

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

March 25, 2025  
10:02 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Sarah Vance

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 125

"An Act relating to membership of the Board of Fisheries."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE BILL NO. 129

"An Act relating to the fisheries product development tax credit; providing for an effective date by amending the effective date of sec. 2, ch. 31, SLA 2022; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 125

SHORT TITLE: BOARD OF FISHERIES MEMBERSHIP

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) JIMMIE

03/05/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/05/25	(H)	FSH, RES
03/18/25	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/18/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/18/25	(H)	MINUTE (FSH)
03/25/25	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

BILL: HB 129

SHORT TITLE: FISHERIES PROD DEVELOPMENT TAX CREDIT

SPONSOR(s): FISHERIES BY REQUEST OF TASK FORCE EVAL ALASKA  
SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

03/10/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/10/25	(H)	FSH, FIN
03/20/25	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
03/20/25	(H)	Heard & Held
03/20/25	(H)	MINUTE (FSH)
03/25/25	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

**WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE NELLIE UNANGIQ JIMMIE  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, gave an overview of HB 125 and offered interpretation of Fritz Georges testimony.

JOHN MANLEY, representing self  
Kenai, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

KAREN LINNELL, representing self  
Glenallen, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

RUSSELL CLARK, representing self  
Kenai, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

JAMES SIMON, representing self  
Salcha, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

COLBY ENGSTROM, representing self  
Nome, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified about HB 125.

DONALD HERNANDEZ, representing self  
Point Baker, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

DOREEN LEAVITT  
Inupiaq Community of Arctic Slope  
Arctic Slope, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

CHUCK DERRICK, Member  
Chitna Dipnetters Association  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to HB 125.

BRIAN RIDLEY, Chief Chairman  
Tanana Chiefs Conference  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

ROD ARNO, Policy Director  
Alaska Outdoor Council  
Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified with conditional support of HB 125.

FRITZ GEORGE, representing self  
Akiachak, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 125.

MONTE ROBERTS, representing self  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to HB 125.

SHANNON MARTIN, Executive Director  
Kenai River Sportfishing Association  
Soldotna, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to HB 125.

NANCY HILLSTRAND, Owner  
Pioneer Alaskan Fisheries  
Port Lions, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified about HB 125.

JOE FELKL, Legislative Liaison  
Alaska Department of Fish & Game  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions pertaining to HB 125.

MATT GRUENING, Staff  
Representative Louise Stutes  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Gave a brief summary of HB 129.

SINCLAIR WILT, Vice President  
Westward Seafood  
Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 129.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[10:02:12 AM](#)

**CHAIR LOUISE STUTES** called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Representatives Himschoot, Kopp, McCabe, Elam, and Stutes were present at the call to order. Representatives Edgmon arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**HB 125-BOARD OF FISHERIES MEMBERSHIP**

[10:03:48 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 125, "An Act relating to membership of the Board of Fisheries."

[10:04:07 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE NELLIE UNANGIQ JIMMIE, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, gave an overview of HB 125. She remarked that the bill would rearrange the composition of the Board of Fish. It would include two subsistence seats, two commercial seats, two sportfishing seats, and lastly one scientist. She said that the aim of the bill is to give a voice to subsistence users, not only in her district but ideally the rest of Alaska.

[10:05:41 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES, after ascertaining that there were no questions from committee members, opened public testimony on HB 125.

[10:06:07 AM](#)

JOHN MANLEY, representing self, testified in support of HB 125. He believed that the current Board of Fisheries was "grossly imbalanced right now." He raised concerns that recently a board member at an Anchorage hearing suggested that they would like to see a day where there is no driftnet fishing in Cook Inlet. He opined that comments like this should disqualify individuals from candidacy or continued service to the board. He said that

no one should serve on that board who has an objective to eliminate one user group from participating in a fishery. He remarked that he was a commercial fisherman who has fished Cook Inlet for a long-time. He did not know the criteria for how the board would be composed but opined that HB 125 was a step in the right direction.

10:08:05 AM

KAREN LINNELL, Executive Director, AHTNA Intertribal Resource Commission, testified in support of HB 125. She said that she appreciates where this bill is trying to go. However, she raised concerns that a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) candidate for the scientist position was inappropriate and did not believe that a federal agency should have a voice on a state-run Board of Fish. She did suggest that two scientists appointed to the board would also be favorable, and a sportfishing appointment as well since they bring "a lot of economy to Alaska." She said that some of these seats should be "river seats" since she believed that concerns occurring on Alaska Rivers were not being adequately addressed by the board, especially salmon in the rivers. She said that she has participated in Board of Fisheries and Board of Game meetings for twenty or more years and the current closures around the state are concerning. She remarked that looking at sustainability is important.

MS. LINNELL also raised concerns over appointments from the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN). She said that other tribal members unaffiliated with the group should be able to be candidates for subsistence nominations.

10:11:09 AM

RUSSELL CLARK, representing self, testified in support of HB 125. He remarked that he has commercially fished Cook Inlet for 24 years and believed that HB 125 was a "step in the right direction." He said that currently a problem with the board is that one user group has potentially more board members than another user group. He reiterated that he believes the proposed bill would strike a balance but raised concerns that the scientific appointment to the board should not have federal affiliations.

MR. CLARK also said that the current rules regarding conflicts of interest at board deliberations need to be revisited. He said that recusal is preventing appropriate local representation

and does not foster good deliberations, if the representative member of the fishery must recuse themselves.

[10:13:58 AM](#)

JAMES SIMON, representing self, testified in support of HB 125. He said that the proposed bill is a great step forward in making sure that all Alaskans have representation on the Board of Fisheries. Like others, he opined that a federal appointee for the scientist position on the board was unnecessary, and the state had several other options for selecting candidates, such as the state's university systems. He also suggested that subsistence appointees should not solely be selected by a list provided by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) but other tribal affiliates and organizations as well.

[10:15:58 AM](#)

COLBY ENGSTROM, representing self, testified about HB 125. He said that he commercial fishes but also practices a subsistence lifestyle. Like other testifiers, he opined that the proposed bill was a "step in the right direction." However, he opposed the bill's current construction. He believed the intent of the bill was to give a voice to different user groups for the purpose of conservation and development. He raised concerns that due to the nature of board members being appointed solely by the governor, the board may focus more on development than conservation. He said that the board decisions should be in the best interests of Alaskans, not any political agenda. He proposed that the six selected board members could select a scientific appointment rather than having an appointment made by NOAA, which is a federal agency.

MR. ENGSTROM said that the Alaska Permanent Fund Corporation (APFC) Board was a perfect example of current political manipulation that impacts Alaskans. He said that a survey suggests that 74 percent of Alaskans disagree with the current management. He raised concerns that campaign contributions may sway the decision making associated with the APFC Board. He said that checks and balances must be maintained for the benefit of all Alaskans. He said that he does not believe the governor should have control over the board.

[10:18:02 AM](#)

DONALD HERNANDEZ, representing self, testified in support of HB 125. He said that Point Baker is a remote rural community and relies heavily on subsistence practices. He also said that he had a long history of involvement with the regulatory process in Alaska. He said that subsistence harvests are the priority harvests in Alaska, and he did not feel that the user group has been well represented in previous board deliberations. He noted that the proposed bill would ensure that the Board of Fisheries would have fair and equitable distribution of user groups represented by the board. He remarked that the scientific addition to the proposed board restructuring was a positive thing as well.

[10:19:33 AM](#)

DOREEN LEAVITT, Inupiaq Community of Arctic Slope, speaking on behalf of the community of Arctic Slope and the Alaska Regional Coalition, testified in support of HB 125. She stated that the Inupiaq Community of Arctic Slope is a federally recognized tribe, and its role is to be stewards of the land and waters of the Arctic Slope Region. She said that the proposed bill would create more representation of actual user groups on the Board of Fisheries. She said that her group, one that represents over 70,000 Alaskans, enthusiastically supports the addition of subsistence users to the board. Additionally, the group supports the addition of a science member to the board. She urged the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into scientific deliberations. She asked that subsistence appointees to the board would have no qualifying factors or ties to sport or commercial fishing.

[10:22:04 AM](#)

CHUCK DERRICK, Member, Chitna Dipnetters Association, testified in opposition to HB 125. He said that he speaks for the Chitna Dipnetters Association, which represents personal use fishing activities. He said that the association opposes HB 125 as it is written. He said that personal use fishing is not classified as sport, subsistence, or commercial fishing. He said that over 40,000 residents in Southcentral Alaska participate in personal use dipnet fisheries and there are others that personal use fish for crab, shrimp, and other species as well. He said that personal use fishing is not a user group that would be represented on the proposed restructuring of the Board of Fisheries. He noted that the process that exists now allows appointees to be anyone who is interested. He remarked that

there is likely a better way to get more appointees interested in open board positions. He reminded the committee that personal use is a resident only fishery, while sport fishing is resident and non-resident alike, and subsistence is qualified by multiple criteria. Personal use is not technically considered subsistence and is not commercial, as there is no sale of fish. He said that personal use exists to feed families with harvested fish. He reiterated that the Chitna Dipnetters Association opposed HB 125 due to its failure to include personal use fisheries as a user group.

[10:25:14 AM](#)

BRIAN RIDLEY, Chief Chairman, Tanana Chiefs Conference, testified in support of HB 125. He said that the Tanana Chiefs Conference is a tribal consortium that represents 37 federally recognized tribes and approximately 18,000 Alaska Natives who live, work, and subsist on the 1,400 miles of Yukon and Kuskokwim River drainages. He said that Alaska has what has long been called "the subsistence priority," which is written into state statutes, and it aims to optimize subsistence first, above all other user groups. He said that according to ADF&G, of all wild resources harvested in Alaska during 2017, commercial fishing accounted for 98.6 percent while subsistence accounted for less than 1 percent of all fish and animals harvested. He said that when looking at the subsistence take, it accounts for approximately 47 million pounds of food, about 25 percent is consumed in urban Alaska and 75 percent is consumed in rural Alaska. He said these numbers are significant because they illustrate that subsistence practices compose the food of rural Alaska.

MR. RIDLEY remarked the Board of Fisheries, and the Board of Game have been skewed over time to over represent commercial interests. He remarked that the ADF&G budget is overrepresented by commercial interests, and, by the numbers, it appears that subsistence users are less of a priority and more of an afterthought to the state. He said that HB 125 seeks to provide equity in user groups to ensure that the decisions made by the Board of Fisheries are representative of all Alaskans. He said that what is good for subsistence users is good for Alaska and subsistence users are on the front-line and fighting for an abundance of wild resources for the state.

[10:27:53 AM](#)

ROD ARNO, Policy Director, Alaska Outdoor Council, testified with conditional support of HB 125. He said that the Alaska Outdoor Council has been involved with conservation issues since 1955. He has personally attended Board of Fisheries meetings for 3.5 decades. He said that he supports the bill with a single amendment, making one of the subsistence appointments a personal use appointment. Additionally, he said it would be ideal to allow the Alaska Outdoor Council to submit a list of nominees for the Board of Fisheries. He said it would be a real advantage to make appointees to the board without the politics of any governor. He said that most of the folks in Alaska that participate in personal use fisheries do not live in areas that federally qualify for subsistence activities. He said that having a science board appointment was good but raised concerns regarding a NOAA appointment to a state board.

[10:30:47 AM](#)

FRITZ GEORGE, representing self, testified in support of HB 125. He gave his testimony in Yupik' regarding HB 125.

REPRESENTATIVE NELLIE UNANGIQ JIMMIE, acting as a translator for the previous testifier, stated that he said that traditional fishing has always been the way of life for his community, and he felt that subsistence users were not adequately represented on the Board of Fisheries.

[10:35:34 AM](#)

MONTE ROBERTS, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 125. He remarked that he is the president of the Kenai River Professional Guides Organization and sits on the Kenai and Soldotna Fish & Game Advisory Committee. Additionally, he teaches public policy to fishing guides. He said that one of the shocking things when listening to testifiers is the misconceptions regarding what the board does and is. He said there was not enough time to talk about this and he would send in a letter. He said that when discussing designated seats, on Friday there was a passionate speech by a legislator that their interests were not shared by a member on the board. He said the bill gives the impression that board members would exclusively represent a single user group. He said the current board structure is not partial and attempts to balance interests for different user groups. He said the current structure supports board-based interest for state fishing activities.

MR. ROBERTS remarked that there are 81 Fish & Game Advisory Committees across the state and if those people are not feeling like they are being heard, they have 15 member boards they can meet with and provide feedback to give to the Board of Fisheries. He said that he does not see all the rural communities contributing on a consistent basis and they have already been provided with this opportunity. He said that there is regional advice and local expertise that can share feedback, he said there cannot be an 800-member Board of Fisheries, but these other avenues were present. He said that he looked forward to finding a balanced solution.

[10:39:04 AM](#)

SHANNON MARTIN, Executive Director, Kenai River Sportfishing Association, Testified in opposition to HB 125. She stated the Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA) is a 503C nonprofit organization that is dedicated to ensuring the sustainability of the Kenai River and Alaska fish resources. She noted that KRSA advocates for sport fishing and personal use user groups and their access to Alaska resources. She said that the group currently has over 3,600 members. KRSA has concerns regarding HB 125, particularly the provision to include the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with the Board of Fisheries. She stated that Alaska has fought hard to get management of its fisheries and the injection of federal affiliates into a state board was concerning. She said that Alaskans know the fishery best and KRSA strongly recommends removing this provision. She also raised concerns over what constitutes a sportfishing appointment, whether this was simply owning a resident fishing license or what other qualifications were in place. In 2024 there were over 150,000 resident fishing licenses sold in Alaska, and in total more than 500,000 sport fishing licenses sold. She said there may be additional criteria regarding who should represent the user groups. While KRSA has concerns regarding bill structuring, the group recognizes and appreciates the spirit of the bill and shares the same concern that there are too few salmon returning to their spawning beds. The group supports a Board of Fisheries that strives to put more salmon into Alaska Rivers. In conclusion she reiterated that the biggest concern is the introduction of NOAA into a state-run Board of Fisheries.

[10:41:25 AM](#)

NANCY HILLSTRAND, Owner, Pioneer Alaskan Fisheries, testified that she has spent a lot of time with the Board of Fisheries and

has attended several meetings since 1994. She said that there is a diversity of science that is introduced to the board. She asked how and who is giving the information to the board for decision making. She spent 17 years on the advisory committee and if people went to the boards with a minority vote then the boards liked it since there were better discussions and debates. She said she loved the idea of scientific advisors but stated that NOAA was not the appropriate pick. She also said that a panel of scientists that could act as consultants could also be useful. She said that having science interpreters for the board would be good. She said that Alaska is losing its fisheries, and many have been lost over the last 40 years. She said it may have to do with what information is getting to the board. She also asked how the Board of Fisheries can get the voice of ADF&G to have the ability to answer questions during deliberations. She raised concerns that board appointees were the only ones who could answer.

[10:44:52 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES, after ascertaining that there were no additional testifiers, closed public testimony on HB 125.

[10:45:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked how many fishery biologists were employed ADF&G and noted that this information would be helpful when considering an amendment for the bill.

[10:45:40 AM](#)

JOE FELKL, Legislative Liaison, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, said that he did not have this information available but would get it to the committee in short order.

[10:45:55 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE remarked that he understands the pushback on federal involvement with the Board of Fisheries. He said that in his opinion, it may be better to appoint a state biologist or state scientist than NOAA, which is a federal entity.

[10:46:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP echoed what Representative McCabe had suggested. He noted that finding the right scientist voice that

was more representative of Alaska may be better. He said that the University of Alaska systems could have scientists as well. He also remarked what has been made clear was that the proposed bill would require a tightening of definitions. He said that several testifiers raised questions regarding what constitutes a sportfishing appointment and opined that a sportfishing charter may be appropriate. Additionally, he said something would need to ensure that personal use fishermen are represented as well. He also said that ensuring that the scientific voice represented on the board would not have an agenda but striving for true science was important as well.

[10:47:50 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES set an amendment deadline and announced that HB 125 was held over.

**HB 129-FISHERIES PROD DEVELOPMENT TAX CREDIT**

[10:48:42 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 129, "An Act relating to the fisheries product development tax credit; providing for an effective date by amending the effective date of sec. 2, ch. 31, SLA 2022; and providing for an effective date."

[10:49:00 AM](#)

MATT GRUENING, Staff, Representative Louise Stutes, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of the bill sponsor, the House Special Committee on Fisheries by request of the Joint Legislative Taskforce Evaluating Alaska's Seafood Industry, gave a summary of HB 129. He said that the proposed legislation expands the Fisheries Product Development Tax Credit to allow for continued incentives for supporting value-added products as well as new technologies and processes that add quality and value to Alaska fish products. The current credit allows the processor to deduct up to 50 percent of its Fisheries Business Tax Liability. He noted that this legislation would expand the use of the credit to all species of fish and shellfish. It would add new qualifiers for the credit, require a faster determination of credit eligibility from the Department of Revenue, and extend the sunset date of the tax credits by three years. He remarked that the passage of this bill would enhance the ability of Alaska seafood processors to receive capital cost recovery for

installing new equipment and making significant investments to get more value for each fish. He said that during a time of historically poor market conditions and low value for Alaska seafood, HB 129 would support the processing industry and incentivize processors to continue to add value to the state's seafood and by doing so, support fishermen in the state.

[10:51:10 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on HB 129.

[10:51:27 AM](#)

SINCLAIR WILT, Vice President, Westward Seafood, testified in support of HB 129. She said that Westward Seafood has three processing operations in Dutch Harbor and its primary focus was on pollock but processed pacific cod, crab varieties, halibut, and black cod as well. He said that as product species and market conditions evolve, processors try to respond to customer wishes. He said that as many of the committee members are aware, the seafood industry is going through trying times right now given the poor market conditions. He stated that whatever could be done to help respond to the market demand and improve products would be helpful. He said that he has supported prior versions of the bill, and the expansion of qualifying species would be useful for Westward Seafood's product line.

[10:53:55 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES, after ascertaining there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 129 and set an amendment deadline for the bill.

CHAIR STUTES announced that HB 129 was held over.

[10:54:17 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 10:55 a.m.