

September 10, 2026

Dear Visitor Industry Task Force Members,

I've been working in the Alaskan cruise tourism industry for over a decade. In 2023, my partner and I started our own fishing charter and have been running daily and multi-day tours out of Statter Harbor for the last two years. I'm writing to share the perspective of our cruise ship and independent guests and our experience as part of the fleet on the waters around Juneau.

Our hope is that VITF will encourage balance in favor of Alaska's pristine natural beauty and wild resources. As fresh entrepreneurs, we look forward to being part of Alaska's tourism industry for decades to come. That can only happen through cooperation with the community and maintaining a good quality of life for all of Juneau's residents, wild or otherwise.

Key Concerns Impacting Visitor Experience

Shortening Port Calls

Something we noticed this season was how reduced port call duration affected our visitors' ability to experience Juneau. 90 of the 700 total port calls (or nearly 13%) only allowed guests to be in Juneau for five and a half hours, after accounting for their All Aboard. Add in disembarking, getting to and from the cruise ship pier, and their usable time here shrinks even more. Curiously, the worst offender is Norwegian Bliss, which made seven Tuesday calls, each from 7:00 AM to 1:30 PM.

This has two direct consequences for our guests. First, they can't enjoy a longer fishing trip — many of our best charters need six hours or longer. Second, guests who book a shorter excursion are left with little or no time to spend elsewhere in Juneau. This results in lost economic opportunity for the rest of the city. Passengers who might otherwise spend money downtown or elsewhere are rushed back to the ship before they've had a chance to explore.

Fish Retention for Cruise Guests

The policy preventing uncontracted vessels from sending guests' legally caught fish back to the cruise ships for cooking is particularly frustrating. Contracted charters are allowed to send their guests back with their catch to be cooked by the cruise ship's chef. Those of us who aren't contracted with the ships aren't extended the same option.

This disproportionately punishes independent operators and limits guest options for enjoying the fresh Alaskan fish they just caught. Sometimes guests only catch a few fish, and shipping them home is exorbitant. A meaningful number of visitors are effectively prevented from enjoying their catch — one of the signature experiences of visiting Southeast Alaska.

Cruise Line Contracting and Markups

Lastly, we have serious concerns around the contracting requirements cruise lines impose on shore excursion operators. The cruise lines apply a 30% to 60% markup on top of the operator's price before selling the excursion to passengers. This creates unnecessary financial stress for visitors, who pay a significant premium for the same experience they could book directly.

What's particularly troubling is that the markup provides no benefit to the tour operators themselves — they receive the same base rate regardless, while the cruise line pockets the difference.

The major cruise corporations increasingly rely on ancillary revenue, and the pressure to capture more of the excursion market through these contracting arrangements is only increasing.¹ This trend squeezes independent operators and limits guest choice, all while driving up the cost of visiting Juneau and sidelining small business owners who aren't part of the cruise lines' contracted connections.

Downtown Experience

One of the most consistent feedback points from our *non-cruise ship* guests is that they actively avoid downtown Juneau. The congestion, commercial pressure, and lack of authentic local experience leads them to seek alternatives. More consideration needs to be given to our independent travelers and their ability to spend time downtown, too.

Wildlife Viewing & Environmental Impact

We're a fishing charter and keep our distance from the whale watchers. However, our guests frequently comment on the sheer volume of boats around the whales and how closely they appear to be approaching and surrounding them.

While we support responsible wildlife tourism, the current density raises concerns about both animal welfare and visitor experience quality. The "whale watching traffic jam" also creates issues on the water for operators not involved in whale watching, usually in the form of wakes, congestion in narrow passages, and tight parking in an already overbusy harbor.

Beyond whale watching, we have serious reservations with the sheer amount of pollutants (marine and air) that these ships disgorge each summer. Cruise ship guests are taking notice, and it would behoove Juneau to be a leader in demanding better. After all, we are Alaska's Capital, and it's time we take a stand and work to balance their impact against the quality of life for everyone and everything in Alaska.

Questions for the Task Force

As you deliberate on Juneau's tourism future, we hope you'll consider the following:

- **Which business is the cruise industry really for?**
 - The current model seems to prioritize cruise line profits over local businesses, visitor satisfaction, and environmental stewardship.
 - How are you going to hold them accountable?
- **Are our visitors truly enjoying their time and booking experience?**
 - How concerned are visitors about the environmental impact of ships on our air and sea quality? The feedback we receive suggests growing unease.
 - Let's be among the first to demand better and hold these companies accountable
- **Most importantly: *Why are we worshipping endless growth instead of embracing a regenerative industry?***
 - Juneau's long-term prosperity depends on protecting the very resources that draw visitors here.

¹ Onboard and other revenue accounted for 34% of Carnival Corporation & plc's cruise revenues in 2025 (Carnival Corporation & plc, 2025 Annual Report, p. IX). Royal Caribbean Group reported a comparable 30.2% share of cruise revenues from onboard spending in 2025 (cited in "The Cruise Industry's Economic Considerations, Impacts and Trends," Michigan Journal of Economics, April 2026, per Royal Caribbean Group 2025 results)

- Unchecked expansion risks destroying Alaska's pristine wilderness, unparalleled biodiversity, and rich fisheries that account for over \$1 billion in economic activity across Southeast Alaska and roughly 15% of regional employment.²

Recommendations for a Sustainable Path Forward

We propose the following actions to balance the cruise industry's impact:

- **Mandatory shore-power** for all cruise ships to reduce air pollution and demonstrate environmental commitment
- **Return of Ocean Rangers program** to monitor and enforce responsible wildlife viewing practices and harbor safety
- **Enforced requirements that ensure cruise ships demonstrate equal commitment to protecting Juneau**, just as those of us who live and work here year-round do

The visitor industry should work *for* Juneau, not the other way around. We can have a thriving tourism economy that also preserves our environment, respects our community, and delivers authentic experiences for guests.

We appreciate your time and consideration of these concerns. We're happy to provide additional data, guest feedback, or participate in future discussions.

Sincerely,

Captains Jojo and Dave
Adventure Fishing Tours

² Direct and indirect economic output from Southeast Alaska's commercial seafood industry, including multiplier impacts, exceeds \$800 million annually and accounts for roughly 15% of regional employment (Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association, citing McKinley Research Group, *Economic Value of Alaska's Seafood Industry*). Guided sport fishing in Southeast Alaska generates an additional \$271 million in total spending and supports 1,750 jobs (SEAGO, *The Economic Power of Southeast Alaska Sport Fishing*, McKinley Research Group, January 2025). Together, commercial and sport fisheries represent over \$1 billion in annual economic activity in the region.