

CSAW
Campaign to Safeguard America's Waters



Earth Island Institute

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Parnell and the Cruise Industry Throw Public Vote Overboard

Governor Parnell has introduced bills SB 29 and HB 80 to overturn a fundamental provision of the cruise ship discharge law passed by popular vote in Alaska in 2006. The initiative called for better controls on pollution, industry taxes to pay for a portion of the costs of their infrastructure, and disclosure requirements to stop cruise ship companies from blacklisting many Alaska-based businesses. Coupled to the roll back of the head tax a few years ago, a complete failure by the State to enforce the disclosure of commission rates with vendors to prevent blacklisting of Alaskan-owned shops and tours, a 1/3 decrease in the oversight of ship wastestream treatment procedures by State-hired independent observers (Ocean Rangers), the passage of these bills essentially complete the to-do list the industry gave to Governor Parnell in Miami shortly after taking office: take the “demo” out of democracy and replace it with “corpo.”

In 2009, the Alaska Legislature created a “Science Panel” to examine alternative cruise ship wastewater treatment technologies. Their report, released a month ago, could have been written the first day they convened and been five words long: don’t worry folks – everything’s fine. The Science Panel membership was heavily weighted with cruise ship representatives, and from the first meeting it was clear the industry would control the proceedings to support the status quo and steer the group away from its intended mission of objectively examining alternative treatment technologies.

The Science Panel refused to acknowledge that some types of existing treatment devices work better than others (a fact confirmed by ADEC’s own data,) combinations of existing technologies could reduce emissions below the State’s Water Quality Standards at a minimum cost to each ship, and using dilution as the solution to pollution (mixing zones) is inappropriate since multiple ships are discharging into the same waters day after day and the public won’t know if harvested seafood has been contaminated by being in the mixing zone while pollutants were discharged.

In 2010, ADEC issued a clearly illegal General Permit for cruise ship discharges. Earthjustice, on behalf of CSAW and Friends of the Earth, successfully sued the State to throw out the permit and the Superior Court ordered ADEC to issue a permit in compliance with State statute, but more than fourteen months after the decision was handed down, ADEC had still failed to take action. Finally, in August 2012, ADEC said it would issue a legal three-year permit in 2013. The industry/Governor’s plan was obvious; delay the drafting and implementation of a legal permit until the Science Panel could provide the media with the backup “analysis” to support changing the law and weakening the rules. ADEC abetted the cruise industry’s desire to overturn the people’s vote by simply stringing out the issue long enough for the Science Panel to do its job. In fact, no significant physical improvements to wastewater treatment have been made on any ship in the cruise fleet in about ten years.

Alaska is being run by Outside resource-extraction industries: they elect our politicians, draft our laws, and administer our agencies and departments. As long as elected officials reward polluters that choose to spend their money to gain political advantage instead of improving performance, despite the public’s repeated demand for action, Alaskans will live in a representative democracy in name only.

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