

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

March 11, 2025
10:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Louise Stutes, Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon, Vice Chair
Representative Rebecca Himschoot
Representative Chuck Kopp
Representative Kevin McCabe
Representative Sarah Vance
Representative Bill Elam

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 117

"An Act relating to commercial set gillnet fishing; and providing for an effective date."

- MOVED HB 117 OUT OF COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL NO. 116

"An Act exempting from insurance regulation cooperative agreements entered into by two or more persons engaged in commercial fishing for the purpose of paying claims or losses."

- MOVED HB 116 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 117

SHORT TITLE: COMMERCIAL FISHING; SET GILLNET COOP

SPONSOR(s): FISHERIES

02/26/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/26/25	(H)	FSH, RES
03/01/25	(H)	FSH AT 11:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/01/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
03/04/25	(H)	FSH AT 10:30 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/04/25	(H)	Heard & Held

03/04/25 (H) MINUTE (FSH)
03/06/25 (H) FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/06/25 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --
03/11/25 (H) FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 116

SHORT TITLE: COMMERCIAL FISHING INSURANCE CO-OP
SPONSOR(s): FISHERIES BY REQUEST OF TASK FORCE EVAL ALASKA
SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

02/26/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/26/25 (H) FSH, L&C
03/01/25 (H) FSH AT 11:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/01/25 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --
03/04/25 (H) FSH AT 10:30 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/04/25 (H) Heard & Held
03/04/25 (H) MINUTE (FSH)
03/06/25 (H) FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/06/25 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --
03/11/25 (H) FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

JANE PETRICH, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

THOMAS WISCHER, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

SUE JEFFERY, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

ADAM WISCHER, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

VIRGINIA ADAMS, Member
Northwest Setnetters
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

ADELIA MYRICK, President
Northwest Setnetters
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

ERIK O'BRIEN, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

DOREECE MUTCH, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

MARK BEARDSLEY, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

ALFRED HAUGHEY, representing self
Uvalde, Texas

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

MATHEW RIENDEAU, representing self
Chicago, Illinois

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony in support of HB 117.

BOB KEHOE, Executive Director
Purse Seine Owners Association
Seattle, Washington

POSITION STATEMENT: During the hearing on HB 116, discussed how vessel insurance pools work.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:03:36 AM](#)

CHAIR LOUISE STUTES called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. Representatives Stutes, Himschoot, McCabe, Elam, Kopp, Edgmon were present at the call to order. Representative Vance arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 117-COMMERCIAL FISHING; SET GILLNET COOP

[10:05:01 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 117, "An Act relating to commercial set gillnet fishing; and providing for an effective date."

[10:05:27 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on HB 117.

[10:05:44 AM](#)

JANE PETRICH, representing self, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. She said that she has been set netting on the west side of Kodiak Island since 1977. She said that she started fishing with her husband with a single permit and as her family grew, they purchased additional permits. She said that her sons have taken on additional responsibilities as she has aged. She talked about changing roles to accommodate her family. She said that she was humiliated last year when told that she was breaking the law by practicing as her family has for years. She remarked that for 48 years she has participated in the fishery and suddenly, has found herself an illegal operator. Additionally, she was told that every fish picked from every crew net needed to be separated. She said this would require an additional skiff and crew, something that would be a major economic burden to her family. If the new legal interpretation stands then her family would need to sell the family operation, and the likely purchasers would not be local and possibly even out-of-state. Someone who could afford "an adventure of a lifetime." She said that the new legal interpretation would exacerbate the outmigration of permits from local communities. She asked for the fishery to return to the status quo.

[10:08:51 AM](#)

THOMAS WISCHER, representing self, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. He said that he has been a setnet permit holder on Kodiak since 1976. He said his family operation currently has three active permits. He said HB 117 would make statute and regulations consistent with the way set netting has always been done. He said the fisheries were struggling right now and the Kodiak setnet fishery was especially challenged. He said that fishermen are not asking for anything new and if the current interpretation remains, it would destroy the family set net fishery. He said many families would be forced out of the fishery.

[10:10:56 AM](#)

SUE JEFFERY, representing self, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. She said that she and her husband are both full-time Kodiak residents and the family has been fishing at their setnet

site since 1987. She said that they have run their setnet operation like a family. She echoed previous testifiers by stating that the comingling of fish has been done since before statehood. She said that the status quo has never caused any conservation or other concerns. She opined that requiring a setnet operation with more than one permit to separate fish would generate additional expenses. She concluded that the new interpretation would make many families unable to make it.

[10:13:58 AM](#)

ADAM WISCHER, representing self, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. He said that he has been setnetting in Kodiak for his whole life. He said that without this bill there would be an unnecessary burden on fishermen that could jeopardize families. He said that forcing families onto the ocean during inclement weather is problematic.

[10:15:08 AM](#)

VIRGINIA ADAMS, Member, Northwest Setnetters, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. She said that since 1980 she has fished at a setnet site with her husband. Currently, her family operates three permits. She remarked that the previous testimonies have been spot on. She said that now at 70 years old, she spends more time on the beach rather than being on the water. She said that many setnet sites in Kodiak have a grandparent and grandchild dynamic. She said that this bill would be critical to maintaining the family fishing structure. She said that without this bill, there would be serious safety concerns. She said it is not feasible or realistic to change.

[10:17:14 AM](#)

ADELIA MYRICK, President, Northwest Setnetters, said that her organization strongly supports HB 117. She emphasized that the proposed new bill would do nothing new. She said that testifiers have made it clear that families have fished as cooperatives for generations and never have faced legal issues. She said that this bill would allow fishermen to fish "without having to look over their shoulder." The legislation would support communities by supporting families who work together. She said it would also support young people coming up through the ranks and maintain economic engines in small communities.

[10:19:58 AM](#)

ERIK O'BRIEN, representing self, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. He said that he is a multi-generational participant in the Kodiak setnet fishery. He urged legislators to pass this legislation, so his daughters and parents do not need to go out into the water during inclement weather for deliveries. He said the new legal interpretation is adversely affecting the fishery.

[10:21:20 AM](#)

DOREECE MUTCH, representing self, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. She said her family owns a setnet site on the west side of Kodiak. She said that her family has owned and operated the site since 2018. The family utilizes four permits and works as a team. She said the previous owners operated in the same manner for over 40 years. She opined that the new legal interpretation has created considerable challenges to the family operation. Like the several previous testifiers she noted the safety issues associated with fish deliveries.

[10:23:08 AM](#)

MARK BEARDSLEY, representing self, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. He said that his wife and he have fished at a multi-permit site for over three decades. He said that his family relies on traditional practices. He said that members of the fishing site work together and it ensures efficiency and safety.

[10:25:02 AM](#)

ALFRED HAUGHEY, representing self, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. He said that he has fished on the west side of Kodiak since 1965. He said that there is always someone trying to change something to the detriment of setnetters. He said that four permits are in operation with his group. He explained the team dynamic associated with setnet fishing. He echoed the testimonies of the previous testifiers and stated that HB 117 would reduce hardships for setnetters.

[10:27:42 AM](#)

MATHEW RIENDEAU, representing self, gave public testimony in support of HB 117. He said that he owns and operates a setnet site on the north side of Kodiak. He said that previous setnetters already described logistical complications and said that many setnet sites are family operations. He said that

being able to pick fish from several permits allows efficiency and safety. Additionally, he said that doing so in this manner would allow them to keep fish viable and encourage tenders to stick around for purchasing. He said that HB 117 would provide clarification to continue this practice for generations to come.

[10:29:58 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES, after ascertaining that no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 117.

[10:30:34 AM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 10:30 a.m.

[10:30:39 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked if any committee members had comments or questions.

[10:31:14 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE commented that years ago he read about an architect that built a college. The architect did not build any sidewalks and when asked about it, he said that students would put marks in the grass to dictate the best and most efficient paths. He said that in many regards setnetters are doing the same thing. He said that it still frustrates him that legislation is needed to fix this. He urged support for HB 117 and setnetters across the state.

[10:32:13 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES noted that while most of the testifiers were from Kodiak, this is a statewide issue.

[10:32:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM said that he has no objections to the bill but wanted to let committee members know that some of the Kenai Guide affiliates wanted this to go through a board process rather than a legislative process.

[10:33:11 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP remarked that he had a conflict of interest as an active setnetter but had nothing to do with drafting the

bill. He said that this is a good bill and common-sense legislation.

[10:34:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE commented that there are many setnetters on Cook Inlet. In response to Sportfishing Guides, she said it would go through the Board of Fish to adopt regulations, but the committee's purview was to clarify the law with legislation. She discussed the challenges faced by set netters.

[10:34:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON moved to report HB 117 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being objection, HB 117 was reported out of the House Special Committee on Fisheries.

[10:35:51 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 10:35 a.m. to 10:37 a.m.

HB 116-COMMERCIAL FISHING INSURANCE CO-OP

[10:37:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 116, "An Act exempting from insurance regulation cooperative agreements entered into by two or more persons engaged in commercial fishing for the purpose of paying claims or losses."

[10:38:18 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on HB 116. After ascertaining that nobody wished to testify, closed public testimony.

[10:41:41 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP asked whether anyone was available online who could speak about how insurance pools work.

[10:42:09 AM](#)

BOB KEHOE, Executive Director, Purse Seine Owners Association, said that insurance pools involve a group of vessel owners

getting together and agreeing to pool money to insure all vessels in that group. This group coverage can involve hull insurance, liability, and pollution insurance. He said the group would work with a licensed insurance broker who would assist by placing and purchasing stop-loss insurance. He said the coop or group would pay claims up to a certain level and have insurance above that level if claims are higher than the amount in the coop reserve. Once established, hopefully after years of minimal claims, the reserve can be built and, at some point, return money back to individual vessel owners.

[10:44:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON moved to report HB 116 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 116 was reported out of the House Special Committee on Fisheries.

[10:46:03 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 10:46 a.m.