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A Statement by the Hammond Bay Area Anglers Association in support of House Bills 4567, 4568 and 4569 Commercial Fishing

by Frank Krist

To the House Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Committee

June 17, 2019

I am Frank Krist, the Vice President of the Hammond Bay Area Anglers Association. Our organization is centered in the Rogers City area along Northern Lake Huron. I would like to thank Committee Chair, Gary Howe and the other Committee Members for the opportunity to provide comments on House Bills 4567, 4568, and 4569. These Bills would amend Part 473 (Commercial Fishing) of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (NREPA).

The key to a successful relationship between commercial and recreational fishing interests has been working together and communicating regularly. The Commercial Fishing Advisory Committee provided in House Bill 4567 would allow representatives from the commercial fishing industry and the recreational fishery to meet and deal with concerns. I chair two MDNR Citizens Fishery Advisory Committees, which bring together stakeholders with many points of view. This has resulted in the public supporting difficult but needed management decisions. The Commercial Fishing Advisory Committee will be a valuable addition to the law.

An important point that generates public support for the State licensed commercial fishery in northern Lake Huron is the commercial fishery harvests non-game fish, especially lake whitefish while the recreational fishery harvests game species. This allows both fisheries to coexist while maximizing economic benefits to the surrounding communities. House Bills 4567 and 4568 specify this requirement.

A critical safety issue is the need to clearly mark and identify the location of the large commercial fishing nets. Tangling fishing equipment and anchor ropes in commercial fishing nets can capsize a boat. Experience over many decades has shown that anglers and boaters can safely maneuver around the nets if they are well marked and the location of each net is known. House Bill 4567 specifies an acceptable net marking system along with the requirement that GPS coordinates must be provided to the MDNR each time a net is set or moved. This information will then be available for posting online so that anglers and other boaters can avoid the nets.

The current commercial fishing statute is outdated, and no amendments have been added over the last 47 years. House Bills 4567, 4568, and 4569 would clarify ambiguous terms and add pertinent definitions. In addition, law enforcement procedures are described, and outdated sections have been removed or updated.

The Hammond Bay Area Anglers Association is a member of the Coalition to Protect Michigan Resources which was in the room when the 2000 Great Lakes and 2007 Inland Federal Court Consent Decrees were negotiated. These Decrees cover the northern waters of about ½ of Lakes Huron, Michigan and Superior, and the adjacent inland areas. The State, 5 Tribes and the United States are parties to these Consent Decrees and fish harvest quotas are established annually for each Tribe, the State commercial and the State recreational fisheries. House Bill 4569 would enable more effective electronic reporting of the State commercial harvest and wholesale information. If these Bills are enacted into law, it would allow the State to implement these new procedures and encourage all parties to the Great Lakes Consent Decree to also implement electronic reporting. The current Great Lakes Decree expires in 2020 and negotiations on a new agreement will begin soon. Currently, the State is converting to an electronic recreational harvest and charter boat reporting system which would work closely with the new commercial fishing reporting system and other changes outlined in these Bills.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm the Hammond Bay Area Anglers Association's strong support for House Bills 4567, 4568, and 4569 as currently proposed.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frank Krist".

Frank Krist, Vice President
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