

Governor Sean Parnell  
P.O. Box 110001  
Juneau, Ak. 99811-0001

March 5, 2012

Dear Gov. Parnell,

I would like to take this opportunity to air my concerns with the current Board of Fisheries (BOF) process as it pertains to Cook Inlet fisheries management decisions. It is the opinion of many of us on the Kenai Peninsula that certain powerful sport fishing groups from the Soldotna area have successfully wielded their brand of lobbying and incentives into unyielding support by a majority of the BOF membership. These groups do not represent private anglers but instead lobby for regulations favorable to the guide industry, often at the expense of the commercial fishing sector, unguided anglers, and sometimes at the expense of resource and habitat conservation.

Their lobbying tactics start innocently enough with meals and drinks but most often evolve into invitations to fishing events such as the "Kenai Classic", other fishing opportunities, lodging, hunting trips, etc.. Through these interactions liaisons are formed and soon it is obvious to everyone observing the board process that certain board members are doing their bidding for them. In my opinion, there are currently four board members that fall into this group. They are Karl Johnstone, Mike Smith, Bill Brown and Tom Kluberton and they constitute a voting majority on this seven-member panel.

At the 2011 Upper Cook Inlet (UCI) meeting Mr. Johnstone and Mr. Brown refused to call on a respected retired fisheries biologist during the committee process they were presiding over because, I believe, they suspected the biologist's remarks might have been counter to these groups agenda on the issue being discussed. When the biologist asked to speak to Mr. Johnstone during a break he refused saying he wasn't interested in what he had to say because he thought the biologist was somehow disingenuous. The biologist immediately left the meeting and went back home to Kenai in disgust. Later that week, during deliberations, I overheard a spokesman for one of these groups telling Mr. Smith what he wanted him to say during discussions for the record and how he wanted him to vote on the issue currently being deliberated on. During this UCI process I discussed these issues with Mr. Hooley, of Boards and Commissions, and he is well aware of how bad it has become.

It is through these types of inappropriate influence that these groups have become the "Jack Abramoff's" of fisheries politics in this area of the state. It also appears this influence has spilled over into other relative areas of state functions as well. Recently, Ben Ellis, Director of State Parks and past Executive Director of Kenai River Sportfishing Assn. (KRSA), has appointed both the current Executive Director of KRSA, Rickey Gease and Andy Szczensny, a Kenai River guide and spokesman for KRSA, to the Kenai River Special Management Area Board (KRSMA). This board already had a heavy guide industry influence on it with the Chairman being a guide and one of the other members being the wife of a current KRSA Board of Directors member. This seems to be

another example of how well connected this group is and how effective it is in expanding its influence over fishery matters. This type of collusion should be an embarrassment to your administration and an example of abuse of power by a state official.

It is now clear to everyone that collusion has occurred and will continue without intervention from your office and your administration. I believe it is imperative and appropriate for you to replace the aforementioned BOF members when their terms expire. I would implore you to vet and seek candidates that, through their character and integrity, would be immune from these types of inappropriate influences whenever and wherever they arise.

Citizens who attend our Board of Fisheries meetings should not expect to get everything they seek from this process but they do deserve to be treated with respect and receive a fair judgment of their issues of interest.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

Respectfully Submitted,

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cc: Jason Hooley, Boards and Commissions  
Tom Wagoner, Alaska State Senate  
Mike Chenault, Alaska House of Representatives  
Paul Seaton, Alaska House of Representatives