

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE LABOR AND COMMERCE STANDING COMMITTEE

February 7, 2024

1:32 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Jesse Bjorkman, Chair
Senator Click Bishop, Vice Chair
Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
Senator Kelly Merrick
Senator Forrest Dunbar

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 191

"An Act relating to the power of the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to make or purchase mortgage loans."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE BILL NO. 209

"An Act relating to electronic monitoring of fishing vessels; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 191

SHORT TITLE: AHFC MAKE/PURCHASE MORTGAGE LOANS

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/18/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/18/24	(S)	L&C
02/07/24	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

BILL: SB 209

SHORT TITLE: ELECTRONIC MONITORING OF FISHING VESSELS

SPONSOR(S): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

01/26/24	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/26/24	(S)	L&C, FIN
02/07/24	(S)	L&C AT 1:30 PM BELTZ 105 (TSBldg)

WITNESS REGISTER

AKIS GIALOPSOS, Deputy Executive Director,
Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 191.

FADIL LIMANI, Deputy Commissioner,
Department of Revenue (DOR)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 191.

BRYAN BUTCHER, CEO/Executive Director
Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions on SB 191.

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Introduced SB 209 on behalf of the Governor.

JOE FELKL, Special Assistant to the Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis for SB 209
on behalf of the Governor.

DYLAN HAYES, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 209.

TRACY WELCH, Executive Director
United Fishermen of Alaska
Petersburg, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to SB 209 in its
current form.

CHARLOTTE LEVY, representing self
Aleutians East Borough
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 209.

Jerry McCune, representing self
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified with concerns on SB 209.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:32:35 PM](#)

CHAIR JESSE BJORKMAN called the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:32 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gray-Jackson, Dunbar, Merrick, and Chair Bjorkman. Senator Bishop joined the meeting shortly thereafter.

SB 191-AHFC MAKE/PURCHASE MORTGAGE LOANS

[1:33:37 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 191, "An Act relating to the power of the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to make or purchase mortgage loans."

[1:33:52 PM](#)

AKIS GIALOPSOS, Deputy Executive Director, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Anchorage, Alaska, testified by invitation on SB 191. He noted the presence of Mr. Fadil Limani, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Revenue and requested that he be given a moment to present an overview of SB 191.

[1:34:34 PM](#)

FADIL LIMANI, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Revenue (DOR), Anchorage, Alaska, read from the following statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I am the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Revenue. I am also a sitting Board Member for Alaska Housing Finance Corporation.

The proposed legislation Mr. Chair would enable AHFC to modify the residential lending programs that will provide additional loan opportunities to Alaskan families.

Currently, with the high interest rate environment and the downpayment requirements, it makes it difficult for homebuyers, particularly first-time home buyers to secure a loan for their home purchase.

This legislation Mr. Chair increases the Loan-to-Value ratio from 95 percent to 97 percent which significantly reduces the downpayment requirements to homebuyers and enables AHFC to compete with the

government sponsored loan programs that are offered by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

This is a GOV mission critical legislative priority as it addresses the livability aspect and provides Alaskans with access to housing and keeping families in Alaska and attracting more people to come and live in Alaska.

[1:36:15 PM](#)

MR. GIALOPSOS said that the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) was founded in 1971 with the mission to provide Alaskans with safe, quality, and affordable housing. He explained that this is done by three prongs. First, it increases housing stock, primarily through the low-income housing tax credit and rural professional housing grant programs. Second, it augments and improves housing stock through weatherization and rebate programs. He noted that one in five residences in Alaska receiving funding through the corporation to improve energy uses by decreasing energy consumption by an average of one-third over the past 20 years. He went on to explain that the third prong is being able to provide access to housing stock through various financial instruments. He noted that SB 191 would be included in the latter category.

[1:37:51 PM](#)

MR. GIALOPSOS stated that Alaska statute 18.56.096(a)(4) limits the corporation to the ability to purchase single family residences on a first convention loan to a loan to value ratio (LTV) of no more than 95 percent. He explained that lenders use LTV to determine what proportion of a loan would need to cover an appraised asset for purchase. Thus, LTV of 95 on a \$100 thousand loan would require a \$5 thousand down payment in addition to closing costs - which can be up to three percent of the appraised value. He said that LTV is one of several tools lenders use to determine the risk factors a borrower may have - including default or payment issues. He explained that loans with LTV of 80 or higher require private mortgage insurance - this is true for both private lenders and AHFC. He said that two key factors have changed, leading to the creation of SB 191. He explained that, ten years ago, the government sponsored entities Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac - which are the federal government counterparts to AHFC - began offering products that allowed LTV of 97 percent. This lowered the buyer's down payment requirement from 5 percent to 3 percent. He went on to explain that the second key change has been the increase in the average appraised value of homes throughout the state of Alaska. He said this

increase has been particularly notable in the past five years and pointed out that as the appraised value has gone up, the cost to credit-worthy borrowers has likewise increased.

[1:40:11 PM](#)

MR. GIALOPSOS referred to a handout titled "Impact of Proposed Loan-to-Value (LTV) Legislation - SB 191." He explained that the three charts show the average sale prices for a single-family home between 2019 and 2023 in the Kenai, Fairbanks, and Anchorage areas. He commented that the numbers vary slightly; however, the trend is the same for all three locations. For example, in [Kenai] the cost has increased from roughly \$250 thousand to nearly \$400 thousand. He pointed out that under current AHFC rules, the required down payment has likewise increased from \$12.5 thousand to nearly \$20 thousand. He explained that AHFC does not believe that the credit worthiness of borrowers has deteriorated, though their purchasing power has. He said that AHFC is requesting that the legislature remove the 95 percent LTV restriction, thereby allowing AHFC to set products that would be competitive when compared to its federal counterparts. He acknowledged that a higher LTV would require qualified borrowers to make a smaller down payment; however, AHFC already requires private mortgage insurance and must move through its due-diligence process. He pointed out that AHFC - and the state as a whole - leads the nation in terms of low default and foreclosure numbers and shared AHFC's belief that any incremental risk is offset by these provisions. He suggested that this would give more Alaskans access to home ownership without the "debilitating additional cost that would otherwise disincentivize them from being able to put down roots in their community." He went on to explain that SB 191 includes "clean up language" that removes duplicative language in the current statute.

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SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked if the date included in the charts also applies to duplexes and condos.

[1:43:08 PM](#)

MR. GIALOPSOS replied that the information in the charts applies to single-family homes.

[1:43:14 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON stated that she would like to see condos and duplexes included, as they are less expensive. She asked if 6.5 percent is the current interest rate.

[1:43:41 PM](#)

MR. GIALOPSOS replied yes.

[1:44:07 PM](#)

BRYAN BUTCHER, CEO/Executive Director, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Anchorage, Alaska, answered questions on SB 191. He explained that condos and duplexes would be included, as well as triplexes and fourplexes. He further explained that anything fourplex and under would be included, as long as the purchaser was living in one of the units. He stated that it would not apply to anything larger.

[1:44:43 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR pointed out that the letter of support from the Alaska Bankers Association states that relaxing LTV requirements can stimulate demand for housing; however, Alaska has a lack of housing, not a lack of demand. He asked if the loans can be used for housing construction and if there is a chance that SB 191 would increase housing costs in the state.

[1:45:48 PM](#)

MR. BUTCHER answered that SB 191 is intended to level the playing field between AHFC and its competitors, which it does by allowing more Alaskans to access AHFC programs. He explained that the number of qualifying home buyers would increase, and this increased demand would result in more houses being built. He said that AHFC has a number of programs that are specifically focused on housing construction; however, SB 191 is not necessarily intended to increase housing construction.

[1:46:35 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR offered his understanding that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac already offer these kinds of products and that AHFC offering this type of product would give homebuyers the chance to choose who they receive their loan through - which would be unlikely to increase the cost of existing housing.

[1:47:09 PM](#)

MR. GIALOPSOS explained that while Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac interest rates have generally been lower, AHFC has a more competitive interest rate, comparatively. He said that prices and affordability would change in favor of the borrower. He agreed that supply and demand dynamics are at play - this includes a restricted amount of supply. However, he pointed out that there is an outward migration of people from the state - and increased access to housing stock is one way to encourage people to stay in Alaska. He suggested that this is potentially

less reflective of a runup in home valuation and more of finding individuals who are currently on the sidelines and competing against cash borrowers. He said that this stagnated capital would be liberated. In response to an earlier question, he clarified that "single family residence" is defined as anything from one to four units, as long as the borrower resides within the unit.

[1:49:02 PM](#)

SENATOR BISHOP asked for clarification that Mr. Gialopsos had intended to say "cash buyers" rather than "cash borrowers".

[1:49:16 PM](#)

MR. GIALOPSOS replied yes. He explained that a historic proportion of entrants in the housing market are outright buyers. He added that roughly 20 to 38 percent of Americans own a home outright. He acknowledged the role of realized equity and explained that an increased LTV ratio would allow buyers who do not own a property with realized equity and those who cannot purchase a home outright to be more competitive players in the housing market. He acknowledged that this would not solve all of the issues that buyers face; however, it is a small step in the right direction.

[1:49:56 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN held SB 191 in committee.

[1:50:32 PM](#)

At ease

[1:52:36 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN reconvened the meeting and announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 209, "An Act relating to electronic monitoring of fishing vessels; and providing for an effective date."

SB 209-ELECTRONIC MONITORING OF FISHING VESSELS

[1:53:12 PM](#)

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Juneau, Alaska, introduced SB 209 on behalf of the Governor, paraphrasing from the following statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SB209: ELECTRONIC MONITORING OF FISHING VESSELS
Senate Labor and Commerce Committee

February 7, 2024

Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang

Introduction

This bill authorizes the Board of Fisheries to require electronic monitoring in a fishery and grants the Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game the authority to implement the program as authorized by the Board. This would include equipment such as video cameras and gear sensors that capture information on fishing location and catch. While Alaska Statutes already provide authority for an onboard observer program, there is no current provision in law to allow for electronic monitoring on fishing vessels.

Electronic monitoring systems, also known as EM, offer the potential to reduce costs while improving accuracy and providing data in near real time when compared to human observers. For those applicable fisheries, more accurate and timely data will benefit our fishery stock assessments by improving the information we use to manage them sustainably. EM can also be used as an enforcement tool in fisheries where mandatory retention regulations are in place, often referred to as bycatch.

This is a permissive statutory change. Any proposal to require EM in one of Alaska's fisheries would have to go through the very involved board process, including public notice, review by the Department and local Advisory Committees, and public comment.

Sustainable management of Alaska fisheries is required by Alaska's constitution, and effective decision making about Alaska's shared aquatic resources requires accurate, timely, and cost-effective data collection. The department supports this bill because having the option for an electronic monitoring program in statute adds another important tool into the toolbox for us to use in managing Alaska's fisheries.

[1:55:48 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG added that currently, the only option the Board of Fisheries has is to put an observer aboard a boat.

He explained that this can be difficult, because many of the boats are quite small and have limited bunk space. Electronic monitoring would alleviate some of these concerns. He continued to paraphrase from the following statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Why is this needed?

For decades, accounting for what fishermen keep and what they discard has been accomplished by combining information from logbooks, interviews, fish tickets, and observers. While onboard observers are the traditional way to collect independent information on a vessel's activities and catch, placing observers on vessels can be more intrusive and create challenges due to the additional cost and space required onboard. Electronic monitoring offers an efficient and cost-effective alternative.

In recent years, electronic monitoring has been increasingly adopted to collect catch data in federal fisheries. Today, both observers and EM play important roles in fisheries management. Electronic monitoring is used in federal fisheries primarily to document the presence or absence of prohibited species such as crab, halibut, or salmon.

Current technology is not able to differentiate species or record size or sex of bycatch, but new technologies are being developed for processing imagery to identify species and fishing gear; estimate weight and length; or simply determine if a vessel is in transit or fishing to determine if catch is on board. Current technology will still expand the ability to collect and share data, especially for monitoring bycatch.

Establishing the Board and Department's ability to require and implement an electronic monitoring program now would allow use of current technology and position the State to use new technologies once they are widely available.

[1:58:10 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG continued to paraphrase from the following statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Potential Fiscal Impact on Vessel Operators & the Department

Installing and using electronic monitoring systems that cover all fishing activities has been demonstrated to be cheaper than placing observers on vessels. Savings estimates vary based on fishery size and type, and the largest costs of most programs are manual video review, data transmission, and storage.

There are no direct costs associated with this bill. Again, this is a permissive change, the bill does not direct the Board to require electronic monitoring in a specific fishery - that will be determined at the Board level with input from local communities and the general public. Just like the onboard observer program, the Board would need to meet and establish by regulation the fisheries that will require EM, and the Department would be responsible for managing the program.

The Department already does this for the shellfish observer program. State costs associated with the shellfish observer program are primarily funded through test fish revenue, federal funds, and direct payments by vessels required to carry observers. EM could potentially be funded similarly along with the possibility of being industry-funded in part for equipment as operators currently bear the costs associated with an onboard observer.

While there are no direct costs associated with this legislation, future funding will likely be needed to stand up a new EM program as it may require hiring and training new staff depending on the fishery. The number of new staff is contingent on the number and type of fisheries that are required by the Board to use EM. If the board adopted EM for larger fisheries across the state, the number of vessels that require monitoring and the associated costs to the Department would increase over the current program.

[1:59:49 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG continued to paraphrase from the following statement:

[Original punctuation provided.]

This is not something that will happen overnight. Once authorized by the Board, it could take nearly two years before the department could implement a new electronic monitoring program. Initial implementation would require considerable regulation development to establish standards for equipment, deployment and inspection, and privacy and data handling.

Finally, it is important to note the Board does not have fiscal, administrative, or budgeting authority, meaning the Board cannot compel the Department to implement a program if there is a cost unless there is agreement a data gap exists.

Assuming there is agreement, the Department would request additional funding through the budget process if needed to implement the program, thereby providing for legislative review of the funding request.

[2:00:42 PM](#)

JOE FELKL, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Juneau, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for SB 209 on behalf of the Governor:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**SB209: ELECTRONIC MONITORING OF FISHING VESSELS
SECTIONAL ANALYSIS
VERSION A**

Section 1: adds new language to the powers and duties statutes for the Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game, providing the commissioner authority to implement an electronic monitoring program.

Section 2: adds new language to the statutory authority for the Board of Fisheries to adopt regulations, providing the board authority to require electronic monitoring in a fishery.

Section 3: defines electronic monitoring for the purposes of Fish and Game statutes.

Section 4: transition section to allow the Board of Fisheries and Department of Fish and Game to adopt regulations necessary to implement the bill.

Section 5: immediate effective date for section 4.

Section 6: effective date of January 1, 2025, for all other provisions of the bill.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG clarified that SB 209 allows the board to require monitoring for an individual fishery - it does not require electronic monitoring for the entire fishing industry.

[2:01:59 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR noted that fishermen are concerned about costs and offered his understanding that, while some federal funds are available, fisherman would also be required to pay a portion of the costs. He asked if SB 209 would put electronic observers on smaller - and therefore less profitable - boats than those that currently have them.

[2:02:43 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that it is a combination of both large and small boats. He pointed out that, for larger vessels, electronic monitoring is a cheaper option that allows monitoring when the observer is not available. He reiterated that electronic monitoring would be less cumbersome and more convenient for smaller vessels that do not have the space for an observer.

[2:03:26 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR agreed that for small boats, having an additional person on board can be inconvenient. However, he pointed out that this is not a common practice and therefore, switching to electronic monitoring is a potential increase in costs. He asked if there have been discussions in the department or the Board of Fisheries about the impact on small boats and ways to defray the cost of the electronic monitoring.

[2:04:11 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that many of the programs are eligible for federal and state funding. Currently, the Board's only tool is to put an observer onboard a boat. He said that

adding this tool gives the board another option; however, whether they use it will depend on several factors, including public testimony and associated costs. He pointed out that one of the reasons observers are not on all fishing vessels is the associated costs; the board balances the tradeoff of the cost of placing an observer versus the benefit. The same would be true for electronic monitoring.

[2:05:04 PM](#)

SENATOR GRAY-JACKSON asked how the board determines which boats have an observer on board.

[2:05:16 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that it is usually a boat that has a "prohibited species catch" and offered an example of a scallop boat that catches halibut. To limit the number of halibut being discarded, the observer would be on board to see what is coming up in the trawl net and what is being discarded over the side of the boat. He said that this gives an accurate count of the prohibited species. He also said that there may be required retention of all salmon caught in seine gear. In some instances, one species may have a cap on how many can be caught and the observer would note how many of these fish are being discarded.

[2:06:04 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked what would happen if the electronic monitor were to break while out fishing.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that there are typically several cameras on board. If all cameras break, there would be an obligation to stop fishing the federal fishery; however, when a camera breaks there is usually a backup to cover the deck space.

[2:07:11 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN opened public testimony on SB 209.

[2:07:33 PM](#)

DYLAN HAYES, representing self, Juneau, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 209. He said he is a deckhand on the F/V Osprey. He commented that, because he is a deckhand and not a captain, he cannot speak to the issue of funding. However, as a deckhand, he would be responsible for transporting, installing, and maintaining the camera system. Referring to the National Marine Fisheries Service Procedure 04-115-02, he pointed out that all

funds are fully dedicated. He expressed concern that he would take the time to install the system but there may not be anyone on the other end to monitor the system. He shared his belief that the monitoring requirements are beyond the current capabilities of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) at this time. He said that he would like to see the review for the National Marine Fisheries Service Procedures on May 1, 2024 to see if there is anyone on the other end of the systems that he would be maintaining.

2:10:12 PM

TRACY WELCH, Executive Director, United Fishermen of Alaska, Petersburg, Alaska, testified in opposition to SB 209 in its current form. She said that United Fisherman of Alaska (UFA) is a statewide commercial fishing trade association that represents 37 different fishing groups in both state fisheries and federal fisheries operating off Alaska's coast. UFA has approximately 500 individual members and a host of business members. She said that UFA opposes SB 209 as written and has submitted preliminary comments online. She indicated that additional comments are forthcoming. She pointed out that currently, the board must consider criteria such as: feasibility, necessity, and impact to a fishery before placing an observer onboard a vessel. She said that, while SB 209 adds electronic monitoring, it does not appear to require this same level of board consideration prior to placement of electronic monitoring systems.

2:11:18 PM

MS. WELCH expressed concern with the zero fiscal note and pointed out that that the addition of electronic monitoring systems would come at a cost. She said that many small boat fisheries and fisherman are suffering due to the state of the industry. She shared her understanding that electronic monitoring systems cost around \$17 thousand. In addition, she said that the yearly cost of operating one of these systems is over \$5 thousand. This includes setting up the system and addressing any issues that arise. She noted that this does not include any additional positions that may be required to review the footage and monitor the programs. She expressed concern that boats would be required to stand down in the event of equipment failure and would be unable to resume fishing until the equipment could be fixed. She questioned whether, if the issue is enforcement, additional money could be put into enforcement rather than into electronic monitoring. She clarified that UFA is not against accountability or electronic monitoring and pointed out that many UFA members have been involved in the

development of these programs. However, UFA would like to see the aforementioned concerns addressed.

2:13:56 PM

CHARLOTTE LEVY, representing self, Aleutians East Borough, Anchorage, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 209. She said she is the fisherman analyst for the Aleutians East Borough, working in both the state and federal fisheries arenas. She has spent the last six years working with local fisherman to develop a compliance monitoring electronic monitoring (EM) program in the federal fisheries. She said that, while SB 209 does not create or propose a specific EM program, it does allow for a future program which could have significant implications for stakeholders and the state. She offered context for the use of EM as well as some considerations. First, NOAA fisheries and the industry have spent millions of dollars over the past decade developing two major EM programs in Alaska - one for catch accounting and one for compliance monitoring. She explained that these programs have very specific objectives and that years of research were required to ensure the programs were functional and cost effective. She said that she is unaware of a comparable process for research within the department. She added that both programs were advocated for and developed by fishermen - and participation is voluntary. Additionally, she explained that the programs were developed within established monitoring frameworks at the federal level and have been used in conjunction with - or supplementary to - observer coverage. She commented that the state does not currently have this type of infrastructure and opined that it is worth considering what resources and funding the state has to develop a new monitoring program.

2:15:57 PM

MS. LEVY said that while EM has the potential for long-term benefits, it also has significant upfront costs - and these costs can vary a great deal. She stated that EM equipment can cost upwards of \$17 thousand and around \$55 hundred per year per vessel for upkeep. She noted that this does not include the cost to develop the program, which would include data analysts, outreach, etc. She opined that it is worth considering what the same funds could accomplish if applied to current programs. In addition, she said that there are constitutional concerns regarding privacy rights, data confidentiality and sharing. She stated that the federal programs have avoided these issues by opting for voluntary participation and explicit data-use limitations. She opined that it is worth considering how these would factor into a mandated program. She said that her primary concern is that it is unclear whether SB 209 mandates EMs in

conjunction with an observer program or as an alternative to the observer program. She reiterated her concern that SB 209 does not include language holding an independent EM program to the same criteria and standards of determination as the observer program. She emphasized that EM programs are very complicated, resource intensive, and just as burdensome as observer programs and therefore should be given the same amount of rigorous study prior to considering a new program.

[2:18:36 PM](#)

Jerry McCune, representing self, Cordova, Alaska, testified with concerns on SB 209. He said he is a gillnetter out of Prince William Sound. He commented that many of the fisheries in question are small. With respect to the \$17 thousand cost to purchase the EM equipment, he said that he did not make this amount during his fishing season in 2023. He explained that fish prices have plummeted, insurance costs \$4 thousand, fuel is \$5 per gallon - these costs add up and can put fishermen out of business. He pointed out that SB 209 would allow EM to be applied to all the fisheries in the state - even the very small fisheries. He expressed doubt that the EM equipment would be easy to use on small boats. He said that, while he understands that the Board of Fisheries needs tools to be able to monitor fisheries, he does not want to see EM misused on small fisheries that are struggling.

[2:20:43 PM](#)

CHAIR BJORKMAN held public testimony on SB 209 open.

[2:20:53 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked what size boats are in area M fisheries and whether the department considered limiting SB 209 to certain boat sizes.

[2:21:29 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that the department did not consider limiting boat sizes. He said that the area M fishery contains two classes of boats: gillnetter boats, which are relatively small, and seine boats, which are around 60 to 70 feet. He said it would be difficult to put an observer or EM on some of the smaller gillnetter boats. He stated that considerations around whether it is feasible to put an observer or EM equipment on a particular boat would be left to the board and would be incorporated into the decision-making process. He said that the federal government runs an observer program to monitor marine mammal interactions and is currently considering placing observers on gillnet boats in Southeast Alaska to

address issues with harbor porpoises. He opined that many gillnet operators would prefer the opportunity to have EM as an alternative to having an observer on their boats.

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CHAIR BJORKMAN held SB 209 in committee.

2:23:05 PM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Bjorkman adjourned the Senate Labor and Commerce Standing Committee meeting at 2:23 p.m.