheries.

[6:31:03 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE pointed out the disagreement on the seat designations on the Board of Fisheries. He questioned whether she would support having legislation that would divide the board seats equally, and he questioned which seat she would have.

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT expressed the understanding that in doing this the number of board members would be nine instead of seven. She expressed the opinion that this would be equitable; however, she expressed the concern that constituencies would be set up, and this would come with problems. She expressed uncertainty on how this would best serve the resource and the function of the Board of Fisheries, as people should be able to maintain the ability to vote their conscience. She offered the advice that if this were done, there should be caution.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE stated that people do tend to divide regionally or by stakeholder status. He expressed the opinion that the larger focus needs to be on the resource. He questioned whether she would be able to support a variety of stakeholders.

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT responded that her record has shown she can, and she will do this.

6:34:47 PM

REPRESENTATIVE STUTES questioned her working relationship with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G).

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT expressed her understanding that the relationship is good. She stated that she and the commissioner agree and disagree on many things. In response to a follow-up question, she suggested that the environment between the Board of Fisheries and ADF&G could be fraught with conflict. She stated that some of her disagreements have come from the information that is being presented and how it is being presented, pointing out that she can be critical in this space. She added that critical thinking is part of the job.

6:37:04 PM

REPRESENTATIVE CARPENTER questioned whether there have been instances where there was not enough data in the analysis presented by ADF&G. If so, he questioned instances of this.

MS. CARLSON-VAN DORT responded that this has occurred, and there are instances where board members want more data. She attributed this to issues with ADF&G's financial and human resources. She expressed the opinion that some fisheries have better data than other fisheries, such as the robust data around king salmon in Southeast Alaska. This data exists because of the treaty and the funding from this. She further explained why more data is important. She stated that the Board of Fisheries has formed a special committee to address the research needs that would help in decision-making and the management of the resource. Her interest in the process and research needs, she said, is why she is committing to reappointment. In response to a follow-up question, she stated that a written statement has not been submitted to the administrative on specific research needs. She expressed the desire to do this. She added that there has been written communication to the legislature about enforcement needs.

6:43:12 PM

CHAIR VANCE opened public testimony on the confirmation hearings for the governor's appointees to the Board of Fisheries.

[6:43:52 PM](#)

PAUL SHADURA, representing self, testified in opposition to the appointment of Mr. Chamberlain and Ms. Carlson-Van Dort to the Board of Fisheries. He shared that he has been a commercial fisherman for 56 years, a member of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, and the vice chair of the Kenai/Soldotna Fish and Game Advisory Committee. He stated that he has attended many Board of Fisheries meetings and witnessed public interaction. He stated that he opposes both confirmations for many reasons, but the reasons are not personal. He suggested that being a board member would require a different set of skills than what these individuals possess. He continued that in the original creation of the board, members had been chosen for the following: their ability with public affairs, their ability to have good judgement, their ability in the field of action, their ability to have diverse points of view, and their ability to have no political affiliation. He argued that these appointments are political in nature, as they come from the governor's office. He noted that there should be representation that is more diverse.

[6:46:24 PM](#)

ROBERT HEYANO, representing self, testified in support of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort to the Board of Fisheries. He stated that he is a lifelong resident of the Bristol Bay area, where he is a commercial fisherman. He stated that he has been attending board meetings since 1979. He expressed the opinion that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort is an outstanding board member, as she is accessible by the public, works toward consensus, takes on leadership roles, acknowledges the importance of subsistence, makes sure she understands the issues before voting, and does not hesitate in making difficult decisions in order to protect the resource.

[6:47:34 PM](#)

JOHN WOOD, Chair, Board of Fisheries, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort to the Board of Fisheries. He noted that his recommendation was unsolicited on her part. He stated that one of the more difficult tasks for the board is bringing parties together, and to do this the process must be thoroughly understood. He acknowledged that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort has been able to do this during her time on the board. He stated that often they disagree, but she never

oversteps the boundaries. He noted that she incorporates local and traditional knowledge into the process.

[6:49:41 PM](#)

KIM LANDEEN, Assistant Executive Director, Southeast Alaska Guides Organization (SEAGO), testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort and Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. On behalf of SEAGO, she expressed support for the appointment of both appointees. She stated that SEAGO represents around 300 saltwater guide businesses, with around 600 active charter boats. She stated that the Board of Fisheries has authority over every fish in this industry except halibut; therefore, a good working board is important to SEAGO. She expressed the opinion that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort understands the nuances in fisheries management, as she is able to comprehend complex ideas. She added that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort knows her material and is capable of interacting with ADF&G in a productive way. She stated that Mr. Chamberlain has been very responsive to SEAGO, and she noted his background in law and fishery issues. She expressed the opinion that he has a good vision for renewing Alaska's fishery resource.

[6:52:16 PM](#)

VIRGIL UMPHENOUR, representing self, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort and Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. He stated that he served three terms on the Board of Fisheries. He stated that he is a current member of the Yukon River Panel and a member of the Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee, but he is testifying on behalf of himself.

[6:53:44 PM](#)

GALE VICK, Member, Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort and Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. She stated that she is a fisheries policy consultant, a former commercial fisherman, and a 55-year resident of Alaska. She stated that she chairs a fisheries subcommittee for the Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee, where she facilitates a weekly Bristol Bay/Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) coalition. On behalf of these organizations, she expressed support for the appointment of these nominees. She noted their experience and backgrounds in biology and law. She stated that they both are diligent in their research and are able to weigh options carefully, always

putting the resource first. She stated that she has worked with the Board of Fisheries for almost 40 years, and she expressed the opinion that Ms. Carlson-Van Dort is one of the most competent members she has ever worked with. She expressed trust in their judgements, even though she may not always agree with them.

[6:55:31 PM](#)

SHANNON MARTIN, Executive Director, Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA), on behalf of KRSA, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort and Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. She stated that KRSA is the leading sport fishing and personal use advocacy organization in Alaska, with thousands of members. She stated that KRSA is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring the sustainability of the Kenai River. She discussed Ms. Carlson-Van Dort's work ethic and positive impact on the fishing resource, as well as her availability to the public. She noted Mr. Chamberlain's dedication to putting the resource first.

[6:57:12 PM](#)

GREG SVENDSEN, Member, Board of Fisheries, testified on behalf of himself in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort to the Board of Fisheries. He stated that he is a first year Board of Fisheries member. He expressed agreement on much of the testimony on Ms. Carlson-Van Dort. He expressed her important role on the board, as she has a wealth of knowledge on the issues. He stated that as a first-year member of the board, he has learned from listening to her questions and answers on many of the issues.

[6:58:03 PM](#)

EVA BURK, Contractor, Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, testified in support of the appointment of Ms. Carlson-Van Dort and Mr. Chamberlain to the Board of Fisheries. She stated that she has participated in board meetings, noting Ms. Carlson-Van Dort's ability to work with the various stakeholders in a contentious environment. She noted that both nominees are very involved in fishery issues, attending various stakeholder meetings across the state. She noted that both participate in making decisions outside of the board, noting Mr. Chamberlain's involvement with subsistence. She expressed appreciation for each individual's knowledge of the fishery resource.

7:00:03 PM

[After ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, public testimony was closed.]

7:00:42 PM

CHAIR MCKAY stated that in accordance with AS 39.05.080, the House Resources Standing Committee has reviewed the following and recommends the appointments be forwarded to a joint session for consideration: Alaska Board of Fisheries - Marit Carlson-Van Dort and Curtis Chamberlain. He advised that this does not reflect an intent by any of the members to vote for or against the confirmation of any individual during any further sessions.

7:01:15 PM

CHAIR VANCE moved to advance the confirmations of Marit Carlson-Van Dort and Curtis Chamberlain, appointees to the Board of Fisheries, to the joint session of the House and Senate for consideration. She reminded members that signing the reports regarding appointment to boards and commissions in no way reflects individual members' approval or disapproval of the appointees, and that the nominations are merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection. There being no objection, the confirmations were advanced.

7:01:50 PM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committees, the joint meeting of the House Special Committee on Fisheries and the House Resources Standing Committee was adjourned at 7:01 p.m.