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To Member of the Natural Resources Committee:

My name is Brian Price. I was for 18 years a commercial fisherman in Lake Michigan and Lake Superior, and I am a current member of the Board of Directors of the Fishtown Preservation Society in Leland, holder of the remaining commercial fishing licenses based out of the port of Leland.

I believe that House Bills HB 4567, 4568, and 4569 are designed simply to punish Michigan's remaining commercial fishermen as if they had anything meaningful to do with the current sad state of the sport fishery in Michigan's Great Lakes waters. These bills are not forward-looking toward a day when we finally bring the lakes into some type of ecological balance by shutting the door to the constant stream of invaders, and when native species are again abundant enough for a strong recreational fishery alongside a rejuvenated commercial fishery. Yes, healthy and wild-caught Great Lakes fish can again be a mainstay of the economies of local fishing ports. We can and should promote and manage for both recreational and commercial fishing. This bill is simply behind the times.

At present, the Great Lakes and their fisheries are still in a state of shock, never having recovered from the parade of invaders that have completely overturned the food chain which for hundreds of years produced abundant lake trout, whitefish, and members of the perch family like walleye and yellow perch. The times argue for giving greater flexibility to the Director of the DNR to respond to rapidly changing availability of fish. As an example, there are indications that lake trout are finally making a strong comeback in both Lakes Michigan and Huron. By placing fish like lake trout and walleye in the "game fish" category, we are saying that no matter how abundant these fish may get in the future, and no matter how far offshore these stocks may be, only sport fishermen will catch these fish. That may make sense in protected waters like Grand Traverse Bay, but it makes no sense at all where I spent my time as a commercial fisherman, usually beyond the Manitou Islands where small boats and amateurs pay a high price for mistakes.

Simply put, if native species make a comeback in the Great Lakes (and there are signs that they may) there is no way that sport fishing alone can even begin to harvest this resource. And also, why should only those who have the time, money, and inclination to spend their days on the water have a chance to eat lake trout, walleye, or perch.

No one knows what will happen next with fish populations in these waters. Give more flexibility to the Director to respond to opportunities to harvest these fish, which belong to all of us, not just the sport fishing industry. And don't make it even more difficult for the handful of fishermen who still provide fresh fish to restaurants and fish markets. Vote no on these bills.

Sincerely,  
Brian Price