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SJR 14 Sponsor Statement

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Alaska's seafood industry is a vital part of Alaska's economy, benefiting fishermen, coastal communities, plant workers and the many businesses that rely on seafood production statewide. As the largest contributor to the United States' seafood harvest, Alaska plays an important role in global seafood production, exporting to over 100 countries worldwide.

Despite its significance, Alaska seafood faces numerous challenges in the global market. High interest rates, inflation, and increased competition from farmed fish and foreign countries threatens the economic viability of our fishermen and seafood businesses. These challenges impact fishing families and local economies and jeopardize our state's food security and supply chain integrity.

In recognition of these challenges, SJR 14 encourages similar treatment of Alaska seafood by the federal government as other sources of domestic food production and supports efforts by the federal government to establish an Office of Seafood Policy and Program Integration within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This could play a crucial role in ensuring that domestic seafood is treated equitably while competing in the global market.

USDA provides critical support for agricultural products but lacks in its support for seafood products. Some of the issues within the USDA are the inability of fishermen and processors to participate in certain loan, grant, or tax credit programs; suboptimal timing of federal nutrition program purchases; and a lack of programs to help the industry develop new products and update aging infrastructure. An Office of Seafood Policy and Program Integration would provide needed leadership on addressing issues with USDA programs.

SJR 14 also encourages greater federal interagency cooperation and greater emphasis on various support mechanisms for the seafood industry from USDA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This is increasingly necessary if the Alaska seafood industry is to survive these significant economic challenges.

Additionally, SJR 14 supports an increased seafood presence in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative which could help address the unbalanced tariffs that result in higher export fees for Alaskan seafood than for competing seafood imports.

SJR 14 aims to support the Alaska Congressional Delegation in their strategic efforts to improve federal programs to give the seafood industry equal support that many other U.S. food products receive.