



RC55



**SOLDOTNA**  
City of Soldotna, Alaska

January 17, 2019

Chairman Reed Morisky  
Alaska Board of Fisheries  
Boards Support Section  
P.O. Box 115526  
Juneau, AK 99811

Re: Reconsideration of location of the 2020 Upper Cook Inlet Finfish Meeting

Dear Chairman Morisky and Alaska Board of Fisheries Members:

Earlier this week, we were disappointed to learn that the Alaska Board of Fisheries was reconsidering their earlier decision to hold the 2020 Upper Cook Inlet Finfish Meeting (UCI) in the Kenai / Soldotna area. We would like to encourage the board to keep its original commitment.

We have been excited about the opportunity to host this important group on the Kenai; together, the City of Kenai and the City of Soldotna have been diligently preparing for the meeting. The Cities have had several joint planning meetings to date to determine how best to effectively collaborate and position ourselves for a highly successful experience for the Board. Understanding the importance of this meeting to our community, necessary venues were reserved, which included the re-scheduling of other events that otherwise would be using those venues.

As discussed in the past, our communities are willing to provide the venues, all IT connectivity and equipment at no cost to the State, providing savings in excess of \$50,000. We have offered this because we know that it is imperative after many years of asking to be considered to host the UCI, that we provide the very best experience possible for the Board and staff. We are committed to achieving that, knowing that if we want to hold the UCI on a rotating basis, we need to demonstrate that our communities cannot only hold the event, but do it less expensively, while providing an outstanding experience that justifies your decision to add our area to the meeting rotation.

Residents in our area were particularly excited to learn that a meeting would be held here, providing an opportunity for them to have in-person access to the BOF process for UCI. As 75%-85% of the proposals made by/within the BOF affect watersheds on the Kenai Peninsula, we were pleased to be brought closer to the process. The decision to bring the BOF to the Kenai is particularly important for those who, for the last 20 years, have had to travel to Anchorage to provide testimony and/or participate in committees. Further, when they have made the decision to attend a meeting, they have gone without a specific agenda to know when they may participate in the process. As a result, Kenai Peninsula travelers have often incurred burdensome costs associated with multiple days of lodging and subsistence, in addition to transportation costs. Holding a meeting in our area gives those most affected by the BOF decisions *true* access to the process.

As Alaskans, we know that our geography often puts decision makers far away from the public they represent, which can disenfranchise the public from the legislative process. Holding every BOF meeting for the past 20 years exclusively in Anchorage, discourages important feedback that residents of the Kenai Peninsula have to offer. Public testimony is limited only to those who can afford both the flexible schedule and money to make the trip to Anchorage. The BOF process is ultimately rendered less comprehensive and effective, by the difficulties imposed upon Alaskans residing on the Kenai Peninsula. We applaud the Board's decision in March of 2018 to schedule the 2020 UCI meeting on the Kenai Peninsula, and encourage rotating the location on a periodic basis. By minimizing or eliminating input and testimony from residents on the Kenai Peninsula, the BOF is denied the knowledge of many individuals that are closest to, and most directly affected by, the fisheries and decisions made by the BOF.

The Cities of Kenai and Soldotna respectfully request that the State of Alaska Board of Fisheries maintains their original commitment to hold the 2020 Alaska Board of Fisheries Upper Cook Inlet Finfish meeting on the Kenai Peninsula.

Sincerely,

  
Paul Ostrander  
Kenai City Manager

  
Stephanie Queen  
Soldotna City Manager