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BOROUGH AND TRIBAL LEADERS CALL ON ALASKA ATTORNEY GENERAL TO INVESTIGATE BOARD OF FISHERIES CONFLICT OF INTEREST FOLLOWING VOTE TO DISMANTLE ALASKA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL SALMON CONSERVATION PROGRAM

ANCHORAGE, AK — The Aleutians East Borough, together with the tribal governments of the region, today called on the Alaska Attorney General's office to act on a formal ethics complaint filed against members of the Alaska Board of Fisheries leading up to a 4-3 vote that dismantled the Area M adaptive management program — the most successful in-season salmon conservation program in Alaska history.

The vote, taken at the February 18-25, 2026 Board of Fisheries meeting in Anchorage, was decided by a single margin and cast by Board Member Curtis Chamberlain, an attorney at Calista Corporation — a corporation that has publicly and repeatedly advocated for the restriction and closure of Area M fisheries for years. Two formal conflict of interest complaints documenting Chamberlain's prior public advocacy, his employer's institutional positions, and a materially false statement made on the record were entered into the meeting record as RC004 and RC139. After the Board Chair, Marit Carlson VanDort, failed to acknowledge the conflict of interest, which is substantiated by Alaska statute, a formal complaint was filed with the Alaska Attorney General's office.

The Board Chair dismissed the conflict twice. The conflict was never resolved. The Board voted anyway.

"What happened to Area M at the Board of Fisheries is what happens when politicians appoint board members who arrive at the meeting with their minds already made up. We asked them to use science to determine what tools should best be used to help the AYK chum returns. Instead, they have done nothing to help the stocks — just a repeat of board meetings over the past 40 years that will result in the continued decline of salmon returning to their systems," said Mayor Alvin D. Osterback of the Aleutians East Borough.

The Mayor continued: "The State of Alaska needs to address the conflict of interest rules for this Board before they ruin other fisheries in the state while accomplishing nothing to stop the decline in the AYK systems. Area M loses and the AYK loses because the Board of Fisheries is failing Alaska's fishermen and its fish. It's a sad day for all fishermen and their communities."

A Conservation Program That Worked — Dismantled

Since 2022, Area M fishermen have operated an adaptive management program that reduced average annual June chum harvest by 50% compared to the five-year average before the program — a 32% reduction compared to the ten-year prior average. The program earned the support of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game as well as the Commissioner. Under the program, the seine fleet voluntarily stood down an average of 291 hours of fishing time per season. In 2025, the drift fleet joined, standing down 554 hours across 28 vessels and 64 separate stand-down events. Both fleets have voluntarily given up the first fishing day of the June season every year since 2022.

The regulation passed by the Board this week — RC245 — eliminates the adaptive triggers that made this program work, replaces a data-responsive management system with a fixed calendar schedule, and compresses the available fishing window so tightly that the voluntary stand-downs that produced four years of documented conservation progress are no longer structurally possible. It also eliminates the chum harvest triggers that served as conservation backstops, leaving no automatic response mechanism tied to real-time abundance data.

“The adaptive management program worked because it was created and led by fishermen who were determined to make it succeed. They voluntarily sacrificed fishing time and real income because conservation mattered to them and they believed in the program," said Carlin Hoblet, commercial fisherman and False Pass tribal member. "This program was unlike anything else in the state, a voluntary, real-time, data-driven conservation tool developed collaboratively by fishermen, processors, biologists, and the Department itself. It took years of effort, significant financial sacrifice, and countless hours of coordination, research, and analysis to build a system that measurably reduced chum harvest in a mixed-stock fishery while preserving opportunity on abundant runs. It was working. It was praised as innovative and responsible management. The Board did not improve on it. They destroyed it. And the regulation they passed in its place will, in all likelihood, produce higher chum harvests which is the exact opposite of the stated goal. This was discussed in detail and acknowledged by Department biologists and members of the Board prior to the vote, and yet, despite their stated conservation intent, they voted to dismantle a conservation tool that was not just working; it was a success story. It’s as if Members Chamberlain, Irwin, Carlson-VanDort, and Svendsen knowingly voted to end chum conservation. Their passion for the conservation of chums is lip service only. They’re playing a game of politics now with not only the resource, but with the lives of our people.”

The Conflict of Interest

Board Member Chamberlain is employed as an attorney at Calista Corporation, which has publicly declared that ending the interception of chum salmon by the Area M fishery is among its most strategically important goals, has submitted letters to the Board of Fisheries calling the failure to restrict Area M "embarrassing," and has publicly identified Chamberlain by name as its "Voice on Subsistence Fishing," explicitly linking his Board appointment to Calista's advocacy strategy.

When asked directly on the record on February 19, 2026, whether he had ever advocated in a personal or professional capacity for closing Area M fisheries, Chamberlain answered: "No, I have not." Official state records show that on May 1, 2023, Chamberlain testified before the Alaska Senate Resources Committee as Calista's Assistant General Counsel in support of legislation specifically designed to close Area M commercial salmon fishing in June. On October 20, 2023, he addressed the Alaska Federation of Natives convention in his capacity as Calista counsel, urging policymakers to act immediately to stop intercept fisheries from capturing salmon bound for Western Alaska rivers.

The Alaska Executive Branch Ethics Act prohibits Board of Fisheries members from taking action on matters in which they have a personal or financial interest, and requires them to fully disclose all interests in fish and game organizations before taking any official action. It does not ask when an interest was formed — only whether the Board member's current actions may affect their current interests. Chamberlain remains Calista's attorney today.

Tribal Voices

The tribal governments of the Aleutians East region, whose communities depend on the Area M fishery for economic survival, public services, and the most basic infrastructure of rural Alaska life, stand united in calling for accountability.

"Our communities exist because of this fishery," said John Foster, President of the Native Village of Unga. "What the Board did was not conservation. It was politics. And it was decided by someone who should never have been allowed to cast that vote."

"The Area M fleet proved it could deliver conservation results," said Jason Bjornstad, President of the Qagan Tayagungin Tribe. "They did it voluntarily, at real cost, for four years. The Board rewarded that commitment by taking away the tools that made it possible. That is not how you build a conservation partnership."

"King Cove depends on this fishery," said Etta Kuzakin, President of the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove. "When you hurt Area M, you hurt our school, our clinic, our road, our ability to stay here. This decision had consequences for real people in real communities, and it was made by a Board that was not operating with integrity."

"The tribes of this region filed formal ethics complaints because we had no other choice," said Lynn Farr, President of the Native Village of Belkofski. "We documented everything. We put it on the record. We went to the Attorney General. We are not going away."

"This is about more than one vote," said Travis Hoblet, President of the Native Village of False Pass. "It is about whether Alaska's regulatory process can be trusted to operate free from conflicts of interest. Right now, the answer to that question is no."

"What was built in Area M over the past four years was something to be proud of," said George Gundersen, President of the Pauloff Harbor Tribe. "A fleet that stepped up, gave up income, and delivered results. The Board just voted to undo all of it. The Legislature and the Attorney General need to respond."

Call to Action

The Aleutians East Borough and the undersigned tribal governments call on:

- The **Alaska Attorney General's office** to act on the formal ethics complaint filed on February 23, 2026, and to review the legal validity of votes cast by a Board member with a documented, unresolved conflict of interest, including the 4-3 passage of RC245.
- The **Alaska Legislature** to examine the Board of Fisheries appointment and ethics process, including the absence of any cooling-off period requirement for board appointees with prior advocacy positions on matters before the board.
- The **Alaska Board of Fisheries** to take no further votes on Area M fisheries until the conflict of interest question raised in the ethics complaint is fully resolved.

About the Aleutians East Borough The Aleutians East Borough serves as the regional government in southwestern Alaska for one of Alaska's most productive fishing regions, representing communities whose economies, public services, and ways of life are directly tied to the health and management of Alaska's fisheries.