

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

May 1, 2025
10:03 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

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

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION: ALASKA BYCATCH ADVISORY COUNCIL

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record.

WITNESS REGISTER

LINDA KOZAK, Former Chair
Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered a presentation outlining the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council

MEGAN O'NEIL, Chair
Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council presentation.

DOUG VINVENT-LANG, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Responded to questions during the presentation on the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council.

RACHEL BAKER, Deputy Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions during the presentation of the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council.

MEGAN O'NEIL, Chair
Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered questions related to the presentation on the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[10:03:08 AM](#)

CHAIR LOUISE STUTES called the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. Representatives Vance, Elam, Himschoot, Edgmon, and Stutes were present at the call to order. Representatives McCabe and Kopp arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION: ALASKA BYCATCH ADVISORY COUNCIL

[10:04:07 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES said that in 2022, Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy appointed 17 Alaskans to the Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force to represent key stakeholder groups. These members bring extensive fisheries knowledge and a commitment to sustaining resources for future generations. In 2023, Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang established the Bycatch Advisory Council to help the Alaska Department of Fish and Game implement recommendations from the final task force report. Linda Kozak, former chair of the Advisory Council, has lifelong fisheries involvement, starting in Bristol Bay's set-net salmon fishery as a child. Since 1988, she has worked as a fisheries consultant, engaging in policies at the Board of Fisheries, North Pacific Fisheries Management Council, and the International Halibut Commission. She has also served on various committees and participated in federal management workshops. She noted that Ms. Kozak would present to the committee using Microsoft Teams. Additionally, she noted that several individuals were available online for questions in order to facilitate discussions.

[10:07:23 AM](#)

LINDA KOZAK, Former Chair, Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council, Co-offered a presentation outlining the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council. Presenting the first 4 slides of the PowerPoint presentation [hardcopy included in the committee packet], she noted that the committee is being recognized for its discussion on the critical issue of bycatch, with appreciation expressed to the commissioner for his efforts in establishing the Bycatch Advisory Council. The speaker, recently retired from the council, acknowledges the importance of addressing recommendations from the Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force.

MS. KOZAK remarked that the definition of bycatch is reiterated as fish harvested but not sold or kept, including economic, regulatory, and prohibited species. Bycatch is present in all commercial fisheries, with recent focus placed on high-value species such as halibut, crab, and salmon. In 2022, the governor created the Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force, a 17-member group composed of representatives from subsistence, commercial, sport, and community interest groups, along with commissioners. Over an eight-month period, the task force and subcommittees convened 45 times to develop policy recommendations for policymakers. Their work centered on three key areas: state engagement, research, and management, aimed at improving the health and sustainability of Alaska's fisheries. Following the task force's recommendations, several individuals recognized the need for additional efforts to advance the work. In 2023, the commissioner established the Bycatch Advisory Council to provide recommendations on priority areas identified in the final task force report. The council comprises members from commercial, sport, subsistence, and community sectors, ensuring broad representation across Alaska's regions.

[10:11:02 AM](#)

MEGAN O'NEIL, Chair, Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council, shared that she is a fourth-generation resident of Petersburg, Alaska, with a lifelong connection to commercial fishing in Southeast Alaska, alongside her family, targeting salmon, shrimp, crab, and sablefish. She noted that she continues to participate in fisheries with her family when possible. She detailed her extensive experience representing fishermen through the Petersburg Vessel Owners Association at various regulatory bodies, including the Board of Fisheries, the North Pacific Council, and the International Pacific Halibut Commission. She

also served on the board of United Fishermen of Alaska. She explained that she is now the director of government affairs for the Canfisco Group, which owns 11 shoreside processing plants across Bristol Bay, Kenai, Kodiak, Yakutat, Ketchikan, and Sitka. These plants process salmon, halibut, sablefish, Pacific cod, pollock, rockfish, and crab, sourced from 1,750 individual fishermen. She concluded by expressing appreciation for the committee's interest in the work of the Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council.

[10:12:00 AM](#)

MS. KOZAK concluded slide 4 by mentioning that a link was available at the bottom of the slide that contained meeting information.

MS. KOZAK presented slide 5 and noted that the Bycatch Advisory Council began meeting in 2023, holding five meetings that year. The first meeting focused on establishing operating procedures, followed by discussions on issues raised by the task force. All meetings have been open to the public and conducted virtually. Four meetings were held in 2024, and two have taken place so far this year, on March 3 and April 24. Public testimony has been available at each meeting. The next Bycatch Advisory Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 23. Efforts have been made to increase public awareness, with the highest attendance reaching approximately 145 people at the November meeting. Engagement has been growing, which is beneficial for addressing bycatch issues. Additionally, the commissioner held two town hall meetings on bycatch, one in Kodiak and one in Homer. He has also met individually with various groups and organizations across the state to discuss bycatch-related concerns.

[10:14:05 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES let committee members know that as the presentation was occurring, they were free to ask questions.

[10:14:18 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON asked Commissioner Vincent-Lang about residents in the Yukon-Kuskokwim area that did not have an opportunity to attend any townhalls that were organized in that region. He asked whether there was a response to this.

[10:14:35 AM](#)

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) responded that there has not been a bycatch specific townhall in this region; however, he has been available to other meetings in the area. Additionally, bycatch has been addressed in other meetings in this region.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON said that he appreciates the response and thinks it would be good to hold a hearing of sorts on the issue and it would be a "hot button" issue. He advised that to serve statewide public interests, the townhalls should be statewide.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that he agreed, and one should be held in Southeast Alaska as well.

[10:15:37 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE noted that there was a meeting in Homer at her request and bycatch has been a point of concern in her district. She said that having the commissioner available to answer questions was helpful and among all the commissioners he has been readily available to support community discussions.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG added to his response to Representative Edgmon's previous comment and noted that he was not sure if a meeting would be best in Bethel or in a different location. He also said whether to pair it with another set of meetings that would have people congregated already would be a point of discussion ahead.

[10:16:46 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON responded that there is an annual meeting of village council presidents during the later part of August to early September and this could be a point of interest for organizing a meeting.

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MS. KOZAK noted that the Commissioner has made it clear to the Bycatch Advisory Council that he is willing and able to participate in discussions in Alaska's various regions and has been extremely responsive to requests for previous meetings.

MS. KOZAK continued the presentation and proceeded to present slides 6 to 10. She noted that the Bycatch Advisory Council conducted a comprehensive review of all task force

recommendations in 2023. A suggestion was made to prepare progress reports, which proved highly valuable in tracking priorities outlined by the task force and assessing responsiveness from the state and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. The latest progress report, completed in early March, is available.

MS. KOZAK remarked that due to public and task force concerns, the council formed a Bycatch Utilization Subcommittee in 2023 and, in 2024, efforts shifted to identifying priorities for management and research recommendations. In 2025, the focus has moved toward state engagement, which includes informing the public about bycatch issues and gathering community input. Town hall meetings have been part of this outreach, with additional engagement strategies being explored. The council has worked on three key issues identified by the task force: management, research, and state engagement. Management recommendations have been prioritized, with the most significant effort devoted to establishing a scientific-based chum salmon cap in the Bering Sea for Pollock. This initiative has been led by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, with extensive testimony and review documents presented. Initial analysis was reviewed in February, and final action is tentatively scheduled for December. A research recommendation from the task force emphasized improving stock-of-origin determinations for Chinook salmon bycatch. Many chum salmon found in the Bering Sea originate from Asia, and the National Marine Fisheries Service lab has conducted genetic analyses. There has been discussion on achieving real-time genetic reporting to aid in avoidance measures.

MS. KOZAK remarked that in 2024, the State of Alaska issued a legislative grant to the Bristol Bay Science and Research Institute (BBSRI) to evaluate the feasibility of in-season weekly chum salmon genetic testing in the Bering Sea. A report on this effort was presented in November, confirming its viability. The next step is incorporating real-time genetic information into in-season management with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The institute has partial funding for this research through July but requires additional financial support. Some funding has been proposed in the House, though its implementation remains uncertain. This initiative is critical for avoiding areas where Western Alaska chinook salmon are present, with real-time data being the key to effective mitigation efforts.

[10:24:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON, in response to slide 10, reflected that there is \$500,000 in the fiscal year 2026 (FY 26) operating budget in the House of Representatives to follow through on year two of BBSRI's work. He asked Commissioner Vincent-Lang whether this was something that the Bycatch Advisory Council could advocate for, in terms of passing it through the legislative bodies and ensuring no vetoes by the governor. He asked whether the governor's Office of Management & Budget (OMB) team could be contacted to ensure that it remains in the budget, given its importance to fisheries management. He raised concerns that it could get caught in the same type of "sieve" that ASMI funding got cut from. He said that if this does not follow through then the meeting is just talk. He reiterated that something like this needs to be funded.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that he cannot guarantee what the governor would or would not do, but at the end of the day, he did not veto this last year. He said he suspects that the governor was convinced that there is some value in this type of work. He said that he received an e-mail from BBSRI that suggested that they would be able to provide weekly estimates for upcoming seasons. He said that the data from the trawl survey has really informed how the council is tackling the bycatch issue. This includes spatial or temporal mapping of Western Alaska chum salmon. He said that this data is critical with how the state could design its management moving forward.

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON responded that there would be an attempt to get funding through and it was a "lean and mean year"; however, he had some assurance of continued efforts in research and determining "where the salmon are going."

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that there were two important pieces to this topic. The first focuses on refining Western Alaska genetic chum salmon identification. Current methods do not allow differentiation between populations from the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers, Norton Sound, and Bristol Bay. Improving these distinctions is critical for understanding stock origins and identifying at-risk populations. Internal work on this issue continues within ADF&G, with experts actively engaged in refining genetic analyses. The second component involves ensuring the accuracy of in-season genetic estimates. A trolling vessel may fish in multiple locations before returning to the dock, where genetic samples are collected. This creates a challenge in pinpointing precisely where each sample originated. Collaboration with the Bristol Bay Science and

Research Institute is underway to ensure that genetic samples accurately reflect fishing efforts in specific areas. He noted that from his viewpoint the work was looking "very positive."

CHAIR STUTES noted that this was imperative research and emphasized the importance of funding these endeavors.

[10:28:33 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked Commissioner Vincent-Lang to further elaborate on the project because it was regionally focused. Furthermore, she asked whether it was a pilot project last year.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG offered his understanding that it was a pilot project and they were looking at the areas that impact Western Alaska chum salmon. He said that the federal money associated with this type of project is in jeopardy now and continuing this work is imperative.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE opined that she thought that this was the future, real time genetic testing that can help in-season management. She asked whether the data was used by the feds, the state, or whether it was a partnership between the two.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that it is basically a federal research effort but was run by the BBSRI, meaning that it is a "team effort." He said that ADF&G was using the information from them to design alternatives to reduce chum salmon bycatch. He said that BBSRI is doing the testing and is neither a state nor federal entity.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether BBSRI was the only institute doing this kind of testing either in Alaska or nationwide.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that currently similar initiatives were occurring with Bristol Bay sockeye salmon. He said that accurate estimates can be determined with the data. He said that similar methods have been used to monitor king salmon across the state. Additionally, he said that a lot of genetic testing work was occurring in other coastal states.

[10:31:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked why someone should care about genetics and where the fish came from. He said that genetic testing would take a week and opined that trawlers could catch plenty of bycatch during this period. He said that putting the

nets down and getting a big haul of bycatch, maybe trawlers should not be fishing there. He said that without the money to continue this work, maybe creating some "best practices" within the industry would be effective.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that it is important for determining the impact to Western Alaska chum salmon stocks and if trawlers were impacting hatchery origin fish from Asia, it would not be as much of an issue of concern. He said that the state needs spatial and temporal mapping to better understand these things and gene testing can assist with this understanding.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that he was asking these questions so that everybody else watching could understand this project. He opined that there should be a bounty on hatchery chums in Alaska. Furthermore, he asked whether real-time genetic testing was possible and reiterated that a seven-day delay could result in consequential bycatch.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that real-time onboard identification in this fishery is extremely challenging, as the ratio of chum salmon to Pollock is approximately 1:8,000-10,000. This makes locating chum salmon difficult, with the first opportunity to identify them occurring when they are brought back to the dock and processed. This differs from the test-net fishery at the Port Moller line, where all fish are sampled directly. The challenge is primarily a numbers issue, as finding chum salmon on trawl vessels is particularly difficult. Regarding the rationale for weekly assessments, if a council-approved management plan is implemented to encourage avoidance of Western Alaskan chum salmon, the ability to track whether the chum caught are from Western Alaska becomes essential. The approach mirrors previous management efforts in Area M, where a chum cap was set, and incentives were established to keep harvest levels below a designated threshold. If the target was exceeded, fishers would lose time and area in subsequent periods. A similar strategy is being pursued now encouraging the fishery to avoid regions known for Western Alaska chum salmon. If the target cap is reached, access to those historically significant fishing areas is reduced, reinforcing responsible management practices.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked about the "catcher processor" boats and whether daily onboard genetic testing was feasible in this fishery rather than weekly since they never go to the dock.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that he thinks this was feasible but believed that most of that fleet is offshore and were not impacting Western Alaska chum.

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REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that it is difficult for her to grasp the scale on what was being discussed. She asked for a better understanding of the scope of how many boats would be out there.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that this can depend on "how good the fishing is" and said that this can determine the boat activity in the area. He noted that there were also market considerations given that fish need to be brought in within 4-5 days of fishing to ensure quality. He said that most of the fishing that occurs closer to the coast are more Asian chum dominated. Typically, these boats will come in and the fish would be sampled for estimates. He reiterated that the data is delayed by a week and while its more real time than what has been available in the past, it would be useful for upcoming management endeavors.

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT said that she understood that there was 100 percent observer coverage for these vessels.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that there is 100 percent observer coverage; however, they were not observing every fish when its trawl nets are offloading. He said that actual observance of what is being caught is probably occurring at the processing plant.

[10:38:12 AM](#)

MS. KOZAK recommended the committee consider inviting Jordan Head with the Bristol Bay Science and Research Institute (BBSRI) to provide a summary of their research endeavors for this topic. She noted that genetic testing conducted by the National Marine Fisheries Service takes several months to produce results, often rendering data outdated by the following season. Weekly in-season genetic testing represents a significant advancement toward real-time analysis, aligning with the direction experts believe fisheries management should be heading. The importance of this work was emphasized, though it was acknowledged that the Bycatch Advisory Council serves in an advisory capacity to the commissioner and does not lobby the legislature. She noted that

the work at BBSRI and their insights are considered highly valuable.

MS. KOZAK, presenting slides 11 and 12, noted that the Bycatch Advisory Council has highlighted several key management recommendations from the task force. One proposal under consideration is a rationalization program for Bering Sea pot cod vessels measuring 64 feet and greater, aimed at improving bycatch management in the region. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council requested a discussion paper on this topic, which is scheduled for review in June 2025. Another significant issue being addressed is the potential closure of certain Bering Sea areas to protect red king crab populations. The North Pacific Council has adopted a two-pronged approach to this effort. First, they are examining trawl project trail definitions, and second, they are seeking input from the trawl fleet on possible innovations in trawl gear technology. A review of the trawl gear innovation paper is also scheduled for the June 2025 meeting. These ongoing discussions reflect a broader effort to enhance fisheries management and ensure sustainability in Alaska's waters.

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CHAIR STUTES asked about the Bering Sea pot cod fishery and asked what the observer requirements were.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG remarked that this may be a question for Rachel Baker.

[10:41:25 AM](#)

RACHEL BAKER, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, explained that the pot cod fishery was in a partial coverage program, meaning that it is less than 100 percent. She remarked that generally around 15-20 percent of trips have an observer on board.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG added that this is one of the benefits of going to a rationalization program: higher observer coverage.

[10:43:01 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked whether Chair Stutes was referring to the pot cod fishery.

CHAIR STUTES confirmed she was.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked how much bycatch in a pot dies after thrown overboard as bycatch.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that it depends on how the gear is fished and it was something that an upcoming discussion paper would highlight. He said that one of the areas of research interest was the impact of trawl gear on the red king crab fishery. He said that the state was trying to balance discard from a trawl fishery and directed fishery moving forward.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked whether the reasons there are fewer observers in this fishery was because there is a higher survivability of bycatch discards. He asked whether mortality rates with bycatch influenced observer coverage.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that this is part of the reason, but reality is that most of Alaska's rationalized fisheries have 100 percent coverage. Otherwise, it gets pooled into other fisheries, and it would be partial observer coverage. He said that this is one of the reasons why discussions were held regarding rationalizing fisheries in the Bering Sea.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that every fishery would have bycatch and when talking about all this, it should be noted that if the survivability is great then some of the regulations and rationalization may not be as necessary. He said that the pot and long line trollers may have greater survivability than a trawler or other gear type. He said that he was unsure about these technical details.

[10:46:05 AM](#)

MS. KOZAK, presenting slides 12-14, noted that management recommendations for the Gulf of Alaska included Tanner crab protections and reviewing trawl gear open and closed areas. At the state's request, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council initiated discussion papers, with a problem statement and analysis options finalized in April. Timing for further review remains uncertain due to staffing constraints. Electronic monitoring for pelagic trawl vessels and tenders was approved by the council and implemented this year. However, electronic monitoring legislation for Tanner crab and state waters pot cod fisheries has yet to be enacted. Due to vessel size and operational challenges, onboard observers are

impractical, making electronic monitoring the preferred solution. To improve bycatch utilization, the Bycatch Advisory Council formed a subcommittee in 2023 to assess proposals and submit a report to the commissioner. Public feedback largely opposed regulatory bycatch utilization for high-value species like salmon, halibut, and crab. Concerns were raised about infrastructure limitations, individual accounting challenges, and processor capacity issues. The report details significant regulatory, economic, logistical, and political obstacles to implementation.

MS. KOZAK, presenting Slides 15-17, noted that The Advisory Council received the Utilization Subcommittee report and forwarded it to the commissioner without recommending regulatory action at this time. Research efforts were then discussed, focusing on general recommendations from the Bycatch Review Task Force rather than specific projects. Three main areas were highlighted: communication, cooperation, and collaboration. These will later be integrated with state engagement recommendations. The first recommendation is to develop state bycatch research priorities by incorporating input from communities, Alaska Native tribes, industry, and the public. These priorities will be shared with funding entities to secure research funds. The second recommendation is to implement strategies that foster cooperative research between industry and agencies to reduce bycatch and associated mortality. While some progress has been made at the state level, efforts remain limited at the federal level, and further work is being encouraged. The third recommendation is to establish collaboration methods between Alaska Native tribes, organizations, and research entities to improve tracking of proposed and funded bycatch research. Additionally, opportunities for cooperative projects and combined reporting of findings should be explored. Concerns were raised about difficulties in accessing information on funding allocations among various organizations, including state and federal entities. A greater need for collaboration was identified to streamline research efforts, with the state positioned to assist in this process.

MS. KOZAK, presenting slides 18-20, noted that in 2024, the Bycatch Advisory Council identified four research priorities. The first was to maintain emphasis on salmon genetics and advance real-time reporting of salmon origins. The second was to track bycatch research conducted by various organizations and make this information publicly available. A significant issue raised by Western Alaska members was the integration of cultural

and historical knowledge into bycatch discussions and regulatory actions. The final priority was to establish an annual virtual meeting focused on bycatch-related research, which could be hosted by the legislature, the Department of Fish and Game, or the Bycatch Advisory Council. The public strongly supported this initiative, recognizing its value in sharing information. The Bycatch Review Task Force also examined state engagement and put forth six recommendations. The first was for Alaska to develop a system for presenting bycatch-related information in an accessible and understandable format. Efforts are underway to improve the bycatch website, though further development is needed. The second recommendation was for Alaska's federal fishery staff to continue offering opportunities for public input before North Pacific Fishery Management Council meetings. Deputy Commissioner Rachel Baker and her team have been conducting virtual and in-person meetings before each council session, allowing the public to contribute to state policy decisions. The final recommendation, already approved, was support for legislative action to remove the sunset provision from the education tax credit program.

MS. KOZAK, presenting slides 21-25, noted that the State of Alaska continues working to secure real-time data on Chinook and chum salmon taken in Russian domestic fisheries, though challenges persist. Efforts remain ongoing. A recommendation was made to establish a permanent bycatch advisory entity, modeled after the Bycatch Review Task Force. The commissioner has implemented this through the Bycatch Advisory Council for the current administration's term. The final state engagement recommendation calls for Alaska to collaborate with stakeholders to develop a bycatch policy, though this process has not yet begun. At the March 3 meeting, Advisory Council members unanimously agreed that a dedicated staff position should be created to manage bycatch-related information, assist with website development, and support council meetings. Current state personnel juggle multiple responsibilities, making a dedicated role essential for ensuring timely and accurate public communication. Recent developments include a chum salmon excluder experimental fisheries permit review in April, with final bycatch policy decisions expected in December. The council will review pelagic trawl gear definitions and pot cod rationalization in June, while a maximal retainable amount adjustment is scheduled for final action in October. Tanner crab protections for the Gulf of Alaska remain under evaluation, with problem statements finalized in April. The North Pacific Council and the state are actively addressing numerous bycatch issues, though staff availability for required analytical work

remains a challenge. However, significant progress has been made since the 2022 Bycatch Review Task Force report. The Advisory Council expressed commitment to continuing efforts and welcomed further inquiries and final questions.

[11:01:16 AM](#)

COMMISSONER VINCENT-LANG noted that the formation of the department advisory committee was intended to ensure continued action on the governor's Bycatch Task Force report rather than allowing it to be overlooked. The goal was to have a diverse group review the report, prioritize recommendations, and guide policy decisions. Efforts are ongoing at the council, state, and departmental levels to address bycatch issues. Upcoming participation in the North Pacific Council meeting in June aims to maintain pressure on gear innovation initiatives. While some believe more should be done, significant work is already underway. The recent recommendation to create a dedicated position for bycatch research is being evaluated, though it was introduced too late for inclusion in budget discussions. Meanwhile, progress continues improving the department's website to provide real-time access to bycatch-related information in a single, user-friendly location.

[11:03:02 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES said that she was happy the ADF&G was pursuing the establishment of a bycatch specialist for public contact.

[11:03:15 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE noted that it has been two years, and questioned why [not until] now was the start of an Alaskan bycatch policy.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that he was hoping to receive more information from the bycatch advisory council that could later be submitted to the Board of Fisheries. He said that a well thought out proposal would be needed, and he was reluctant to throw something out there without advisory council involvement.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE asked whether the legislature had a part to play with this proposed policy. She said that if it were addressed only through the Board of Fisheries, then it may have a narrower scope than what the public expects. She asked whether legislators could collaborate in this process.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that if it would turn into regulation then it may be most appropriate to go through the Board of Fisheries process.

REPRESENTATIVE VANCE said that this has been one of the bigger issues that people talk about, why there was not a policy.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG noted that bycatch is a topic frequently discussed, with ongoing legislative proposals and regulatory actions at both the council and state levels. Every meeting reinforces its significance, underscoring the need for careful decision-making. As a science-based organization, decisions must be grounded in the best available data. Policy should not be overly restrictive, potentially harming economic interests when bycatch does not have a substantial negative impact. Representative McCabe's point was noted - that all fisheries experience some level of bycatch unless occurring on spawning beds. Regarding a chum cap in the Bering Sea, regulations should not penalize fisheries with minimal influence on Western Alaska chum. Instead, targeted actions should focus on areas where reductions would be most effective. Developing policy requires balancing regulatory, scientific, and strategic objectives, and while efforts are progressing, the framework is not yet ready for full implementation.

[11:06:52 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES noted to committee members that several people were available online to help with questions and facilitate discussions.

[11:07:08 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON noted that Representative McCabe's earlier question highlights why this issue should not be front and center in the legislature; it is too complex and highly specialized. Navigating even a single committee would take days, not to mention multiple committees needed to advance legislation to the governor's office. However, this does not mean the legislature should remain a silent bystander. While passing policy through the legislature would be difficult due to competing interests, legislators still have a role in advocating on behalf of their constituents. Bycatch is not only a regulatory challenge but also an economic issue. It affects industry participants as well as subsistence fishers who rely on the same ecosystem. This economic impact should not be

overlooked. Additionally, the Department of Public Safety created the "AKTIPS" app to allow casual users to report crimes or suspicious behavior via their phones. Traditional websites are becoming less effective for public engagement, and an app could be a valuable tool for tracking bycatch data. Widely distributing an app would make information more accessible and encourage participation. Finally, while significant work is being done, much of it remains unnoticed in the legislative process. Representative Edgmon said he recognizes that he has more to learn, but broader public awareness of the Advisory Council's efforts would be beneficial. Whether through an app or another means, increasing visibility would help ensure that ongoing progress is recognized and appreciated.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that an app would be a great idea.

[11:10:39 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE asked Commissioner Vincent-Lang whether he knew who Canfisco was.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that he did not know.

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that this question was asked at a bycatch advisory taskforce meeting since the chair is the vice president of governmental affairs at Canfisco, which he said is a huge Canadian trawl company with more than a dozen owned trawlers and several more that were co-owned. He said he has received word that the chair, whom Commissioner Vincent-Lang appointed to the bycatch advisory taskforce has a huge interest in the trawl fishery.

[11:11:38 AM](#)

MS. KOZAK said that Megan O'Neil is the new chair, and she was recently elected to the body by the body. She said that Canfisco is primarily a salmon company in Alaska and to her knowledge, no trawl vessels were allowed to be foreign owned. She said that Ms. O'Neil could provide an overview of Canfisco operations including Bristol Bay and Kodiak.

[11:12:56 AM](#)

MEGAN O'NEIL, Chair, Alaska Bycatch Advisory Council, noted that there are tiers of ownership and as plants have been purchased, many have not been renamed. She said that there is not any

ownership in any vessels, although they purchase trawl caught fish at the plant in Kodiak.

[11:13:54 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that Google says differently and maybe it was subsidiaries of Canfisco that own the vessels. He said that they have partial or full ownership in more than a dozen trawlers. He said that he is responding to e-mails from his constituents and the concerns that the chair of a bycatch advisory taskforce had interests in a foreign owned fishing fleet.

CHAIR STUTES suggested that Ms. O'Neil send in information to the committee to clarify the ownership.

[11:15:16 AM](#)

MS. O'NEIL said that she can submit this information. She said that while they are a Canadian company, there was no Canadian ownership of vessels.

[11:15:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MCCABE said that this alludes to previous discussions regarding recusals prior to discussion of issues in which a speaker has conflict. He said that there is possibly a major trawl influence in a bycatch advisory council.

[11:16:08 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES said that this is a reason why conflict of interest related bills were important.

[11:16:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE HIMSCHOOT added that Canfisco also owns the Yakutat plant and was a good addition. She said that Ms. O'Neil is a Petersburg grown expert. Regarding slide 22 and the State of Alaska bycatch policies, she asked whether other states had similar policies and how one policy would be developed to consider the various industry nuances.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG responded that federal fisheries operate under national standards and guidelines, which mandate that bycatch should be reduced to the extent practicable. The question is whether Alaska should follow these federal

guidelines or develop a more state-specific approach. Other states' policies are being reviewed as part of this process. However, at the federal level, bycatch is not prohibited but rather managed with the goal of minimization. The effort now is to piece these elements together and determine the most effective approach for Alaska.

[11:18:24 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES noted that the discussion highlighted the importance of verifying information and addressing issues based on science rather than speculation. The Advisory Board's role in distinguishing fact from misinformation was acknowledged as invaluable. Ms. Kozak was specifically thanked for her time, especially as she transitions into retirement. Appreciation was also given for the suggestion to invite Jordan Head to speak at the fisheries committee, an idea Chair Stutes said she would pursue.

[11:19:52 AM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG thanked Ms. Kozak for her efforts and said she has done a remarkable job.

CHAIR STUTES echoed Commissioner Vincent-Lang's comments.

[11:20:31 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE EDGMON circled back to slide 22. He said the idea of establishing a permanent bycatch advisory entity was revisited, with two possible approaches outlined. One option is to formalize it through statute, ensuring long-term protection and standing. The other is to integrate it within the department, which would allow flexibility but may not provide the same level of security or authority. Given the ongoing nature of bycatch management, it was acknowledged that the issue will persist, evolving alongside scientific advancements. Support was expressed for creating a lasting framework, and the possibility of further discussion offline was mentioned to explore additional thoughts on implementation.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that he acknowledges its importance and intends to maintain it for as long as he serves as commissioner. However, he said Representative Edgmon was correct that a future commissioner could decide otherwise. That said, he said he expects the pressure to address bycatch will remain just as strong, ensuring that an advisory task force

continues in some form. He recommended allowing ADF&G to sustain this effort, but if it falters down the line, there would still be an opportunity to formally establish it.

[11:21:51 AM](#)

CHAIR STUTES discussed the upcoming committee scheduling and agenda.

[11:22:17 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 11:22 a.m.