



Representative Alan Austerman

House Majority Leader

Alaska State Legislature

Sponsor Statement for House Bill 181: Fishing Crew Data Program

Economists estimate that the Alaska seafood industry is the largest private sector employer in the state. In November 2010, the Alaska Department of Labor reported that the industry employed at least 53,500 workers—skippers, crew and processing workers—at some point during at some point during 2009. This number is a best estimate, though, because commercial fishermen, as self-employed people, are outside of standard labor data collection. At present, data to describe the workforce of 20,000 crew members who work in Alaska's fisheries is almost non-existent. We cannot determine whether an individual crewmember fished 5 days or 250 in a given year; whether he or she fished in a single salmon fishery or in seven fisheries across five regions of the state; on a single boat or on 10; or whether he or she fished a single year as an adventure, or is a 25-year veteran of the industry.

State and federal fishery policy can have strong impacts—positive or negative—on employment in the seafood industry. At present, however, decision makers have extremely limited information that can guide their policy direction with respect to the labor force in the fishing industry. They are asked to formulate resource policies that impact the largest labor force in Alaska, without the benefit of information on that labor force. Time and time again—particularly in federal regulatory arenas—Alaskans have seen regulations implemented that have significant and deleterious impacts on the seafood industry that could have been foreseen, mitigated, or avoided had this information been in hand.

HB181 is the result of more than five years of work by fishing industry participants, coastal municipalities, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to develop a program and approach that addresses the policy needs and interests of Alaskan fishermen and communities. It establishes a pilot crew data program in the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Simple year end reports from commercial fishing crew will provide information on fishery participation through the course of the year, and allow the department to link crewmember data with harvest data for aggregated statistical analysis.

HB181 has a 4-year sunset. This provides the Legislature the opportunity to review the efficacy of the program and ensure it meets the intended policy goals.

~ Representing Alaska State House District 36 ~

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