

ALASKA BOARD OF FISHERIES
Board Finding Affirming
Pelagic Trawl Gear Definition and Supporting Seafloor Contact Sensors,
and Habitat Accountability in State Waters

[DATE]

[2026-XXX-FB]

WHEREAS, the Board has long recognized that Alaska's fisheries resources are foundational to the economic, cultural, and food security of Alaska's coastal communities, and that the conservation of fish habitat is inseparable from the sustainable management of those resources; and

WHEREAS, the Board's regulations define pelagic trawl gear as trawl gear that is fished in the water column and does not contact the seabed, which is a definition reflecting the fundamental operational and ecological distinction between pelagic and bottom-contact trawl gear; and

WHEREAS, the Board has previously established areas in State waters closed to bottom trawling for the purpose of protecting fish habitat, sensitive benthic communities, and spawning, rearing, and feeding areas essential to the productivity of Alaska's fisheries; and

WHEREAS, the purpose and integrity of those habitat closures depend on reliable assurance that gear operating in those areas, as pelagic trawl, is in fact not contacting the seabed; and

WHEREAS, available technologies, including seabed contact sensors and gear-monitoring devices, are commercially available and provide a practical and cost-effective means of verifying that trawl gear is operating as represented, consistent with a principle of trust-but-verify; and

WHEREAS, the Board has an obligation under the sustained-yield principle to ensure that gear classifications reflect actual fishing practices and that tools to verify intended use and operation of lawful gear keep pace with available technology and conservation needs; and

WHEREAS, the implementation of seabed contact sensors on trawl vessels operating in State waters will increase the clarity, enforceability, and sustainability of existing regulations, and should not result in a prohibition on legal fishing.

The Board makes the following findings:

1. The Board's existing regulatory definition of pelagic trawl gear as gear that does not contact the seabed is a substantive conservation standard, not merely a gear classification. Affirming and clarifying that definition advances the Board's conservation mandate and promotes consistency in how gear is characterized, operated, permitted, and managed in State waters.
2. The Board finds that seabed contact sensors or equivalent gear-verification technology as a required gear component is consistent with a principle of trust-but-verify. The Board does not presume that permit holders are misrepresenting their gear's operation, but

recognizes that the absence of an objective verification mechanism creates a data/information gap that undermines the enforcement of habitat closures and lawful gear-type regulations. Sensor technology provides an objective, documentable record of gear behavior that protects responsible operators and enables meaningful oversight.

3. The Board recognizes that state waters include critical habitat for all life stages of our diverse Alaskan marine species, critical to our state's culture, economy, and ways of life.

4. The Board finds that meaningful habitat protection necessitates implementable, effective, and cost-effective gear-verification technology.

5. The Board finds that seabed contact verification and enforcement will advance the goal of eliminating bottom contact and incidental impacts of pelagic trawl gear to non-target species and sensitive habitat. Ensuring that pelagic trawl gear is operated in compliance with the existing definition will advance conservation objectives while preserving fishing opportunities.

6. The Board finds that increased clarity in operational verification capacity promotes transparency and public confidence; improves the sustainability profile of Alaska's trawl fisheries, and provides a foundation for coordinated accountability measures between the Board, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, and relevant federal agencies consistent with the Joint Protocol Agreement between the Board and the NPFMC.

7. The Board finds that verification of gear operating standards aligns with federal priorities for fisheries data collection, bycatch reduction, and habitat impact minimization, and that Alaska has a demonstrated interest in pursuing a federal partnership that includes cost-sharing for enforcement programs. The Board notes that prior mandates imposed on Alaska fishermen have historically been funded through federal appropriations in other states but not in Alaska — an inequity previously recognized by the Board in Resolution 2008-256-FB. The Board therefore encourages the ADF&G, the Alaska Congressional Delegation, and the Governor's office to actively pursue federal funding mechanisms — including through NOAA Fisheries, legislation, and relevant appropriations processes — to offset the cost to fishing operations and management bodies, and to treat seafloor contact sensor programs as eligible components of federally supported fisheries management infrastructure.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Alaska Board of Fisheries adopts this finding affirming that the State of Alaska definition of pelagic trawl gear is intended to prevent seafloor contact by that gear, and thus enforcement of the operational intent of the definition will require implementation of seafloor contact sensor technology in State Groundfish fisheries and State Parallel Waters fisheries. It is also resolved that the Alaska Board of Fisheries will provide input to the NPFMC to express the Board's interest in the pelagic trawl gear performance standards and encourages the timely development and implementation of those standards in Federal waters. The Board will consider the performance standards established by the Council. The Board is aware that any standards developed by the Council apply to the State parallel fishery, and the Board will consider, but not be limited to, adopting those standards, provided they adhere to the

intent of the existing State of Alaska pelagic trawl gear definition and its prohibition of seabed contact.

ADOPTED this ____ day of _____, 20__.

[Chair Name], Chair
Alaska Board of Fisheries
Vote: ____