

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

April 10, 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 Sarah Vance
Representative Bill Elam

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 111

"An Act relating to finfish farms and finfish farm products; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PRESENTATION: MARICULTURE IN ALASKA

- REMOVED FROM AGENDA

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 111

SHORT TITLE: FINFISH FARMS AND PRODUCTS

SPONSOR(s): RULES BY REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

02/21/25	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
02/21/25	(H)	FSH, RES
04/01/25	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
04/01/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
04/03/25	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120
04/03/25	(H)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
04/10/25	(H)	FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish & Game
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of the bill sponsor, House Rules by Request of the Governor, presented HB 111 and discussed finfish farming in Alaska.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Offered the sectional analysis to HB 111.

MARY MCDOWELL, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 111.

JOHNNY FISHMONGER, Executive Director
Wild Salmon Nation
King Salmon, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 111.

ADAM CUTHRIELL, representing self
Girdwood, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 111.

JILL WEITZ, Government Affairs
Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in opposition to HB 111.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:02:07 AM](#)

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

HB 111-FINFISH FARMS AND PRODUCTS

[10:02:58 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 111, "An Act relating to finfish farms and finfish farm products; and providing for an effective date."

[10:03:19 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES noted that committee substitute was available, with changes made by Legislative Legal Services to conform with the Legislative Drafting Manual. She noted that the changes made are strictly technical and not substantial.

[10:03:43 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT moved to adopt the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 111, Version 34-GH1437\N, Bullard, 3/26/25, as a working document. There being no objection, Version N was before the committee.

[10:04:57 AM](#)

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, on behalf of the bill sponsor, House Rules by Request of the Governor, presented HB 111 and discussed finfish farming in Alaska. He said that in the late 1980s and 1990s, salmon farming in other parts of the world was done exclusively in large offshore net-pens. He said that given Alaska's abundant salmon stocks, lots of concerns were raised by Alaskans that there was a potential for farmed fish to escape and intermingle with wild fish. Additionally, there was the potential for farmed salmon to compete for market share against the wild salmon fisheries. He said that as a result, the legislature preemptively passed a ban on not only salmon farming but all finfish farming. He said that for these reasons, salmon farming was not included in the proposed legislation.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG remarked that there have been rapid technological advancements which have enabled businesses to raise commercial quantities of fish in large onshore facilities. He said that there are many advantages to today's technologies and one of which was isolation from any wild stocks of fish. He said that a good example for the use of this new technology is Norway, which has already implemented fish farming onshore, and the industry is growing rapidly. Furthermore, many more onshore fish production businesses are popping up in other states and bringing fish to market. He said that these advancements have transformed the fish farming industry and have made finfish farming more efficient, sustainable, and humane, while meeting global demand for seafood.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that an example of this new technology could include recirculating tanks that filter waste

and recycle water, and this technology allows for a level of precision that optimizes fish growth. He said that digital twin technology creates virtual replicas of physical fish farms that would allow real time monitoring and simulation. He noted that sensor technology has gotten advanced as well; it provides real-time data on fish behavior and health which allow for early detection of problems. He said that given the advancements in these technologies, there are some real opportunities in Alaska. These opportunities could even include aquaponics, which combines hydroponic growing of plants and finfish aquaculture.

10:08:03 AM

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG noted that he was recently in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, and had the opportunity to visit [Icy Waters Arctic Charr], a fish farm, and it was an interesting experience. He said that all the fish were reared in recirculating pens and Arctic char were chosen because they are a cold-water fish, thus the business did not require any considerable heating expenses. He said Icy Waters Arctic Charr has a market that sells eggs to other fish farms that are trying to raise char. Additionally, it provides the fish product to other Canadian Provinces. He noted that the entire operation was contained, and every fish was sterile. He said that amazingly the business was making money, and the species of char was a niche product.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG noted that HB 111 would authorize onshore farming of non-salmon finfish species in approved land-based facilities in Alaska. He said that it would be limited to an inland closed system water body with a natural or artificial escape-proof barrier. He said that the bill would allow for a wide range of fish farming opportunities; however, the Alaska Department Fish & Game commissioner would have the authority to determine which finfish can or cannot be farmed in Alaska. He said this follows a similar protocol as the Yukon Territory in Canada, where the government can determine eligible species. He said that the bill includes safeguards to ensure that wild fish stocks are protected. He noted that offshore fish farming would continue to be banned, all fish sold must be sterile so they cannot breed with wild stock, finfish farming activities would need to be consistent with all existing laws and policy, and facilities and products would be subject to Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) regulations much like hatcheries are.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG advised that authorizing finfish farming could benefit Alaska. He said that the proposed bill would create a new industry that would create new local jobs, contribute to economic growth, and support food security for Alaska. He said that state and local governments would see an increase in tax revenue, rural communities would gain access to high-paying jobs to supplement seasonal fishing income. Stocking activities would also provide Alaska with additional recreational sport fishing activities. He said that implementing this bill would allow Alaska to diversify its economy while supporting sustainable and controlled fish farming practices.

[10:11:14 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG noted that many Alaskans were opposed to farmed fish. He said that this sentiment is rooted in Alaska's culture and "friends don't let friends eat farmed fish" is a common phrase throughout the state. He said that the bottom line is that fish farming in other parts of the world is not going away. He commented that Alaska imports 95 percent of its food supply and farmed fish products are already in Alaska grocery stores. He said that fish farms are growing outside of the state and were already competing with Alaska fisheries. He asked whether Alaska would choose to move forward or continue to overlook farmed fish products that already exist in Alaska markets. He said that if any form of fish farming is allowed, it must be done thoughtfully and safely to ensure that Alaska wild stocks are protected, and the fisheries remain viable in the marketplace. He said that HB 111 is a beginning to these discussions.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG ended the presentation by highlighting that fish farming is already a form of aquatic farming and Alaska already allows farming for aquatic plants, shellfish, and ocean ranching through the state's hatchery programs. He said that hatcheries use similar methods and equipment as fish farms. He said that the total cost to produce a catchable rainbow trout is about \$4.50 per fish. This includes the price after all the expenses and wages are considered. He said that discussions would be needed to determine how to make any fish farming products viable for market after expenditures. He said that HB 111 would allow Alaska to join a steadily growing multi-billion-dollar industry across the United States and allow for additional food security measures as well. He said that one of the issues that became recently highlighted was an aquaponics facility in the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley that used

goldfish as part of a closed system to produce vegetables. After attempting to sell the fish, it became legally classified as fish farming and was shut down. He said that the business profit margin was built on the vegetable product rather than the fish. He opined that there were opportunities to do it internally and he was skeptical about all this until he went to visit the Whitehorse facility. He said that the Whitehorse facility has been in operation for 15 years. He reiterated that globally, farmed fish are not going away and the market is growing in response to demand.

[10:14:55 AM](#)

JOE FELKL, Legislative Liaison, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, offered the sectional analysis to HB 111. He noted that the sectional analysis remains the same despite the changes associated with the CS. The sectional analysis [copy available in committee file] read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Section 1: amends the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) definition for "agricultural facility" to include a finfish farm.

Section 2: amends the DNR definition for "agricultural operation" to include finfish farming.

Section 3: amends the powers and duties of the Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Commissioner to authorize the permitting and regulation of finfish farming.

Section 4: conforming amendment referencing the new statute for finfish farm permits in the Board of Fisheries authority statute that prohibits adoption of regulations or taking action regarding the issuance, denial, or conditioning of a finfish farm permit or the construction or operation of a finfish farm - consistent with existing language for aquatic farm and hatchery permits as well as aquatic stock acquisition permits.

Section 5: conforming amendment clarifying the Board of Fisheries may not adopt regulations for the rearing and sale of fish from private ponds; this activity is now authorized under the new statutory framework for finfish farms.

Section 6: conforming amendment exempting permitted finfish farm activities as well as a person or vessel employed in an activity under these permits from other fish and game statutes related to different uses of fish and wildlife resources such as hunting and fishing permits, licenses, and vessel registration - consistent with the current exemption for aquatic farm and hatchery permits as well as aquatic stock acquisition permits.

Section 7: conforming amendment to exempt finfish stock and finfish farm products from purchasing, identification and other requirements that apply to fish processors and buyers and commercial fishing permit holders - consistent with existing statutory language for aquatic farm products and stock from aquatic stock acquisition permits.

Section 8: amends the Finfish farming prohibited statutes to allow the growing or cultivation of finfish under the newly created finfish farm permits.

Section 9: adds new sections for finfish farm permits and related definitions. The permits are triennial and subject to restrictions set out in this section, including the Alaska Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, permit terms and conditions necessary to protect natural fish and wildlife, application fees, and regulations adopted in consultation with the Department of Environmental Conservation governing all aspects of finfish farming. This includes eligibility, location, operations, disease control, finfish stock and products, and any other matters necessary to implement this section and protect wild stocks of fish and game in the state. This section also requires all finfish at or sold from a farm to be triploid (sterile). The definitions limit this aquatic farming activity to bony finfish species except for salmon and an inland, closed-system water body enclosed within an escape-proof barrier.

Section 10: conforming amendment to exempt permitted finfish farm activities from the statutes that regulate entry into Alaska's commercial fisheries - consistent with existing language for aquatic farm and

hatchery permits as well as aquatic stock acquisition permits.

Section 11: conforming amendment to the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute's definition of "seafood" to include finfish farm products.

Section 12: conforming amendment to the powers and duties statutes for the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner to authorize the permitting and regulation of finfish farms, including standards and conditions of operations, restrictions on chemical use, monitoring products for compliance, and other requirements into existing authorities for aquatic farms and hatcheries.

Section 13: adds finfish farms to the Alaska Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act statute authorizing an officer or employee designated by the DEC commissioner to inspect a factory, aquatic farm, or establishment of a DEC permit holder.

Section 14: adds finfish farms to the Alaska Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act statute authorizing the DEC commissioner or agent to have free access to a factory, warehouse, or establishment in which foods or cosmetics are manufactured, processed, packed, or held for introduction into commerce to inspect for violations and secure samples.

Section 15: conforming amendment to add definitions for finfish farm and finfish farm products to the Alaska Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

Section 16: conforming amendment adding language to uncodified law requesting the revisor of statutes to change section heading of AS 16.40.210 from "Finish farming prohibited" to "Finfish farming prohibited without a permit" - consistent with section 8 of this bill.

Section 17: immediate effective date.

[10:20:03 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked Commissioner Vincent-Lang when walleye could be brought to Alaska.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that he asked this question at the fish farm in Whitehorse, as well as why the company chose Arctic char. He reiterated that the facility could be run without heating water because char is a cold water fish. He pointed out that if Icy Waters Arctic Charr had to heat water, then the operation would likely not be profitable.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that Minnesota was doing virtually the same thing and was having discussions regarding farmed fish and much like Alaska, it has a large sportfishing industry. He said that discussions are taking place to consider commercial production of walleye, another cold-water fish. He asked what the issue would be regarding whether Alaska could ever produce walleye and why people were opposed to it.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that people are opposed to having walleye put into lakes that could flood and spread into other water bodies. He said that in an enclosed facility that requires sterile fish, even if a fish escaped from an "escape-proof" area, the concern decreases. He said that the question is how to permit an activity that prevents escapement into the wild.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that what is being discussed is like Whitehorse and regarding holding tanks. He said that one of the issues for using Arctic char, grayling, or trout was that it takes a huge tank to support a small number of fish. Tilapia, however, while needing heated water, could utilize smaller tanks and support more fish. He surmised that the tank must be big in Whitehorse. He said that he was also thinking about the aquaponics side of things and not just growing fish for food.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that he was surprised while visiting the facility in Whitehorse; it had fish of every stage of development including 10- to 15-year-old brood stock for egg production and sales. He said that it was all indoors, but not necessarily heated. He asked why the facility did not produce tilapia and they responded that if they heated the water then they could not compete with other tilapia farms such as those in Arkansas. He discussed price point and the opportunity to sell Arctic char as a delicacy item.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that he understands that Alaska is a wild fish producing state and that there is a lot of resistance to the idea of aquaculture. However, he said that one of the things that need to be considered was that going to a restaurant

in the "Lower-48" and ordering tilapia, the odds are it is farmed fish from Asia and even possibly produced adjacent to sewage discharge. He said that it would be better to say, "farmed in the pristine waters of Alaska" and asked whether marketing it this way was an appropriate way to go.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that right now it is banned and nobody can even try to determine whether these are profitable ventures under current law. He said that certainly species such as snakehead or Asian carp would be prohibited but nobody could even try to raise Arctic char. He noted that the Yukon Territory has had fish farming on the books for 20 years and there is only one farm. He said that it would be difficult in Alaska, but nobody can even try.

[10:25:57 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM asked what kind of revenues were being generated from the Whitehorse facility and whether it had an economic impact on the community.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that the facility has been in business for 18 years and a lot of their products are eggs that are being sent to support other fish farms. He noted that Icy Waters Arctic Charr produces 6,000 fish a month for fresh market. About 40 percent goes to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and the remainder stays within Yukon. He remarked that the logistics of getting fresh fish to Vancouver were a point of difficulty for the business.

[10:26:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that she wants to be open minded about the future and the possibilities but her district and others across the state have remarked that it is a terrible idea. She asked how this would work because Commissioner Vincent-Lang had mentioned that these fish would be in onshore facility tanks that would be away from the wild stocks, but then he had mentioned stocking ponds. She asked whether both options were available for prospective aquaculture activities.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that last year's Thirty-Third Alaska State Legislature passed a bill that has allowed private nonprofits (PNP) hatcheries to raise fish and sell them to individuals if they were triploid under Alaska's fish transport permit (FTP) processes. He said that right now, a PNP hatchery could theoretically sell fish and, under the permitting

process, someone could stock them into a lake that is not publicly accessible. He noted that [ADF&G] cannot stock lakes that do not have public access. He said that this process is already in existence and said that HB 111 would allow for the private sale of this fish into the marketplace.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked for confirmation of her understanding that the difference between fish hatcheries and fish farming is that hatcheries utilize wild genetics while farms produce nonnative varieties.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that the rainbow trout brood stock production would be a wide mixture of different stocks, both Lower-48 and Alaska. He said that rainbow trout stocks are unique and while they have wild genetics, they are not technically wild.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that one of the concerns that had been brought to her was that people hear stories about how "nature will find a way" and it complicates regions with new species. She said this concerns fishermen regarding complications it could have with Alaska. Additionally, she noted that the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) Board discussed this idea and moving away from selling wild Alaska fish to selling farmed fish. She said that the brand has been built surrounding wild caught fish and the inclusion of farm raised species may impact wild sales. She asked whether Commissioner Vincent-Lang had discussed this with the ASMI Board.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that he did not have any intention of diminishing the quality of wild products, but the bill would add another element into it. He said that Alaska wild fish are the foundation of all fisheries. He said the fundamental question was whether to allow Alaska to determine whether any fish farming ventures would be worthwhile. With regard to genetics, when he spoke with staff at Icy Waters Arctic Charr, he asked whether those fish were locally sourced. They had responded that their farm-raised stock was their own stock much like farm raised cattle. Everything was triploid and everything was enclosed and isolated from natural systems. He reiterated that the Whitehorse brood stock was genetically distinct from wild varieties.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE reiterated the issue of public concern. She remarked that the department has been very specific about protecting wild genetics in various Alaska regions. She said

that Alaskans are interested in ensuring the natural environment is not disrupted.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that is why HB 111 focuses on onshore production facilities. He said that ADF&G's genetic policy is to ensure the prevention of intermixing genetics in wild systems. He noted that farmed fish would never get to the ocean and genetics were not a concern. He noted that diseases that coincide with fish farms were a larger risk than genetic intermixing. He said that he changed his boots six times [to ensure the sterile environment] when visiting Whitehorse's aquaculture facility.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE, considering this, asked whether the statute provided under HB 111 would just permit the private market to enter the field of fish farming but ADF&G would not participate.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that for one, the department did not have the capital to even consider this type of venture and furthermore, department hatchery programs are focused on sportfishing purposes. He said that some hatcheries are doing "ocean ranching" through the permitted process but ADF&G would not ever get into onshore fish farming.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked, considering the possibility of disease in aquaculture facilities, whether it would require more ADF&G staff to monitor this.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that at some point in time it would require permitting from ADF&G, as well as ensuring sterility, species type, et cetera. He acknowledged that if the business grew, then it would require additional resources. He suspected that this would be a slow-developing process if moved forward.

[10:34:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that in the movie Jurassic Park, the actor Jeff Goldblum is quoted saying, "Life finds a way." She then expressed concern that the bill would not provide additional funding to the department to support monitoring for diseases, for example, and asked for an explanation regarding how triploid fish are produced.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that when the eggs are in the first stages of incubation, they are either heat sensed or "basically" cold shocked which renders the fish triploid.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether this procedure was 100 percent successful and where the procedure is conducted.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that the facilities that are rearing the eggs typically conduct the process of ensuring sterility. He said that ADF&G would ensure sterility by analyzing a subsample of fish. He said that it is possible to have a few fish that do not become sterile but that is the reason for isolated and enclosed aquaculture.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that ADF&G may need to monitor the facilities to ensure that these things don't occur and the zero fiscal note to the proposed bill was concerning.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that he has given this a lot of thought and reiterated that when he looked at the bill, he did not think that things would take off immediately. He said that this would allow businesses to assess feasibility and if it grows then he was sure that it was something that could be monitored by the existing ADF&G staff with the cost being passed off to the business.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that she was from the town that developed the slogan "friends don't let friends eat farmed fish." She asked how the farmed brand would compete with the wild brand and asked whether any research has been done on this. She said that Alaska has fought for the wild brand and asked whether it was wise to introduce this during a time of poor market conditions for wild seafood.

REPRESENTATIVE VINCENT-LANG said that currently it is difficult to buy fresh fish in Alaska and if there was an Arctic char that was produced then it would be fresh, he said that there is already Atlantic salmon being sold in Alaska. He said the question is whether to introduce Alaska varieties.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked whether there was a shortage of wild fish in Alaska.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that there currently is a shortage in the amount of fresh fish that can be purchased in grocery stores during the wintertime and said that most fish are produced during the summer. He said that many times wild fish

products in Alaska are sent south and then shipped north again after they are frozen and processed. He said that he thinks that this would be a niche market, and it would not compete against the volume of wild fish caught in Alaska.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that she appreciates the enthusiasm. She asked how the pet stores sell goldfish and asked whether pet stores were farming fish.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that he has thought of this and would need to follow up with an answer.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT commented that her district was quite clear regarding their opposition to the bill.

[10:38:58 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON remarked that his district was unequivocally opposed to HB 111 and viewed it as bad judgement by the administration at a time when the seafood industry was struggling to make ends meet. He said that there is a lot of unfair trade practices and cheating and misusing the Alaska wild brand. He questioned championing something that would have a miniscule number of benefits and would bring harm to the value of the wild brand that the state has spent millions of dollars to establish. He said there are lots of wild salmon in Alaska and the marketplace should not be confused by the inclusion of farm raised seafood. He remarked that the bill was bad judgement and to put the bill forward without talking to industry members was not ideal.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that the state had his full commitment to continuing to support the Alaska wild stock fisheries and he has been a strong advocate for it during this entire process. He said that he would continue to fight for wild stocks because they are the foundation of Alaska. He said that HB 111 is to begin a discussion and reiterated that he supports wild stocks.

[10:41:35 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES said that she identifies with many of the comments that Representative Edgmon has made. She said that "make no mistake" this was not a popular idea or proposed legislation. She added that public testimony was soon to be heard, and she was surprised at how few people had called in. She said that

she was not surprised by the amount of opposition submitted via e-mail.

10:42:26 AM

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked Commissioner Vincent-Lang whether there was a commercial freshwater fish industry in Alaska. He asked whether trout could be netted in a river and then sold to restaurants.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that he was not aware of one. He said that salmon can be commercially fished in freshwater but he was not aware of any trout fisheries.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE inquired if one could sell sport caught freshwater fish in Alaska.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied no.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE commented that he appreciates Commissioner Vincent-Lang's bravery coming before the committee considering its make-up. He said that he did not think that salmon and freshwater fish would compete with one another, but he understood the angst and what was discussed and did not necessarily disagree. He said that all this was worth a conversation. He said there is no way to have freshwater fish commercially caught in Alaska. He said that coming from Minnesota, he enjoys walleye. He said that going to a restaurant and ordering an Alaska trout was impossible.

10:44:34 AM

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM said that he appreciates the conversation. He noted that the comments from his district have been regarding the inability to get nets in the water in the Upper Kenai. He said the opportunity to harvest an abundance of wild red salmon was his district's priority.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that he bought his salmon this year from the northern district set netters.

10:45:33 AM

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP said that he does not need to speak to his constituents to know where they stand on the bill. He commented on the Battle of Wake Island and Mr. Hernandez, who was responsible for revitalizing fish hatcheries on Fort Richardson

and Elmendorf. He spoke of the battle with the Japanese and Mr. Hernandez' experience as a prisoner of war (POW). He said that there is a long history of ADF&G serving the state.

[10:47:00 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that multiple committee members have heard from the public regarding the proposed bill. She said that the timing of the bill is unsatisfactory and she appreciated Representative Edgmon's comments regarding the bill. She said that a pin should be in the conversation for the future. She noted that the commissioner has highlighted that currently the Board of Fisheries was providing oversight to hatchery fish and asked why this has not been fixed. She opined that the Board of Fisheries should be managing wild stocks.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that this is a different topic, but it is something that would need consideration by the legislature. In closing, he said that HB 111 is opening a discussion, and in discussions with the Senate Resources Standing Committee, similar skepticism and concerns were voiced. He reiterated that an outright ban has curbed any discussions regarding market feasibility. He said that ADF&G was open to any discussions moving forward.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked, since the governor had put in a request for the creation of a Department of Agriculture, where any future fish farming would be held, organizationally speaking.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that ultimately this would be a legislative decision.

[10:50:19 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on HB 111.

[10:50:50 AM](#)

MARY MCDOWELL, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 111. She said that she has had a career serving Alaska's fisheries including as Senate staff helping assist with the passage of the fish farming ban in the past. She said that she was grateful regarding this legislative decision and that it has allowed Alaska to avoid the consequences associated with fish farming that were feared and have been realized in other regions that have allowed finfish farming. She notes that some places

were now instituting bans after large public and private investment into fish farming because of the consequences. She noted that onshore fish farming was explored as an alternative to offshore net pens during the debate over the fin-fish farming ban, but it was ultimately rejected. She noted that Alaska has benefited tremendously regarding its ability to bring wild caught fish to market and even allowing one fish farm would diminish the branding power of Alaska wild-caught fish. She expressed concerns about the "slippery slope" of opening the door to offshore farming by allowing onshore farming. She said that the zero fiscal note to the bill is unrealistic and there would likely be costs to the state if the bill were to pass. She said that Alaska fisheries are facing "enormous challenges right now" but with support, good fisheries management, and environmental safeguards wild stocks can thrive into the future. She said that allowing fish farming would undermine these efforts.

[10:54:37 AM](#)

JOHNNY FISHMONGER, Executive Director, Wild Salmon Nation, Testified in opposition to HB 111. He remarked that he has been an Alaska fisherman since he was 18 years old. He said that fish always escape, and triploid sterility is not an absolute guarantee. He raised concerns about fish farming and the source of and industrial processes associated with fish farm food. He talked about the procurement of fish for later processing into fish food. He talked about challenges for fishermen including high fuel prices and low fish prices. He described a list of experiences that he had while in association with the fishing industry. He questioned opening "Pandora's box" to fish farming when advancements need to be made to support the thousands of Alaska small-scale operations. He said that there is no such thing as a "small, family-owned fish farm" and the owners of these enterprises are far from comparable to the small-time fisherman. He said that over time small producers have been "gobbled up." He concluded by remarking that he was participating in an Asheville, North Carolina, chef summit and was constantly asked by chefs where can they get wild Alaska salmon, as they could not get enough.

[10:59:01 AM](#)

ADAM CUTHRIELL, representing self, testified in opposition to HB 111. He noted that as an Alaska father and an outfitter, he finds HB 111 a "slap in the face" to Alaskans and all the time and money spent on the legislation is a waste of time. He noted

that real issues should be addressed such as waste associated with the trawl fleet, which he opined is "decimating oceans and creating real issues for Alaskans and the economy." He noted that fish farming puts native wild stock fish at risk and remarked on many fisheries in the Lower 48 states that have been impaired. He noted that salmon, steelhead, and grayling populations were already facing challenges in Alaska. He said that HB 111 would "screw over" outfitters and others visiting Alaska who wish to pursue native wild stocks of fish. He noted that while concerns over escapement were mitigated by discussions about triploid fish, escapes happen, and he commented that "nature will find a way." In conclusion, he noted that [the proposed legislation] would put Alaska's economy at risk.

[11:01:23 AM](#)

JILL WEITZ, Government Affairs, Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska ("Tlingit & Haida"), testified in opposition to HB 111. She remarked that for 15 years she has been able to work alongside tribes, sportfishermen, and affiliates in all levels of government. She noted that Tlingit & Haida oppose HB 111 because of the unnecessary risks fish farming pose to water and air quality in the surrounding environments. She raised concerns over aquaculture waste such as pesticides and antibiotics. Furthermore, the bill would allow nonnative species to be farmed, which would distract regulatory agencies from focusing on already periled wild stocks. She remarked that farmed fish have [wreaked] havoc on Canadian water bodies and ecosystems. Additionally, she noted that HB 111 would undercut wild stock fishermen.

[11:03:42 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES, after ascertaining that there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 111.

CHAIR STUTES noted that her office had received so much opposition to a piece of legislation and noted that it was important that Alaskans have the opportunity to express that Alaska is not interested in farming fish at this time. She expressed respect towards Commissioner Vincent-Lang and Mr. Felkl and remarked that it was only because of this respect and the good working relationship between ADF&G and the fisheries committee that this bill was heard. She indicated her intent to hold over HB 111 [Version N].

[11:04:59 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE noted that when working with ASMI and getting updates about the global market, one "sobering" thing that she learned was that last year, aquaculture surpassed wild caught fish for the first time. She said that Alaska needs to recognize this as a state and the technology for farmed fish and the quality it produces is putting a challenge on wild stock fish. She said that this is a time when Alaska needs to be "bullish" regarding wild caught marketing. She said that now is not the time to step back from continued support for the wild caught seafood industry. She said that recognizing that aquaculture is growing exponentially is important. She said that Alaska competes against Iceland and Norway, which can take farmed fish and have it on a plate in a European restaurant in the same day. The conversation is relevant to this issue since they are direct competitors.

[HB 111, Version N, was held over.]

[11:08:12 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES discussed the upcoming committee schedule and agenda.

[11:08:43 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 11:08 a.m.