

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

April 24, 2025
10:04 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

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):

Board of Fisheries

Thomas Carpenter - Cordova
Olivia Henaayee Irwin - Nenana

- CONFIRMATION(S) ADVANCED

HOUSE BILL NO. 199

"An Act relating to the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development; relating to the Alaska Commercial Fishing and Agriculture Bank; relating to certain loans made by the Alaska Commercial Fishing and Agriculture Bank; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 1

Establishing the Joint Legislative Task Force on Sport Fishing Service Providers in Southeast Alaska.

- BILL HEARING CANCELED

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 199

SHORT TITLE: AK COMMERCIAL FISHING & AG BANK; LOANS

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

04/16/25 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/16/25 (H) FSH, FIN
04/24/25 (H) FSH AT 10:00 AM GRUENBERG 120

WITNESS REGISTER

THOMAS CARPENTER, Appointee
Cordova, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As appointee, gave testimony about the Board of Fisheries and his qualifications and interest to the board.

KATIE HARMS, representing self
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave public testimony regarding the absence of coastal representation on the Board of Fisheries.

ROBERT MACK, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

SAM MUTCH, representing self
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

BOB MURPHY, Executive Director
Concerned Area M Fishermen
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

GARY HOLLIER, representing self
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

DAN MACDONALD, representing self
Bellingham, Washington

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

KIM LANDEEN, Co-Executive Director
Southeast Alaska Guides Organization
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

OLIVIA HENAAYEE IRWIN, Appointee
Nenana, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As appointee, gave testimony about the Board of Fisheries and her qualifications and interest to the board.

GARY HOLLIER, representing self
Kenai, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

CRAIG THYTHLOOK, Fisheries Policy Director
Native Peoples Action
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

GRACY KIRKEY, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

MATTHEW LOHRSTORFER, representing self
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

DONALD STILES, representing self
Nome, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

JOEL JACKSON, President
Organized Village of Kake
Kake, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

ROCHELLE ADAMS, representing self
Beaver, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

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

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

EVA BURK, Science and Policy Lead
Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

PHIL DOHERTY, Executive Director
Southeast Alaska Seiners Association
Ketchikan, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified regarding concerns of the absence of a Southeast Alaska affiliated Board of Fisheries member.

KELSI IVANOFF, representing self
Unalakleet, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

AL BARRETTE, representing self
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

VIRGIL UMPHENOUR, representing self
North Pole, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries.

Kyle Neumann, Staff
Representative Louise Stutes
Alaska State Legislature

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented HB 199, sponsored by the House Special Committee on Fisheries at the request of the Joint Legislative Taskforce Evaluating Alaska's Seafood Industry.

SHARON LECHNER, President
Alaska Commercial Fishing and Agriculture Bank
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave invited testimony in support of HB 199.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:04:46 AM](#)

CHAIR LOUISE STUTES called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. Representatives Vance, Kopp, Edgmon, and Stutes were present at the call to order. Representatives McCabe, Elam, and Himschoot arrived as the meeting was in progress.

CONFIRMATION HEARING(S):

BOARD OF FISHERIES

[10:05:44 AM](#)

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

[10:07:13 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 10:07 a.m. to 10:11 a.m.

[10:11:21 AM](#)

THOMAS CARPENTER, Appointee, gave testimony about the Board of Fisheries and his qualifications and interest to the board. He thanked the committee for the opportunity to speak and the governor for both his current nomination and his previous nomination from three years ago. He noted that for the past two years, he has served as vice chair of the Board of Fisheries. As part of his tenure, he chaired the Herring Revitalization Committee, leading discussions on the state's herring fishery challenges. Additionally, he was involved in the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force, a collaborative effort focused on identifying critical research needs specific to Alaska's salmon populations. He originally sought appointment and now seeks reappointment due to his strong commitment to addressing the critical fisheries issues affecting communities statewide. Through his work on the board, he has gained significant knowledge and believes that effective problem-solving requires collaboration, compromise, and negotiation among user groups.

MR. CARPENTER noted that among his key projects, he played a significant role in the development of the Nushagak River King Salmon Action Plan, working with user groups and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) to establish regulatory language aimed at increasing king salmon populations. He emphasized the importance of the species not only to commercial fishing but also to subsistence users and the sport industry. He also contributed to the creation of the Kvichak Special Harvest Area, which addressed the absence of a mechanism for harvesting sockeye in the Kvichak River when Naknek sockeye forecasts were low. Additionally, as chair of the Herring Revitalization Committee, he led discussions aimed at refining regulations and management strategies for underutilized herring fisheries in Kodiak and Prince William Sound, fostering market expansion and utilization efforts, some of which have already shown positive results. He thanked that committee for allowing his testimony and welcomed any questions.

[10:17:06 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on the confirmation hearing of Tom Carpenter.

[10:17:45 AM](#)

KATIE HARMS, representing self, gave public testimony regarding the absence of coastal representation on the Board of Fisheries. She advocated for candidates that are long-term residents of communities in which fishing is the primary economic driver. She commented that Mr. Carpenter is the only current Board of Fisheries member who resides in a community that had fishing as its main economic driver. She said there is a lot of representation from the Greater Anchorage area and this comes with minimal understanding of marine sport, marine commercial, marine subsistence, or marine personal-use fishing, and the associated gear types and target species.

MS. HARMS noted that this was the first time in 50 years that there was not a Southeast Alaska member of the Board of Fisheries for a full cycle. She remarked that previously from 1975 to 2023 there had been at least one Southeast board member. She asked the committee to reconsider adding members to the board that are from "fishing towns." She said that if there was a Southeast member in the cue then consider moving them up in the list. She said a couple of pertinent interview questions for appointees could be whether they could describe how a slinky pot works, the differences between a gillnet, seine, troll, and

trawl vessel, and lastly, whether they had ever touched a sea cucumber.

[10:20:51 AM](#)

ROBERT MACK, representing self, testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He said that he has been commercial fishing for as long as he could remember and grew up doing it with his family. He said that Mr. Carpenter is fair and equitable for all user groups in fishing communities, whether this was sport, commercial, personal-use or commercial.

[10:22:05 AM](#)

SAM MUTCH, representing self, testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He said that he has been attending Board of Fisheries meetings since 1988 and for the last two years he had attended two different meetings with Mr. Carpenter present. He said that Mr. Carpenter has great attention to detail and can help recognize them when making regulations. He said that Mr. Carpenter has also taken time to work with user groups and develop solutions to help concerned users.

[10:23:26 AM](#)

BOB MURPHY, Executive Director, Concerned Area M Fishermen, testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He said that Concerned Area M Fishermen represents around 105 commercial salmon fishermen who operate near King Salmon. He said that the group is supportive of Mr. Carpenter's reappointment. He noted that Mr. Carpenter was knowledgeable about subsistence, sport, commercial, and personal-use fisheries throughout the state. He noted that he is approachable, experienced, and willing to listen to any user group when making science-led decisions.

[10:24:49 AM](#)

GARY HOLLIER, representing self, testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He said that he has dealt with the Board of Fisheries for five decades, typically regarding Cook Inlet issues. He said that he thinks that a good member cannot come with a party line and looks at the science and tries to find middle ground on tough issues. He said that Cook Inlet meetings are highly contentious, and Mr.

Carpenter always strives for the middle ground. He said that even while fighting COVID-19, Mr. Carpenter sought board decisions that fostered the best interests for all user groups.

[10:26:25 AM](#)

DAN MACDONALD, representing self, testified in support of Tom Carpenter's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He said that he has been a commercial fishing permit holder since 1979 and when younger he was more active in fish politics and would attend Board of Fisheries meetings. He said that when previously dealing with a contentious issue, without Mr. Carpenter's efforts it is doubtful that a positive resolution would have been received. He said that he has never met him personally but when considering Board of Fisheries members over the years, Mr. Carpenter stands out. He noted that Mr. Carpenter is not objective, does not take sides, tries to get people together, and is an excellent mediator.

[10:28:46 AM](#)

KIM LANDEEN, Co-Executive Director, Southeast Alaska Guides Organization, said that the Southeast Alaska Guides Organization (SEAGO) represents more than 300 charter fishing operations and roughly half of the state's guided saltwater activity. She talked about the benefits and scale of Southeast guiding operations and has an interest in who sits on the Board of Fisheries. She said that SEAGO has often found themselves on opposite sides of allocation decisions but has found Mr. Carpenter to be very approachable and responsive to concerns. She said that a regional example would be Mr. Carpenter's growing understanding of the complexity of Southeast Alaska's king salmon fishery and without a Southeast affiliated Board of Fisheries member, he has shown knowledge in this fishery. She said that while SEAGO may not always agree on his positions, they appreciate his ability to explain different perspectives and nuances of other user groups.

[10:31:54 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES, after ascertaining there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on Tom Carpenter's confirmation hearing.

[10:32:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON stated that the House Special Committee on Fisheries has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointee, Thomas Carpenter, to the Alaska Board of Fisheries, and recommends that his name be forwarded to a joint session for confirmation.

CHAIR STUTES reminded members that a signature on the report does not reflect intent of any members to vote for or against the appointee.

[10:32:55 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 10:32 a.m. to 10:33 a.m.

[10:36:22 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES invited Olivia Irwin to speak.

[10:36:34 AM](#)

OLIVIA HENAAYEE IRWIN, Appointee, gave testimony about the Board of Fisheries and her qualifications and interest to the board. She noted that she comes from a long line of fishermen and her family has deep roots along the Tanana River, the Koyukuk River, and the Kobuk River Valley. Much of her childhood was spent between her mother's home state of Missouri and Alaska, returning to Alaska in the summers to participate in Fish Camp. What initially seemed like Fish Camp was a profound cultural experience where she first learned to cut and prepare fish, harvest properly, and develop a deep connection to the practice.

MS. IRWIN remarked that she earned a bachelor's degree from Pomona College in Claremont, California, and later returned to Alaska to begin working in natural resources and private nonprofits. Currently serving as the policy coordinator for the Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, she feels honored to be present today. She deeply appreciates the representatives and staff she had the opportunity to meet in Juneau and, despite hearings not being held in person at the time, found the trip to be well worth it. Hailing from the Interior, with ties to the Tanana River, which feeds into the Yukon, she is motivated to put her name forward for the Board of Fish to prevent the decline of salmon across the state. With salmon populations dwindling, she understands firsthand the hardships faced by communities, particularly the reduction of commercial fishing opportunities. Her goal is to contribute to decisions that benefit all users statewide. Over time, she has built a broad

network of fishermen and policy specialists, and despite coming from the Interior, she remains deeply committed to understanding the needs of users across Alaska.

MS. IRWIN noted that her journey began after attending a Board of Fisheries meeting, where she quickly immersed herself in policy creation. The accessibility of the process was eye-opening; it reinforced her belief that as a member of the public and a stakeholder, recommendations to management were both possible and necessary. Now, she hopes to continue promoting this engagement in her role. Above all, she is dedicated to ensuring sustainable salmon runs for future generations, safeguarding the health of Alaska's fisheries for all users in perpetuity.

[10:40:29 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE noted that on Ms. Irwin's resume, she stated that she wishes for decriminalization of subsistence practices and asked for an elaboration.

MS. IRWIN responded that unfortunately there exists within Alaska the inability for folks to feed themselves, urban or rural. She said that often it is because stocks are in such decline. She said that for communities off the road system, food must come in by boat or air. She said that one of her priorities would uphold the subsistence priority while considering other users.

[10:42:05 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES remarked that she had listened to a podcast in which Ms. Irwin was a participant, The Northern Hunter. She said that she had a few questions regarding the way commercial fishing and fish hatcheries were characterized on the podcast. She said that sustainability and the ethics of commercial fishing were brought up and she was quite surprised by some of the comments. She quoted the podcast and said that "commercial fishing is akin to the fur trade or the extinction of the bison in the Lower-48" and "commercial fishing is about making a quick buck at the expense of the resource." Chair Stutes said that this was not the way that her constituents view commercial fishing and fishing is generational; it sustains and supports local families and their way of life. She asked how Ms. Irwin views commercial fishing and its role in the state.

MS. IRWIN responded that she acknowledged the critical nature and cultural impact to the fishing communities throughout the state. She said that they are a user group and following allocative criteria was necessary with science. She said that commercial fishing supports food security in Alaska and intends for Alaskans to continue to feed themselves. When considering any allocation, usually the state economy is favored, and she would ensure while in deliberations, that those two allocative criteria are recognized, as well as the historical and cultural importance of commercial fishing.

[10:44:50 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT asked Ms. Irwin if she could talk about the role of hatcheries in Alaska.

MS. IRWIN responded that as she understands hatcheries are to help rebuild stocks and many salmon populations have been decimated. The purpose was to increase opportunity for users.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT told her that it might be helpful to learn about pink salmon hatchery cycles as well. She said that her region is heavy commercial fishing, she asked what actions Ms. Irwin intended to take to support and ensure sustainability.

MS. IRWIN responded that until she is sitting at the board with a proposal in front of her, she would not be able to say what she would do as it would require interactions with user groups. She said that at this time there is not a single answer to solve the issue to ensure run sustainability. She noted that ensuring runs of high abundance for future generations was imperative.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that she appreciates the perspectives that she would bring to the board. Following up with previous testimony and asked if she could differentiate trollers, trawlers, seiners, and slinky pots and whether she has interacted with this equipment.

MS. IRWIN responded that she had never touched a slinky pot or sea cucumber. Furthermore, the other gear types were types that she has never used. She said that seines are nets that "swoop in a circle" to catch fish closer to the beach. The gill nets were further out where the head of fish get caught. Then the trollers were fishing vessels that hang more than one fishing line. She said that she had a lot to learn about the various gear types, but she has a network of support to help her learn.

[10:49:05 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked what regions of the state Ms. Irwin had participated in fishery issues.

MS. IRWIN responded that she had engaged with fisheries issues at the statewide level in the interior region. She had participated in nonstate management as well and personally fished on "the Kenai."

[10:49:49 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked for Ms. Irwin's opinion on what was more important, the resource or the stakeholder.

MS. IRWIN responded that this was difficult to answer since the stakeholders were not unimportant, but her priority would be the resource since it upholds the ability to provide opportunities for Alaskans. She wanted to conserve and develop the resource for Alaska and would focus on long-term sustainability.

[10:51:36 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked whether Ms. Irwin supported federal management of salmon resources more than state management.

MS. IRWIN said that she would represent state interests and the states perspectives of management. She said that the "checked board" model does not work, and the state needs to come to a place where management is clearer for user groups.

CHAIR STUTES asked Ms. Irwin, if appointed to the board, whether she would consider herself filling a subsistence seat.

MS IRWIN said that she would consider herself filling a "subsistence sport seat."

[10:52:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ELAM, looking through Ms. Irwin's diverse list of support, asked how she would plan to navigate the waters of the varying groups.

MS. IRWIN responded that it would involve listening to the stakeholders. She said that it would be assuming that she would not have any more information than they would. She recognized her limited knowledge in various fishing methods, and it was

important to listen to stakeholders that use these methods. When it comes to a decision, the board must follow regulations by statute and the allocative criteria.

[10:54:31 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES said that Alaska's hatchery program has been argued by some to be a direct cause of the decline of Interior and Western Alaska salmon stocks; however, the science does not support these claims. She noted that ADF&G finds many hatchery programs sustainable. She asked Ms. Irwin whether she had any opinions regarding hatchery programs.

MS. IRWIN said that she believed that there are cumulative impacts that harm fish populations on the Yukon River. She said that there are cumulative impacts at play. She said that the Board of Fisheries has a role in hatchery management and most of those decisions she would leave to the legislature and the Private Nonprofit Hatchery program to ensure they run as they should.

[10:56:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that there were some points of interest on her resume, and it reminded her of a partnership. She asked Ms. Irwin whether she had anyone help her prepare for engagement in an advisory council (AC) or Board of Fisheries deliberations. She asked whether she ever had an advantage of a class like this.

MS. IRWIN said that she is here because of the support that has been provided to her by mentors. She said that the University of Alaska Fairbanks has partnered with the Tanana Chiefs Conference to offer classes and help people prepare for fish related deliberations. She said that she had the opportunity to attend a couple of these classes. She said that she attended this course prior to attending a Board of Fisheries meeting.

[10:58:25 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES asked when Ms. Irwin moved back to Alaska.

MS. IRWIN replied that she moved back to Alaska in 2020.

[10:58:36 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that the classes were admirable, and he took a speech class from "Professor Gary Stevens" when he was younger. He wanted to speak about the hatcheries and last year there was a bill, House Bill 169. He said that this allowed a return to the "early way" of doing hatcheries in a five-gallon bucket opposed to larger hatcheries. He asked whether Ms. Irwin would favor either method. He said that in discussions with the Knik Tribe, they felt that it was a good bill.

MS. IRWIN responded that she would leave legislative bills to the legislature and her role would be allocative. She said that she would follow any statute. She said that she has not engaged with stakeholders on this issue.

[11:00:32 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on the confirmation hearing for Olivia Irwin to the Board of Fisheries.

[11:00:48 AM](#)

GARY HOLLIER, representing self, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He said that Upper Cook Inlet has been declared a federal disaster in the past years and the fishery was in "dire straits." He said that it alarms him that Ms. Irwin would represent subsistence and sportsman on the board. He said that a good board member needs to come in with an open mind and listen to all the science and facts. He said that in 2024 there were two test fish sites that caught 20,000 sockeye salmon on the east side and killed no kings. He said that it is a new and upcoming fishery, and he wished Ms. Irwin would be supportive of new methods to assist the historic history of the Upper Cook Inlet fisheries. He said that he hoped Ms. Irwin would look at the science.

[11:02:39 AM](#)

CRAIG THYTHLOOK, Fisheries Policy Director, Native Peoples Action, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He is a lifelong resident of Bristol Bay and serves as the Fisheries Policy Director for Native Peoples Action. His family has long relied on the region's resources, and since the early 2000s, he has managed his mother's drift fishing operation. Native Peoples Action, a statewide, nonpartisan organization, works to protect and restore Alaska Native rights to hunt, fish, harvest, and steward their homelands for future abundance. The organization strongly

supports Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Alaska Board of Fisheries. Through her leadership roles – including Co-Chair of FNG, policy coordinator for the Yukon Drainage Fishermen's Association, and nomination to the Eastern Interior Regional Advisory Council – she has demonstrated a collaborative approach and the ability to work with commercial fishermen, subsistence users, and personal-use harvesters. Her constructive, solution-driven engagement makes her an ideal candidate. Native Peoples Action believes Ms. Irwin's appointment will bring fresh perspectives and innovative problem-solving, ensuring the long-term health and prosperity of Alaska's fisheries. The organization appreciates the consideration of its recommendation and is confident Ms. Irwin will be a tremendous asset to the Board of Fisheries.

[11:05:18 AM](#)

GRACY KIRKEY, representing self, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. She opined that Olivia is fair and honest, treating all user groups with respect. She thoroughly researches issues, takes the necessary time to make informed decisions, and is extremely generous with her efforts. She values public testimony and truly listens, ensuring every voice is considered. Olivia does not shy away from answering or asking difficult questions. Alaskans would experience a great loss if Olivia were not appointed to the Board of Fisheries.

[11:06:06 AM](#)

MATTHEW LOHRSTORFER, representing self, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He was a Bristol-based permit holder for many years and is a personal-use fisherman. He strongly supports the appointment of Olivia Irwin to the Board of Fisheries. Having participated in meetings with Olivia, Matthew has observed her ability to facilitate discussions that allow all sides to be heard, as well as her exceptional critical thinking skills. Her approach is thoughtful, constructive, and inclusive. Matthew believes Olivia's appointment would be a tremendous asset, bringing fresh perspectives and leadership as a young Native leader.

[11:06:45 AM](#)

DONALD STILES, representing self, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He grew up as a commercial and subsistence fisherman on the Yukon River and now

fished for red king crab. He believed that Ms. Irwin would be the "best deployment" that is currently available.

[11:07:50 AM](#)

JOEL JACKSON, President, Organized Village of Kake, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He said that she was well informed and would make a good addition to the board.

[11:08:48 AM](#)

ROCHELLE ADAMS, representing self, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. Her people have fished along the Yukon River since time immemorial. She is calling in to voice strong support for Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries, uplifting the voices of many in her region who share this sentiment. Ms. Irwin is an exceptional candidate, highly knowledgeable in fisheries policies and cultural traditions. She is approachable and capable of working effectively with all user groups. Her passion, drive, and deep love for fisheries make her stand out. Ms. Adams said she has spent significant time with Ms. Irwin in fisheries management spaces, testifying alongside her and discussing critical issues. However, the most meaningful time has been at culture camp along the river, witnessing Olivia's deep understanding of traditions and ways of life, as well as the care and respect with which she approaches them. Strong representation from the Interior of Alaska and the Yukon River drainage is crucial, and Olivia brings exactly that. Ms. Adams said she firmly believes Ms. Irwin would be an invaluable addition to the Board of Fisheries.

[11:10:53 AM](#)

SHANNON MARTIN, Executive Director, Kenai River Sportfishing Association, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. She represents Kenai River Sportfishing Association (KRSA), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to ensuring the sustainability of the Kenai River and Alaska's fish resources. Established in 1984, KRSA is Alaska's leading sport fishing advocacy group, committed to supporting fishing opportunities and access. She said KRSA strongly supports the appointment of Olivia Irwin to the Alaska Board of Fisheries. Olivia is well-spoken and familiar to the organization through her service on the Minto-Nenana Fish and Game Advisory Committee. In that role, she gained valuable experience working

closely with Board of Fisheries members, stakeholders from all user groups, and staff from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. She said KRSA considers firsthand knowledge and familiarity with the Board of Fisheries process essential qualifications for any board member. Through several interviews with KRSA, Ms. Irwin has demonstrated a deep commitment to the sustainable management of Alaska's fisheries and alignment with KRSA's core priority: ensuring more fish in Alaska's rivers. The organization respectfully urges confirmation of Ms. Irwin's appointment to the Alaska Board of Fisheries.

[11:12:29 AM](#)

EVA BURK, Science and Policy Lead, Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. The Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, which represents 44 members along the Yukon River working toward long-term sustainability for future generations. The commission represents a diverse group of users, including commercial, subsistence, and personal-use fishermen. Ms. Irwin is a great communicator and highly approachable. One of her most valuable qualities is her engagement in the fisheries process, including her leadership within the Minto-Nenana Advisory Committee. She is also an exceptional researcher when it comes to policy and regulation. Most importantly, she will help the public and stakeholders navigate the Board of Fisheries' process, making it more accessible and constructive. Having someone on the Board of Fisheries who can bridge communication between different user groups and ensure all perspectives are considered is essential, Ms. Burk advised. She said Ms. Irwin has consistently demonstrated this ability, and her appointment would be a tremendous asset.

[11:14:17 AM](#)

PHIL DOHERTY, Executive Director, Southeast Alaska Seiners Association, testified regarding concerns of the absence of a Southeast Alaska affiliated Board of Fisheries member. He has extensive experience in fisheries, having served as an area management biologist for commercial fisheries for nearly 30 years, followed by 15 years as Executive Director of the Southeast Dive Association. While not advocating for any specific candidate, Mr. Doherty said he wishes to highlight a significant issue: for the first time in his 50 years of involvement in Alaska's fisheries, there is no representation from Southeast Alaska on the Board of Fisheries. Southeast Alaska hosts one of the most diverse and robust fisheries in the

state, encompassing salmon fisheries, hatchery programs, sport, and charitable fisheries, groundfish, shellfish, herring, and more. Given the complexity and importance of these fisheries, representation from Southeast Alaska on the board is crucial. Phil urges the committee and the state to ensure that in future appointments, a candidate from Southeast Alaska is considered, so that the region's interests and expertise are properly represented on the Board of Fisheries.

[11:16:16 AM](#)

KELSI IVANOFF, representing self, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. She clarified that she is testifying on her own behalf while noting her current role with Native Peoples Action and their positions on the Southern Norton Sound Advisory Committee and the Seward Peninsula Regional Advisory Council (RAC). Through her interactions and experiences with Ms. Irwin, she has found Ms. Irwin to be a strong representative of her people. She effectively communicates and advocates for fairness, ensuring all voices are heard. She expressed confidence in Ms. Irwin's dedication and ability to fight for equitable solutions, emphasizing that her leadership is rooted in the right values.

[11:17:34 AM](#)

AL BARRETTE, representing self, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. While he is a member of the Board of Game, he clarified that his views are his own and do not represent the board. As an Alaskan and a user of wild fish resources, he strongly supports the appointment of Ms. Irwin to the Board of Fisheries. He first met Ms. Irwin several years ago when she was part of a wood bison reintroduction team at Minto Flats State Refuge. Despite contention surrounding the plan, Ms. Irwin played a key role in developing compromise solutions to move the project forward. He later attended meetings with Ms. Irwin focused on addressing historically low returns of Yukon Chinook and chum salmon. Additionally, he witnessed her leadership as Co-Chair of the Minto-Nenana AC Advisory Committee, where she ran meetings efficiently and with consideration for all attendees. He said Ms. Irwin is well-versed in fisheries policies, thoroughly understands processes, and consistently brings fresh, innovative ideas to discussions. He said he considers her age an asset, as her generation will be most affected by current board decisions. She has demonstrated the ability to study, research, and analyze issues while listening to multiple perspectives. Her skill in synthesizing

this information and presenting well-rounded solutions is refreshing. He urged support for Ms. Irwin's confirmation to the Board of Fisheries, emphasizing that her youthfulness, knowledge of the process, and strong communication skills will bring valuable new perspectives to the board.

[11:19:39 AM](#)

VIRGIL UMPHENOUR, representing self, testified in support of Olivia Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He is a resident of North Pole, Alaska, and testifying on his own behalf. He has served three terms on the Board of Fisheries and is the longest-serving member of the Pacific Salmon Commission. He remains active as a member of the Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee. He noted that in the committee's packet, there is a letter from the Fairbanks Fishing Advisory Committee supporting Ms. Irwin. Mr. Umphenour said he has known members of Ms. Irwin's family for over 50 years, as they live in Nenana. He highlighted the devastating reality faced by residents of the Upper Yukon River, who have been unable to subsistence fish for any species of salmon for the past five years. He recently returned from an eight-day Yukon River Panel meeting in Dawson, where the outlook remained bleak. The long-term monitored systems in the state have seen alarming declines: summer chum salmon returns are down to just 4 percent of the long-term average, and Chinook salmon are at only 20 percent of their historical numbers. Given these dire circumstances, Mr. Umphenour reiterated that he strongly supports Ms. Irwin's appointment to the Board of Fisheries. He shares this information to ensure that the severity of the Yukon River crisis is understood, reinforcing the urgent need for leadership that can effectively address these challenges.

[11:21:48 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES, after ascertaining there was no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on the confirmation hearing of Olivia Irwin to the Board of Fisheries.

[11:22:05 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON stated that the House Special Committee on Fisheries has reviewed the qualifications of the governor's appointee, Olivia Irwin to the Alaska Board of Fisheries, and recommends that her name be forwarded to a joint session for confirmation. Signing the report regarding appointments to boards and commissions in no way reflects an individual member's

approval or disapproval of the appointee, and the nomination is merely forwarded to the full legislature for confirmation or rejection.

[11:22:35 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 11:22 a.m. to 11:24 a.m.

HB 199-AK COMMERCIAL FISHING & AG BANK; LOANS

[11:24:37 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 199, "An Act relating to the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development; relating to the Alaska Commercial Fishing and Agriculture Bank; relating to certain loans made by the Alaska Commercial Fishing and Agriculture Bank; and providing for an effective date."

[11:25:55 AM](#)

KYLE NEUMANN, Staff, Representative Louise Stutes, presented HB 199 on behalf of the bill sponsor, the House Special Committee on Fisheries, on which Representative Stutes serves as chair. He explained that the proposed bill would provide a one-time temporary investment of approximately \$3.7 million of state money to bolster Alaska's Commercial Fishing and Agriculture Bank (CFAB). This would allow CFAB to refinance existing loans and potentially new loans at a reduced interest rate of 5.25 percent, the same rate currently offered by the commercial fishing revolving loan fund. He noted that HB 199 is a companion bill to SB 156.

MR. NEUMANN remarked that CFAB was established by the legislature in 1978 through AS 44.81, and with this statute the state granted CFAB unique authority to lien limited entry permits in addition to providing loans specifically for commercial fishing operations. He noted that CFAB has over 700 members that represent 80 fishing communities and provide critical financing for fishermen across the state, especially in difficult financial times. He noted that it was known that the commercial industry was currently facing some challenges. The legislature addressed these challenges in the Thirty-Third Alaska State Legislature in 2024, with the passage of HB 273, which made changes to the state's commercial fishing revolving loan fund that included temporarily fixing interest rates at 5.25 percent. He said that thus far, HB 273 has been successful

but had one unintended consequence: Unable to match the fixed interest rates, CFAB is losing significant new loan volume to the commercial fishing revolving loan fund. He said that the problem has been exacerbated by costs associated with current fishing operations which have made it harder for borrowers to make payments on their existing loans. He said that CFAB has already expended many tools to avoid defaults, including revised payment plans and low loan restructuring for borrowers.

MR. NEUMANN noted that in the interests of the seafood industry and in order to keep CFAB operational, the Joint Legislative Taskforce Evaluating Alaska's Seafood Industry recommended that the state enact policy to temporarily lower CFAB interest rates. He noted that HB 199 would provide a one-time \$3.7 million investment to CFAB from a separate and now defunct capstone avionics revolving loan fund. He said that the investment would be through the purchase of Class C non-voting shares, the same vehicle that gave \$32 million in start-up capital to CFAB in 1979 which was repaid by 1990. The investment provided under HB 199 would be used only to refinance or issue new low-interest rate loans until the revolving loan fund rates return to normal in two years, at which time CFAB would return any unused funds. He emphasized that CFAB would repay the state in full within 20 years by purchasing back stock from the state.

[11:30:45 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP asked Mr. Neumann whether the total appropriation coming from the capstone avionics revolving loan fund was \$3.7 million.

MR. NEUMANN responded that it was roughly \$3.7 million and sitting in a defunct capstone avionics revolving loan fund which had a sunset date in 2021 and seemed to have been forgotten. He noted that it was not written in statute that the remaining funds would go back in the state general fund. He said that prior reappropriation attempts have been unsuccessful.

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP commented that this is a small amount of money for a significant industry that needs it. He said that it would help the few fishermen that need it.

[11:32:19 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether there was a reason that there was no fiscal note showing the fund transfer and whether he

could provide some clarification to the commercial fishing revolving loan fund.

MR. NEUMANN said that there is a fiscal note, but it is a zero fiscal note since HB 199 was pending appropriations and it does not specifically say that if HB 199 passes it would not move the money but "subject to appropriation the department shall issues shares by CFAB using an amount of money equal to amount sitting in fund at moment."

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether this would mean that the \$3.7 million would be required to be included in the operating or capital budget.

MR. NEUMAN responded that he was not sure.

CHAIR STUTES noted that it would be subject to appropriation in that amount, but the bill would not transfer the funds.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that the only other way the money would be transferred is through an appropriation bill, and she asked for clarification.

[11320034:30 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP said that he was not sure whether it needed a bill, but this bill gives the state permission to do this administratively. He said those unused funds could not be moved around unless permission was given by the legislature. He said that he believed it was about permission.

CHAIR STUTES reiterated that this bill would not transfer the funds.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that she would prefer Legislative Legal Services clarify the way that the bill was worded. She said that the way it was worded suggests appropriation and as far as her understanding was concerned, the state would need an appropriation mechanism in order to transfer. She said she was in support of the bill but wanted to understand the mechanics of how to make this happen and prevent any unnecessary oversight. She said that making a change for a fund, there should be a "paper trail."

CHAIR STUTES said that if HB 199 were approved, then it needs to be in the operating budget.

[11:36:17 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that he did not disagree with Representative Vance and indicated the importance of the fiscal note. He said that the fact that it says "avionics" on the fund gives him pause. He understood that the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) needed a new airplane for firefighting operations.

CHAIR STUTES said that Legislative Legal Services can be consulted about these technicalities and there was no intent to move the bill today. She reiterated what Mr. Neumann said and that HB 199 would not technically transfer money.

[11:37:24 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether there was any historical information available pertaining to the capstone avionics revolving loan fund.

MR. NEUMANN said that it is a fund that was created several years ago, and the program has already passed the sunset date. Therefore, the program does not exist any longer and the funds were not accessible for any loan that the program had provided. He said the unused funds were not returned to the general fund and future reallocation attempts have been unsuccessful. He reiterated that the program passed the sunset date already.

[11:39:04 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that on pages 1 and 2, the bill discusses repaying the loan after 20 years; however, further down, on line 10, the bill suggests a fixed term of 15 years. She asked whether there was a reason for this discrepancy.

MR. NEUMANN clarified that 20 years is the period that CFAB would repurchase the shares from the state. The 15 years refers to the duration of the loans that CFAB can provide to borrowers using these state funds.

[11:40:31 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that the committee would hear invited testimony.

[11:40:57 AM](#)

SHARON LECHNER, President, Alaska Commercial Fishing and Agriculture Bank, gave invited testimony in support of HB 199. She noted that CFAB was formed by the state in the late 1970s by the governing statute AS 44.81 and it limits lending activities in support of traditionally underserved industries such as commercial fishing and timber. She said that AS 44.81 also deems CFAB to be formed for a public purpose. She noted that CFAB pays federal taxes and cannot issue tax exempt bonds. She said that borrowers need to be Alaska residents. Currently, about 90 percent of CFAB loans are for commercial fishing and there was heavy investment into this industry. She said that unlike traditional lenders, they work for their borrowers. In the last 20-plus years, CFAB has not foreclosed on a single borrower. She said that the public purpose mission is evident by their response to the recent market downturn. Now many fishermen cannot get access to working capital loans from processors and in response, CFAB introduced a seasonal loan program that would allow access to working capital to help borrowers avoid high interest credit card borrowing. She said that CFAB supports the commercial fishing revolving loan fund, but it has consequences for CFAB. She noted that existing loans are moving over, the collateral is being eroded, and no new applications were directed to CFAB. She said that HB 199 would allow matched interest rates with the commercial fishing revolving loan fund. She said that CFAB has 650 Alaska resident members and over 300 borrowers living in almost every Alaska community. Support for the bill would expand the financial lifeline for several hundred additional Alaska fishermen, their families, and their communities. She urged support for the bill.

[11:44:13 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES opened public testimony on HB 199. After ascertaining that nobody wished to testify, she closed public testimony.

[11:44:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KOPP reiterated that he appreciates the intent of the bill and in the interest of small businesses and helping them, he opined that this was a good direction.

[11:45:20 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES announced that HB 199 was held over.

11:45:29 AM

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.