

Representative Dan Ortiz
Phone: 907-465-3824
Rep.Dan.Ortiz@akleg.gov

RE: Support for HB 41 – shellfish enhancement & ASMI marketing aquatic farm products

Dear Representative Ortiz,

February 11, 2021

The Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF) would like to express strong support for House Bill 41 which creates a framework to manage and develop shellfish fishery enhancement and benefits the state's economy by providing a method to increase the available harvest of shellfish in an environmentally safe manner. HB 41 will also allow for the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) to market aquatic farm products furthering the development of the new mariculture industry. This bill accomplishes two priority recommendations of the Alaska Mariculture Task Force, as a part of a larger plan to fully develop the mariculture industry in Alaska, with a goal to grow a \$100 million per year industry in 20 years.

AFDF's membership is comprised of seafood harvesters, seafood processors, and support businesses. Founded in 1978, AFDF's mission is *to identify opportunities common to the Alaska seafood industry and develop efficient, sustainable outcomes that provide benefits to the economy, environment and communities.*

One of AFDF's recent areas of work is spearheading the *Alaska Mariculture Initiative*, which is meant to expedite the development of mariculture in Alaska. As a direct result of this initiative, the **Alaska Mariculture Task Force** was established in 2016. The Task Force completed a statewide comprehensive plan in 2018 called the [Alaska Mariculture Development Plan](#) with the goal of growing a \$100 million industry in 20 years.

HB 41 has broad stakeholder support and will accomplish two priority recommendations contained within the statewide comprehensive plan. More specifically, HB 41 will accomplish the following:

- 1) allow for shellfish fishery enhancement and restoration; and
- 2) amend the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) statutes to allow (rather than prohibit) marketing of aquatic farm products.

HB 41 creates a regulatory framework with which Alaska Department of Fish & Game's (ADF&G) can manage shellfish fishery enhancement and restoration. This will allow interested stakeholders to either continue or begin enhancement and/or restoration efforts of species such as King crab, sea cucumber,



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geoduck, abalone, scallops or razor clams. Without this regulatory framework, shellfish enhancement is NOT allowed in Alaska, and development progress is halted.

As the facilitator for sustainability certification programs for the Alaska salmon fishery, AFDF has a unique viewpoint regarding concerns of the potential for negative impacts to wild shellfish from hatchery shellfish. AFDF is the Client for the Responsible Fisheries Management (RFM) and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certifications of Alaska salmon. As a part of these certifications, the ADF&G management of the salmon fishery (including salmon enhancement) is reviewed every year by independent third-party experts to determine whether it meets internationally accepted standards for sustainably managed fisheries. ***Alaska salmon is currently certified as sustainable under for the RFM and MSC programs, because ADF&G's management incorporates a precautionary approach that prioritizes wild fish and minimizes adverse impacts to wild stocks.*** ADF&G has extensive enhancement policies which protect wild stocks (e.g., genetics, release sites, marking, and disease). Given these policies, ADF&G is fulfilling its constitutional mandate to manage the State's fishery resources for sustainability. ADF&G will manage shellfish enhancement with the same constitutional mandate to protect wild stocks.

Another benefit of developing shellfish fishery enhancement is the important role that shellfish hatcheries can play in adapting to ocean changes and acidification. As shellfish hatchery techniques are developed and more is learned through research, we learn more about our abilities to mitigate the effects of ocean acidification (OA) in a hatchery setting. For example, adjusting pH levels at critical juvenile stages in a hatchery can improve survival once crabs are released into the wild. Therefore, shellfish hatcheries may play a critical role in the future by helping protect wild stocks from negative impacts of OA.

Shellfish enhancement can diversify and expand economic opportunities by increasing harvests for sport, subsistence, or commercial use. For example, during the years 2012-2017, salmon enhancement contributed approximately \$720 million in ex-vessel value and \$2.1 billion in first wholesale value to the state's economy. Similarly, shellfish enhancement could infuse the economies of Alaska communities.

AFDF believes that growth of the mariculture industry can play an important role in Alaska's economic recovery from the COVID-19 disaster, and passage of HB 41 is central to fully enabling that economic potential. After the disaster of COVID-19, Alaskans need hope and a path to economic recovery. Mariculture can be part of that economic recovery and HB 41 will help enable this potential for private investment, without requirements for state financial investment. Thank you for your sponsorship of this mariculture bill.

Sincerely,



Julie Decker, Executive Director, AFDF

Cc: AFDF Board of Directors