

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

May 7, 2025

3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair
Senator Forrest Dunbar
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Robert Myers

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Matt Claman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 161

"An Act relating to the use of certain trawl or dredge fishing gear in state water; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 161

SHORT TITLE: PROHIBIT BOTTOM TRAWLING

SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) CRONK

04/09/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/09/25	(S)	RES, FIN
05/07/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR MIKE CRONK, District R
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SB 161.

DAVE STANCLIFF, Staff
Senator Mike Cronk
Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented the sectional analysis and gave a presentation on SB 161.

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 161.

JULIE DECKER, President
Pacific Seafood Processors Association (PSPA)
Wrangell, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 161.

JULIE BONNEY, Executive Director
Alaska Groundfish Data Bank (AGDB)
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 161.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:30:43 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Myers, Kawasaki, Dunbar, Hughes, and Chair Giessel. Senator Wielechowski arrived thereafter.

SB 161-PROHIBIT BOTTOM TRAWLING

[3:31:26 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 161 "An Act relating to the use of certain trawl or dredge fishing gear in state water; and providing for an effective date."

[3:32:19 PM](#)

SENATOR MIKE CRONK, District R, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, paraphrased the sponsor statement for SB 161:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Sponsor Statement for SB 161

"An Act relating to the use of certain trawl or dredge fishing gear in state water; and providing for an effective date."

In 2021, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) prohibited all chinook and chum salmon fishing on the Yukon River due to the catastrophically low salmon populations. In 2024, this regulation evolved into a seven-year, international moratorium on all chinook salmon fishing.

Due to the mismanagement and overharvesting of our fish, the dozens of communities along the Yukon cannot subsist on salmon, as they have done for hundreds of generations. This same phenomenon is not just exclusive to up-river communities; several fisheries in 2024 were forced to close in Kodiak due to the levels of bycatch by salmon and pollock trawlers. Over 2,000 chinook salmon were caught as bycatch and discarded, which jeopardized the careful, sustainable management of the declining chinook population.

[3:32:49 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK continued to paraphrase the sponsor statement for SB 161:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Article VIII of the Constitution of the State of Alaska dictates that the State of Alaska utilize its marine resources for the maximum benefit and common use of the people, and to maintain the sustained yield of fish and all other replenishable resources.

Over the past few decades, however, the destructive commercial practice of bottom trawling has led to Alaska's fish being depleted for the maximum benefit of trawlers at the expense of rural communities.

SB 161 puts an end to bottom trawling in state waters beginning in 2028 and directs ADF&G to study and report to the legislature on the effects of bottom trawling, the condition of Alaska's seafloor, and the quantity of bycatch by species taken by bottom trawl and dredge fishing gear.

Fishing should be an activity for all Alaskans - commercial fishers, subsistence fishers, and sport fishers alike. Unfortunately, this will never be the case so long as bottom trawling is permitted in our

waters. I strongly urge your support for SB 161 so that all Alaskans can benefit from our fish resources.

SENATOR CRONK acknowledged that the State of Alaska cannot control what occurs in federal waters but emphasized its control over state waters. He stated that inadequate conservation initiatives have also played a part in jeopardizing the associated constitutional principles. Communities around the state are feeling the effects of the state's mismanaged fish resources. He opined that subsistence use is a low priority when considering the use of fishery resources. He pointed out that subsistence users are the first barred from fishing when salmon returns become dangerously low. However, fisheries using bottom trawl gear are left open - despite collecting tens of thousands of salmon as bycatch and destroying the sea floor. He emphasized the negative impact this has on vulnerable salmon populations as well as Alaska's commercial fisheries.

SENATOR CRONK opined that SB 161 is simple and said it is a starting point that can lead to the necessary critical fishery reforms. He acknowledged that these changes could negatively impact some scallop and shrimp fisheries. He said that is not the intention. He stated that SB 161 is not perfect; however, it will give Alaskans the chance to voice their concerns related to these fishing practices.

[3:35:10 PM](#)

DAVE STANCLIFF, Staff, Senator Mike Cronk, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, presented the sectional analysis for SB 161:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Sectional Analysis for SB 161

"An Act relating to the use of certain trawl or dredge fishing gear in state water; and providing for an effective date."

Section 1:

Amends AS 16.10 by adding a new section that prohibits bottom trawling in Alaska State waters.

Section 2:

Amends the uncodified law of the State of Alaska and directs the Department of Fish and Game to:

- Conduct a comprehensive study on the impacts of bottom trawling of Alaska's seafloor and marine wildlife,
- Provide numerical data on bycatch, by species, taken over the last 10 years,
- Recommend to the Legislature on whether bottom trawling and dredging equipment should be prohibited or limited for sustained fishery resource yield and the maximum benefit of the people of Alaska.

Section 3:

Provides an effective date of January 1, 2028, for Section 1 of this Act.

Section 4:

Provides an immediate effective date for Sections 2 and 3 in this Act.

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MR. STANCLIFF began a presentation on SB 161. He advanced to slide 2:

[Original punctuation provided.]

About Bottom Trawling

Bottom Trawling:

- Is a fishing method where large, weighted net is dragged along the seafloor.
 - Is often used to catch groundfish and other species that live near the seafloor.
- Leads to a substantial amount of bycatch - species that were not intended to be harvested and are often subsequently discarded.

- In Alaska, common bycatch species are halibut and chinook salmon.
- Is very effective at harvesting massive amounts of fish but is devastating to our seafloor and marine life.

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MR. STANCLIFF advanced to slide 3, containing an infographic to illustrate the seafloor before and after bottom trawling:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The Impacts of Bottom Trawling - Before and After

IMPACTS:

- Serial resource depletion
- Damage to seafloor integrity and habitats, leading to changes in fish distribution
- Changing the balance of species abundance
- Disrupting biogeochemical cycles and compounding eutrophication
- Reducing carbon sequestration rates

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MR. STANCLIFF advanced to slide 4, containing images and a sonograph of the seafloor:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Bottom Trawling Before and After

Bottom Trawling: Before & After

(A) Bottom photographs showing seafloor before (left) and after (right) bottom trawling has occurred on deep-sea coral gardens on the continental slope off Norway. Note in photo on right the elongated trawl mark on the seafloor, resulting from dragging trawl doors.

(B) Side scan sonograph showing elongated and curved tracks made by bottom trawl boards on the seabed of Moreton Bay, Australia. Light-toned areas are elongate trains of sand dunes.

Source: (A) Photos from UN Environment/GRID-Arendal, Norway. (B) Image from Geoscience Australia.

[3:39:04 PM](#)

MR. STANCLIFF moved to slide 5, containing an image of a docked fishing vessel with a red "X":

[Original punctuation provided.]

Fishery Closure: Kodiak

- Last year, two bottom trawlers accidentally caught over 2,000 chinook salmon while fishing for pollock.
- This led to the emergency closure of the Gulf of Alaska pollock trawl fishery on September 25th, 2024.
- Chinook (king) salmon runs continue to decline around Alaska.

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MR. STANCLIFF advanced to slide 6:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Fishing Closure: Yukon River

- Once strong Chinook and Chum populations in the Yukon River are now at dangerously low levels.
- In 2021, state regulations prevented all salmon fishing in the Yukon River.
- In 2024, a joint agreement between the U.S. and Canada agreed to a 7-year closure of all salmon fishing in the Yukon, including subsistence fishing.
- Individuals and communities who have subsisted on Yukon salmon for thousands of years can no longer fish in their ancestral waters.

- NOAA data shows that, of the 32,000+ chinook salmon taken as bycatch in 2020, 18,195 (56.4 percent) were from western Alaska stocks - almost all of which were caught by bottom trawlers.

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MR. STANCLIFF advanced to slide 7:

[Original punctuation provided.]

What SB 161 Will Accomplish

Section 1:

- Bans the use, employment, and operation of bottom trawling or dredging gear in Alaska state waters on January 1st, 2028. (Sec. 3)

Section 2:

- Directs ADF&G to study and report, by Jan 1, 2027, to include:
 - How Alaska's fish resource has been affected by bottom trawling,
 - The quantities of bycatch, by species, over the past 10 years,
 - Recommendations on whether bottom trawling should be banned or regulated for:
 - The maximum benefit of the people of Alaska,
 - The continued, sustained use yield of Alaska's fish resource.

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MR. STANCLIFF concluded his presentation. He noted that this is basic information that will benefit those who are unfamiliar with bycatch and trawling.

[3:41:20 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL commented that covering introductory information is helpful for the public.

[3:41:26 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR referred to slide 5 and asked whether the bottom trawlers involved in the fishery closures were fishing in state waters.

MR. STANCLIFF answered that he does not have this information. He offered to follow up with that information.

[3:42:10 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR referred to slide 6 and asked what percentage of the 18,165 fish from western Alaskan stocks were caught in state waters.

MR. STANCLIFF deferred the question.

[3:43:05 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked whether some trawlers would be compliant if SB 161 were to pass.

[3:43:36 PM](#)

MR. STANCLIFF replied that mid-zone trawls may be excluded. He emphasized the ecosystem damage caused by bottom trawling and indicated that other states and countries have banned this practice. He stated that species that depend on the ecosystem disappear when the ecosystem is destroyed; it is very difficult to build the species back without the necessary environment to support that growth. He emphasized the question of whether this practice should be allowed to continue in state waters. He reiterated that there is a mid-zone trawl that is mostly off the sea bottom.

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SENATOR MYERS asked what species of fish trawl fisheries target. He wondered if there are other fishing methods that could replace bottom trawling.

[3:45:09 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK answered that bottom trawling targets many species, including pollock, rock fish, halibut, salmon, among others. He stated that SB 161 is concerned with the overall impact of bottom trawling on the sea floor.

[3:45:49 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS wondered whether there are less harmful ways to harvest those species. He directed his question to upcoming invited testifiers.

[3:46:02 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked why the changes made by SB 161 would not go into effect until 2028.

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SENATOR CRONK said that the delay would give the industry and ADF&G time to make necessary changes and perform any assessments. He added that Legislative Legal Services indicated that an immediate closure of the fisheries would be unconstitutional.

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SENATOR HUGHES directed attention to referred to the fiscal note from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), OMB Component Number 2171, dated May 3, 2025. She commented that this fiscal note is primarily associated with research costs. She briefly discussed the use of a Camsled, which can observe damage done to the sea floor. She commented on the connection between disturbed habitat and disturbed seafloor. She asked if any of the necessary research may be available from other sources, thus decreasing potential costs.

[3:47:21 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK shared his understanding that some research does already exist. He added that there are other avenues to reach these goals. He emphasized that SB 161 is a baseline and indicated that changes are welcome. He said researchers have been evaluating this issue for a significant amount of time and that research should be available.

[3:47:47 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI read from the fiscal note from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), OMB Component Number 2171, dated May 3, 2025, which defines a Camsled as, "an aluminum superstructure with cameras that is towed across the seafloor." The Camsled would be built from scratch specifically for the study and would assess whether bottom trawling causes damage to the seafloor. He noted that, according to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), half of federal waters already prohibit bottom trawling and one-third strictly regulate trawl gear. He pointed out that Alaska is one state that does not regulate trawl gear and asked why.

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SENATOR CRONK opined that money is the primary reason. He stated that trawling is a billion-dollar business. He further opined that, while Alaska is a commercial fishing state, the subsistence fishery should be the priority. He noted that some coastal communities are part of the Community Development Quota program (CDQ), which creates financial incentive. He suggested that the CDQ funding controls an agenda. He stated that his

priority is to ensure that the resource is protected. He opined that the State of Alaska needs to refocus on this priority.

[3:49:11 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI expressed appreciation for SB 161 and recalled Yukon River bycatch rates for Chinook salmon at roughly 140,000 per year before those fisheries were strictly regulated. He expressed concern about those numbers and the impact that had on subsistence fisheries. He indicated that it is not surprising that those fisheries have been closed for the past five years. He asked how other countries manage trawl fishing bans. He also asked where the United States ranks with respect to its trawl protections compared to other countries.

[3:50:08 PM](#)

MR. STANCLIFF replied that they are beginning to research how other countries handle the environmental concerns while maintaining industry health. He opined that this is the balance most would like to see. He surmised that the United States (excluding Alaska) has a very conservative approach to the use of trawl equipment when compared to other countries and offered examples to illustrate this point.

[3:50:58 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI referred to a Yale study that distinguished countries that protected against trawling and those that do not. He recalled that the United States is near the bottom of the list - and surmised that Alaska is also near the bottom compared to other states. He reiterated his appreciation for SB 161 and emphasized the importance of giving attention to the environmental issues. He expressed hope that the fisheries can be turned around before it is too late.

[3:51:30 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL referred to slide 4 and asked if the countries represented in the images (Norway and Australia) ban trawling. She asked for additional information regarding the images and the actions each country has taken with respect to trawling.

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MR. STANCLIFF suggested that, based on the image quality, the photographs may be old. He said he does not know what impact (if any) the images may have had on the practice of trawling in either country. He shared his belief that the availability of the images is an indication that trawling policies likely changed in those countries as a result; however, he reiterated that he does not know with certainty.

CHAIR GIESSEL said it would be interesting and informative to have that information. She pointed out that Norway is highly dependent upon its fisheries. She noted various historical advisory councils related to bycatch and asked whether a trawl ban was one of the recommendations put forth by those groups.

[3:53:11 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK replied that he does not know.

CHAIR GIESSEL indicated that the commissioner of Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) may be able to answer this question.

[3:53:19 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES asked if statutory change is needed or if these changes could be made by the Board of Fisheries.

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MR. STANCLIFF shared his understanding that this could potentially be implemented by the Board of Fisheries; however, he opined that concern, testimony, and the search for solutions combined with the associated statutory change would be a clear statement of legislative support. He further opined that this would make it easier for the department to implement those changes. He acknowledged that the commissioner could close a fishery via an emergency order, if needed; however, SB 161 is considering long-term changes. He briefly commented that disallowing bottom trawling could potentially provide carbon credits and indicated that this could be worth losing out on the harvest of fisheries resources.

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SENATOR HUGHES commented that fisheries can at times be a fierce political battle. She expressed understanding that the commissioner may desire to have the legislature weigh in on the issue. With respect to alternative fishing methods, she stated that there are different methods to catch all manner of fish. She surmised that bottom trawling is chosen because it is extremely efficient. She noted that most trawling occurs in federal waters. She wondered what it would cost per vessel to alter the fishing method.

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SENATOR CRONK replied that he does not know what the cost would be.

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MR. STANCLIFF added that there have been efforts in the industry to develop less damaging gear for use when sea floor contact is necessary. He suggested that industry experts involved in those efforts may be able to provide a more detailed answer related to costs.

[3:57:04 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL commented that there is also discussion about mining the sea floor for minerals, which would be even more disruptive to the sea floor.

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CHAIR GIESSEL announced invited testimony on SB 161.

[3:57:54 PM](#)

DOUG VINCENT-LANG, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Anchorage, stated that SB 161 does not apply to federal fisheries (which are responsible for most trawling in Alaska). This legislation would close fisheries in state waters that use trawl and dredge gear that the department has determined makes substantial contact with the sea floor. He reiterated that federal fisheries that use the same gear in federal waters would remain open. He noted that SB 161 does not define "substantial bottom contact with the sea floor." He pointed out that several fisheries in state waters use trawl and dredge gear that have some amount of bottom contact and could therefore be subject to closure under SB 161: the state parallel bottom and pelagic trawl ground fish fisheries; a dredge scallop fishery across Alaska; bottom trawl Pacific cod fishery in the Aleutian Islands; Dean trawl shrimp fisheries in Prince William Sound and Yakutat; and the pelagic trawl and pollock fishery in Prince William Sound. He stated that recent declines in salmon, crab, halibut, and other fish stocks have raised concerns regarding the impacts of trawling. He noted specific concerns related to bycatch and trawl gear used in pollock fisheries and the potential unobserved mortality of crab and herring in the Bering Sea.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that it is important to distinguish between bottom trawl and pelagic trawl. Bottom trawl is designed to catch fish at or near the sea floor. Pelagic trawl is designed to fish higher off the bottom and are designed to target a particular fish which may, at times, contact the bottom of the sea floor. He stated that the best available data indicate that bottom trawl fisheries have a greater impact on

sea floor habitats than pelagic trawls. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC), and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have closed large areas of the ocean off to bottom trawling to minimize its impact.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG went on to say that some key species (e.g. scallops) can only be fished with bottom fishing gear. He stated that pelagic trawls fishing for Alaskan pollock often fish near or in close contact with the sea floor. However, the extent of that contact - and its impacts on various species - is unknown. He stated that those data gaps are concerning to Alaskan and (to some extent) the department. The trawl industry is addressing those gaps under the direction of ADF&G and NMFS. Industry is developing a gear industry, alongside an assessment of how much contact each gear type has with the sea bottom. In addition, the industry is developing best management practices for the inventory that would minimize bottom contact. He indicated that the progression timeline of this project is satisfactory, and an update to NPFMC is expected in June. Some advocates would like to see further research and/or a prohibition on trawl and dredge gear (as in SB 161).

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stated that advocates for further research and/or a prohibition on trawl and dredge gear believe that this gear poses a threat to Alaska's sea floor habitat and that bycatch is contributing to poor returns of keystone species across the state. Conversely, industry stakeholders and trawl fishery participants consider trawling to be a sustainable and effective fishing method that provides thousands of jobs and benefits coastal communities statewide. He stated that fishermen and fishery managers utilize sustainable ecosystem approaches that effectively guard against overfishing in protected, at-risk habitats. He stated that a 2023 review by the NPFMC and NMFS of essential fish habitats of Alaska's fish and small fish species determined that the negative effects of fishing on essential fish habitats are minimal and temporary.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stated that more can be done to improve available information that will help understand and address the impacts of pelagic trawling on the sea floor. He stated the need to prioritize efforts to more precisely estimate the amount of sea floor contact - and determine the consequences for sensitive habitats and benthic species such as crabs and halibut. He clarified that he is not stating that pelagic trawls should never touch the sea bottom; however, negative impacts

must be reduced in sensitive areas. He listed several areas that have notable pelagic trawl fisheries - and that are already closed to bottom trawling. This includes various crab fisheries.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stated that all fisheries have some degree of by-catch, as it is nearly impossible to avoid. He said by-catch is a contributing factor; however, it does not appear to be the greatest contributing factor leading to low-productivity in important Alaskan fisheries. He briefly discussed a variety of potential causes, including changing ocean conditions. He emphasized the need for continued research alongside efforts to minimize by-catch.

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SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI joined the meeting.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG highlighted actions currently underway to address by-catch and the potential, unintended consequences of trawl gear on sea floor ecosystems in need of protection. He said that the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) is addressing bycatch of species important to Alaska and the US. He briefly described that process. He said NPFMC initiated and adopted several actions in response to bycatch concerns. He noted the continued and ongoing analyses of salmon bycatch and offered examples.

[4:04:45 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that in February 2025 NPFMC reviewed the second draft of the chum salmon bycatch Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). This will provide scientific data upon which to base fisheries changes. The final statement is scheduled for December 2025. He briefly discussed various bycatch studies and adaptive regulations. He stated that, in 2021, Governor Dunleavy established the Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force. He briefly discussed establishing the Bycatch Advisory Council in 2023. He indicated the importance of utilizing the final reports of such councils.

[4:06:03 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG briefly discussed the recommendations for management to reduce bycatch. This includes protection of the Gulf of Alaska tanner crab, authorization for electronic monitoring of state-managed fisheries, and development of abundance-based management for halibut bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska. He provided several additional examples of areas of continued research. He briefly described the advisory council's

current focus, which includes developing safe engagement recommendations to identify additional ways to engage with the public regarding bycatch. He briefly described the various ways the advisory council will continue to engage with the public on this issue. He stated that ADF&G will continue to take the lead on addressing these issues through the advisory council process and working to implement the recommendations of the Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force (ABRT).

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG turned his comments to the impacts of trawl gear on the sea floor habitat. He briefly discussed research that can inform the Department's understanding of those impacts and inform subsequent management decisions. He provided several examples of research and potential solutions, including research related to reducing the impact of trawl cables on the sea floor. He stated that the advisory council is evaluating whether further protections are needed for tanner crab. He reiterated that the advisory council is focused on gear modifications that would reduce the impacts of mid- and bottom-trawls. He stated that research is underway that would inform potential actions, and the industry is positioned to identify techniques to utilize innovations to reduce bottom contact and minimize the impact of pelagic trawl gear in sensitive areas. He noted that the research is a cooperative effort between Alaska Pacific University Fisheries, the Aquatic Science and Technology Lab, and the Pollock Trawl --. He said this research will provide information regarding whether pelagic trawl gear makes significant bottom contact with the sea floor.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG opined that the best path forward is for industry to lead the way, identifying verifiable techniques for using gear innovations to minimize contact with the sea floor in sensitive areas. He stated that the industry has the knowledge and experience needed to make these decisions. He compared this to asking those in the sport fishery how best to reduce catch-and-release mortality. He stated that his goal is to work with the trawl industry and other effected fishery participants using a science-based approach to find effective, enforceable solutions. The Alaska Bycatch Review Task Force shares this goal and recommends agency and industry collaborations to develop gear modifications for improved bycatch management.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG stated that industry representatives agree that the effort must produce results and solutions within a reasonable amount of time. The urgency is partly driven by the

need to decrease crab mortality and increase successful recruitment to bring health back to affected fisheries. He stated that, if industry-led efforts fail, management agencies will act. He said that a broader goal is to manage fisheries with science and ensuring management approaches are sustainable. He stated that Alaskans expect and deserve nothing less. He acknowledged that ADF&G is deeply concerned about the poor salmon returns in coastal western Alaskan systems. He stated that this results in fishery restrictions and closing - which impacts food security, subsistence, and cultural activities. He has heard from the communities about the impact this has had. He reiterated his concern and understanding about the negative impact fishery closures have on Alaskans.

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said there are gaps in the data related to the impacts of trawl gear on the sea floor. He added that there is room for further research and discussion on this topic. He stated that the research required by SB 161 would not be possible within the required timeframe. He added that many types of fishing gear have significant bottom contact and offered examples. He stated that there is little information available to assess the impact of that gear. He stated that SB 161 bypasses the existing Board of Fisheries process, mandating the closure of certain fisheries. This could have unintended impacts on industry participants, stakeholders, and the economy. He noted that, while the topic may be more appropriately addressed at the board level, the decision is ultimately within the purview of the legislature.

[4:11:43 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR repeated his earlier questions. He asked whether the bycatch on slides 5-6 is occurring in state waters. He recalled Commissioner Vincent-Lang's statement that bottom trawling is more damaging than pelagic or mid-level trawling. He asked whether there is more salmon bycatch for bottom trawl versus mid-level or pelagic trawls.

[4:12:47 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said that a mid-level trawl can have a greater salmon bycatch than a bottom trawl. Bycatch from bottom trawls is generally more bottom-dwelling species (e.g. crab, halibut, and rockfish). He said it is a catch-22, because moving trawl gear up off the bottom could increase the salmon bycatch. He recalled 2024 advisory board deliberations in Cordova regarding salmon bycatch in Prince William Sound. At that time, the board was considering the question of whether to limit trawl gear in Prince William Sound. However, the unique shape of the

bottom of the sound meant that trawl gear was not making contact. The realization that the trawl gear was higher in the water raised concerns about Chinook salmon bycatch. The board decided to cap the allowable bycatch of salmon in that fishery (rather than close the fishery).

[4:14:19 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked what gear could be used in place of trawl gear.

[4:14:34 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that some species could be fished using pot gear or long-line gear; however, it is difficult to reach the same catch volume. He said the department does not want to eliminate the gear type, but rather wants to encourage responsible usage that reduces ecosystem impact and bycatch. He said significant progress has been made toward this goal.

[4:15:16 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI noted the advisory council did not advise eliminating trawling. He briefly discussed how various countries have restricted or banned trawling because of sea floor damage. He wondered whether the advisory committee did not discuss a trawl restriction - or if it was discussed and the committee decided against it - and why.

[4:16:07 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG shared his understanding that the advisory committee did discuss a complete ban on trawl gear. He recalled concerns related to differential impacts depending on how and where the gear is fished. He stated that the committee did not feel a "one-size-fits-all" approach was appropriate until additional research was conducted to discover more responsible ways to fish with trawl gear (including a reduction in bycatch).

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SENATOR KAWASAKI pointed out that there are dozens of studies on the impacts of midwater and bottom trawling that highlight the damage caused to the ecosystem. He asked why this is not discussed more in advisory council meetings. He emphasized that ADF&G is responsible for maintaining fish and game habitat and noted that ADF&G has not addressed this issue.

[4:17:22 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that ADF&G closes trawling in sensitive areas as they are identified. Where the habitat is more robust and/or bycatch is lower, the fishery gear type is not closed. He reiterated that the focus is primarily on how to responsibly fish trawl gear.

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SENATOR HUGHES asked whether there is technology under development that could address this problem while allowing trawl fishing to continue. For example, autonomous amphibious units with sensors that could be attached to the nets and notify the vessel of sensitive habitat.

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COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied yes. He explained that many types of new technology exist that could be used. He stated that a trawl fisherman does not want to make significant bottom contact because this can result in lost gear. He said that in most cases, there is one salmon to 10,000 pollock. He stated that pollock fisheries make every effort to reduce salmon bycatch, as this reduces their ability to catch their target species. He stated that pollock fishermen dedicate significant resources to determining best management practices to decrease bottom contact. He reiterated that there is a great deal of research and offered examples.

[4:19:57 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked how many boats are in the fishery and how ADF&G is monitoring bycatch.

[4:20:20 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG answered that there are around 100 vessels. The annual economic value is around \$8 million. He said he does not have bycatch numbers solely for the state-managed fisheries, as they are parallel fisheries that intermix with the federal fisheries. He said he would work to provide this.

[4:20:46 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that federal waters require onboard or electronic monitoring (for bycatch). He asked about similar requirements in state waters.

[4:20:59 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG said the river program is the only method available for observing trawl fisheries. He stated that federal waters require electronic monitoring and many who fish in state waters also participate in the federal fishery (and

therefore already have electronic monitoring equipment on their vessels). The Bycatch Advisory Council wanted to explore electronic monitoring as an option; however, legislative action is needed for the board to require the use of the electronic monitoring equipment in state waters. He explained that recent legislation that would have allowed the Bycatch Advisory Council to require electronic monitoring failed to pass. He explained that there are discussions underway to require electronic monitoring in the Prince William Sound fishery.

[4:22:16 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR asked whether there are trawlers that fish exclusively in state waters - or if all trawlers fishing in state waters also fish in federal waters.

[4:22:49 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that he does not have exact numbers and estimated that the majority of the pollock and cod fisheries are fishing both federal and state waters. He surmised that some scallop and shrimp fisheries may be solely in state waters.

[4:23:11 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK posed a hypothetical related to fishing on the Copper River. He asked what the consequences would be for tossing small fish back into the river.

[4:23:35 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG replied that the consequence depends on the regulations. He explained that if there is mandatory retention in place, throwing fish over the side would merit a citation. He explained that trawl vessels are subject to citations in this case. He noted that electronic monitoring would make observing this easier.

[4:24:06 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK asked if Commissioner Vincent-Lang would agree that waste is waste.

[4:24:14 PM](#)

COMMISSIONER VINCENT-LANG agreed and explained that the Bycatch Advisory Task Force is working to ensure full utilization of the product.

[4:25:07 PM](#)

JULIE DECKER, President, Pacific Seafood Processors Association (PSPA), Wrangell, Alaska, read from the following written testimony and added occasional comments:

[Original punctuation provided.]

**Pacific Seafood Processors Association (PSPA)
Invited Testimony
Alaska Senate Resources Committee
May 7, 2025**

Madame Chair, Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about SB 161. For the record, my name is Julie Decker. I am the President of the Pacific Seafood Processors Association, or PSPA, and I live in Wrangell.

PSPA is comprised of major seafood processing companies that purchase fish from fishermen and process it in 23 Alaska communities - communities in SE, PWS, Cook Inlet, Kodiak, the Aleutians and Bristol Bay. These processors rely on almost every fishery, harvested by almost every gear type. The health of commercial fisheries and the seafood industry is critical to Alaska, as it generates \$5 - \$6 billion in economic activity in Alaska annually, creates 48,000 direct jobs, is the state's largest manufacturer, and helps reduce shipping rates, for all Alaskans, due to the volume of seafood shipped from the state every year. It is the primary economic driver in many of our coastal communities.

PSPA opposes SB 161, which would prohibit certain gear types that harvest scallops, shrimp, pollock, and Pacific cod in state waters. This bill will directly harm Alaska fishermen, processors, and communities, rather than manage fishery impacts. Although PSPA opposes SB 161, we recognize and appreciate that the bill sponsor's intent is to solve a perceived problem - that certain gear types are harmful to Alaska's fisheries through bycatch and bottom-contact. However, we disagree with the approach due to the significant harm it will cause to Alaskan fishermen, processors and certainly, communities. There are better and more nuanced ways to manage fishery impacts, like bycatch

and bottom contact, than banning fisheries, **as all fisheries have bycatch, and many fisheries have bottom contact.**

[4:27:17 PM](#)

MS. DECKER continued to read from the following written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

I will briefly highlight our concerns with the bill, also provided in our written letter:

The bill assumes harm by the scallop, shrimp, pollock and cod fisheries in state waters that use trawl and dredge gear, and bans these fisheries starting in 2028, regardless of whether the referenced study of seafloor impacts is completed or supports that outcome. These are very important fisheries to the state of AK and banning them is a very significant action. Why spend the money for the study in section 2 of the bill, if the information will not be taken into consideration in the management of these fisheries? Before making a major decision, it seems you would want to collect the best information possible, then use that information in the decision-making. In addition, the study would need to not only determine the level of contact with the seafloor, but also determine whether, and to what degree, impact or harm is done by that contact.

Fishery management issues are complicated. We have noted several inaccurate statements mentioned today. My colleagues and I will go back and listen to the recording, and I personally commit to following up with each of you with accurate information.

[4:28:49 PM](#)

MS. DECKER continued to read from the following written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Fishery management issues are complicated, which is why the Alaska Legislature gave the authority to

manage the state's fisheries to the Alaska Board of Fisheries, in consultation with the Alaska Dept of Fish and Game. Over-riding the authority of the Board of Fisheries and ADFG is poor public policy and sets a harmful precedent. The Legislature confirms the Governor's appointment of the Commissioner of ADFG. The Board of Fisheries is appointed by the Governor, confirmed by the Legislature, and is informed by ADFG expertise, scientific data, and a very public process. It is difficult to imagine replicating such a process in the Legislature, through hearings or other means. The fishery issues brought forward by the bill sponsor are continually evaluated and addressed at the BOF. Others will speak in more detail about some examples.

[4:29:45 PM](#)

MS. DECKER continued to read from the following written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The bill would ban fisheries with a relatively small footprint in Alaska waters, but that are very important to these fishermen and communities. Alaska already has much of its state waters closed to trawl or dredge gear. Additionally, 61 percent of the Federal EEZ off Alaska is closed to bottom trawling. Even in the areas where bottom contact is allowed, the level of contact can vary and having contact does not convey a level of impact, in other words, whether that impact is more than minimal or temporary. All of the gear is very different, and this is something the BOF has the ability to dive into - for example, scallop dredge gear may be on the bottom 100 percent of the time, because that's where scallops live. Whereas, the shrimp beam trawl gear used in the Wrangell fishery, near the mouth of the Stikine River, may sometimes touch the bottom, however, the bottom is very muddy and constantly shifting and changing due to the outflow of the river. Therefore, any potential impact is minimal or temporary. I believe you have some written testimony from these fishermen that speak to this.

Since 2023, the Alaska seafood industry has been experiencing significant economic headwinds due to a perfect storm of national and global circumstances. Revenues have been down due to unfair competition from Russia, adjustment of seafood demand in the wake of the pandemic and inflation, and other global issues. At the same, costs are skyrocketing, including labor for seafood processors increasing 50 percent between 2021 and 2023.

[4:31:53 PM](#)

MS. DECKER continued to read from the following written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

At a difficult economic time like this, fishermen, processors and coastal communities need all fisheries to be viable. Whether fisheries are high volume or low volume, high value, or low value, they are all important and provide a mix that businesses can rely on. Diversification of fisheries and product types has been a strategy that fishermen and processors have used in order to spread costs across assets and throughout the year in order to survive.

Additionally, at a time like this, policy and regulatory stability is more important than ever. Hits produced by fishery closures, as in this bill, cannot be absorbed when profit margins are already this tight.

[4:32:33 PM](#)

MS. DECKER continued to read from the following written testimony:

[Original punctuation provided.]

The Alaska Legislature has recognized the current economic challenges through several actions over the last year to support the seafood industry, including

the creation of a Joint Legislative Seafood Task Force, which heard from many stakeholders about the challenges and potential actions the state could take to help the industry through this period. The Task Force meetings culminated in a final report with short, mid, and long-term actions recommended for the Legislature. Several of the short-term actions have been addressed through bills that are working through the process. **Closing state fisheries is directly in opposition to these other state actions meant to support the seafood industry and the communities that rely on it.**

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss SB 161.

[4:33:21 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked for recommendations to reduce trawl bycatch.

[4:33:32 PM](#)

MS. DECKER answered that the industry is working on gear modifications and provided examples. She indicated that the technology is not readily available in a commercial setting; however, efforts are underway.

[4:34:23 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether PSPA supports whatever mandates the Board of Fish may put forth.

[4:34:34 PM](#)

MS. DECKER replied that state waters and federal waters have been conflated. She explained that the state water fisheries addressed by SB 161 are relatively small compared to the scale of the federal fisheries (in both area and volume). She stated that the Board of Fish (BOF) and the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) are the appropriate bodies to address these issues in depth, as they can undertake a detailed evaluation of the process and concerns. She offered examples of the questions BOF and NPFMC can consider. She stated that those measures constitute tools that the industry can utilize, rather than instituting a ban on the fishery.

[4:35:28 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI shared his understanding that concerns related to this fishery were discussed at a recent meeting in

Cordova. He noted that, at that time, BOF did not have access to bycatch numbers. Some individuals raised concerns that in-state trawlers do not have electronic monitoring. He noted that electronic monitoring is required in federal waters; however, statutory change is necessary to make this a requirement for Alaskan waters. He asked if this is something PSPA would support.

[4:35:58 PM](#)

MS. DECKER replied that she attended the meeting in question. She recalled that the fishermen indicated a willingness to leave the monitoring equipment on. However, she stated that it is more complicated than simply using the monitoring equipment. She explained that someone needs to be available to watch the film (which is a financial investment for ADF&G). She said that PSPA would not oppose such a change; however, she emphasized that the necessary measures need to be in place.

[4:36:35 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI referred to SB 161, Section 1, which addresses "substantial bottom contact." He asked what this term means to PSPA.

[4:36:45 PM](#)

MS. DECKER answered that "significant bottom contact" needs to be defined. She wondered if he is asking what this phrase means to her.

SENATOR KAWASAKI replied yes. He said he is equally concerned about the bycatch and the habitat. He asked how Ms. Decker perceives "significant bottom contact."

MS. DECKER said this is one concern PSPA has regarding SB 161. She noted that this phrase could impact the shrimp, scallop, pollock, and cod fisheries. She said it depends on how "significant bottom contact" is defined and noted that each of those fisheries has some degree of bottom contact.

[4:37:43 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI asked what "substantial" means to Ms. Decker. He wondered whether this means "some of the time" or "50 percent of the time" when the nets are open and extended, or something different.

[4:37:57 PM](#)

MS. DECKER replied that this depends on how much of the net is touching and for how long. She said the legislature would need to determine that definition.

4:38:56 PM

JULIE BONNEY, Executive Director, Alaska Groundfish Data Bank (AGDB), Kodiak, Alaska, provided a brief overview of AGDB. She said AGDB focuses first on fishery resource sustainability and second on the health of the local community. She said that the Kodiak marketing sector works year-round to provide products to fishermen of all gear types across Southcentral Alaska.

4:40:09 PM

MS. BONNEY stated that Trawl deliveries allow those plants to operate year-round and provide markets to pulse fisheries. There are approximately 1000 to 1,500 employees per month (this number varies by season and fish volume). Most of the employees are Kodiak residents. Kodiak trawlers are primarily Alaskan family-owned catcher vessels. She briefly described the process of catching and delivering product to shoreside processing plants. Trawler size ranges from 58 feet to 124 feet; the majority are between 80-90 feet. She reiterated that the trawl industry is primarily Kodiak residents, and the fishery benefits the community of Kodiak. She stated that SB 161 would hurt Alaskans and Alaskan communities. The position of AGDB on SB 161 is aligned with that of PSPA and Aleutians East Borough (and is provided in accompanying written comment). She stated that the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) should regulate fisheries (not the legislature). Fishery management issues are complicated, and this is why the legislature gave fishery management authority to BOF. She noted misinformation related to the trawl fishery. She stated that flat fish and/or pollock cannot be caught with any other gear.

4:42:00 PM

MS. BONNEY stated that Alaska's pollock fishery is the second most valuable fishery - and the largest by volume. She stated that the Chinook salmon bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska is usually made up of hatchery fish from the Pacific Northwest (PNW) and British Columbia (BC), not Western Alaskan salmon. She stated that currents and tidal changes cause more damage to essential fish habitat than any kind of trawl gear. She stated that experts are needed to make informed decisions. She said the discussion related to SB 161 has confused state and federal fisheries. She opined that attempting to override the BOF (thus circumventing the state's regulatory process) by seeking

legislative change is inappropriate and sets a dangerous precedent. She offered an example to illustrate how BOF addresses these issues by considering a variety of solutions and choosing the best option for fishery management based on available scientific data.

[4:44:24 PM](#)

MS. BONNEY stated that, if SB 161 passes, it would override previous management changes made by BOF and close the fishery. She said SB 161 closes a fishery but does not determine a problem. She opined that the purpose of the legislation is unclear. She questioned whether the purpose is to reduce bycatch or minimize impact to the seafloor. She pointed out that bottom contact is not limited to trawl gear and added that the fishing gear addressed by SB 161 has a relatively small impact in state waters. She contrasted this with other gear that operates almost exclusively in state waters (e.g. seine gear used in the salmon fishery). She asserted that the metrics used to identify substantial bottom contact or impact are unclear. She stated that SB 161 would ban certain fisheries if the gear used has bottom contact, even if that contact has negligible impact on the sea floor and does not negatively impact any species. She pointed out bycatch is part of the required report; however, there is no nexus to understand how that bycatch would be affected if the fleet loses access to those fishing grounds. She stated that, if fishermen cannot follow cleaner fishing because of area closures, bycatch increases.

[4:46:00 PM](#)

MS. BONNEY said that SB 161 harms fishermen, processors, and communities. It also conflicts with prior legislative actions. She expressed appreciation for the efforts to stabilize the fishing industry; however, SB 161 would undo some of work that has already been done to that end.

[4:47:47 PM](#)

SENATOR MYERS noted the stated preference for the Board of Fisheries (BOF) to manage the fishery. He said that, while he supports this in principle, he has heard from concerned constituents who do not believe BOF has done its job. He emphasized that, if BOF does not adequately address the issue, the responsibility falls to the legislature. He opined that SB 161 is necessary for the legislature to consider the issue, regardless of whether the proposed changes are made.

[4:48:38 PM](#)

SENATOR DUNBAR said he does not consider salmon a bottom fish, although he encounters salmon as they transition to rivers. He noted that salmon bycatch is lower for bottom trawls than midlevel trawls. He said reducing salmon bypass was one stated purpose of SB 161 and opined that this is admirable. He asked how banning bottom trawls would improve salmon bycatch levels when mid-level trawls have a higher volume of salmon bycatch.

[4:49:29 PM](#)

SENATOR CRONK acknowledged problems with SB 161, and he is open to changes. He stated that he has had discussions with specific fishermen and does not want to harm those fisheries. He stated that this is impactful for every fishery. He acknowledged that the federal bottom trawl fishery is a bigger issue; however, it is also a concern for Alaskans. He indicated that when it becomes impossible to pass down cultural teachings because there are no fish in the river, the concern will increase. He said he does not want the legislature to manage ADF&G; however, sometimes legislation is required to make necessary changes. He opined that the Yukon River fishery would not recover. He emphasized that the legislature has put off the issue time and time again and questioned how the State of Alaska would return Chinook salmon to that river. He emphasized that immediate change is needed, or Alaskans would have to suffer the consequences. He emphasized that future generations would be left with nothing and added that the lives and culture of Alaskans is at stake. He said research and subsistence must be the top priority.

[4:51:15 PM](#)

SENATOR KAWASAKI referred to SB 161, Section 2, which includes the study from the commissioner of ADF&G. He noted that this section addresses damage to the ecosystem and opined that this is a very important issue. He further opined that the commissioner should be responsible for ecosystem and habitat concerns. He noted an earlier comment that questioned the purpose of SB 161 and opined that this legislation attempts to address both [bycatch and ecosystem damage]. He stated that he has read the scientific data that illustrates the damage bottom trawling has on the sea floor and noted that some level of impact occurs across seabed types. He applauded the sponsor of SB 161 for addressing both bycatch and ecosystem damage.

[4:51:58 PM](#)

SENATOR HUGHES applauded the sponsor of SB 161 for addressing this issue, as fisheries topics tend to be contentious. She expressed frustration that federal agencies are not addressing

this issue. She shared her understanding that the number of vessels impacted is small and most of their income is likely from trawling done in federal waters. She surmised that SB 161 would impact those vessels to a degree; however, the changes would demonstrate that this is an important issue to Alaska. She expressed concern about salmon bycatch and said the data from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) (which shows a large percentage of Chinook salmon bycatch is from Western Alaskan stock) is likely highly accurate. She opined that remaining in denial about this is not the solution and SB 161 is a step in the right direction, although it is a difficult conversation to have.

[4:53:18 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL expressed appreciation to the sponsor of SB 161 and acknowledged that fisheries issues are emotional, as they impact food, jobs, and culture. She said the Senate Resources Standing Committee has previously considered studies related to the impacts of bottom trawling. She agreed that subsistence needs to be a shared value. She shared her understanding that there is legislation to add subsistence seats to BOF and surmised that this would make a substantial impact.

[4:54:05 PM](#)

CHAIR GIESSEL held SB 161 in committee.

[4:54:31 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Giessel adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 4:54 p.m.