

Alaska State Legislature

Interim: (June – Dec.)
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Session: (Jan. – May)
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REPRESENTATIVE JOHN HARRIS

Sponsor Statement HB 207

An Act increasing the allowances for injury, disability, or heart attack payable from the fisherman's fund

The Alaska Fisherman's Fund was established 1951 to provide for the treatment and care of Alaska licensed commercial fishermen and crew who have been injured while fishing on shore or off shore in Alaska. The upper limit on claims in the fund has been \$2,500 since 1959. If \$2,500 in 1959 dollars was adjusted for the Consumer Price Index, it would be worth approximately \$18,229.64 today. While the limitation in state law has remained unchanged, health care costs have steadily risen.

Access to health insurance and health care is a concern among fishermen and especially presents an obstacle to younger fishermen who are seeking to continue as the next generation in Alaska's sustainable fisheries.

HB 207 updates the Alaska Fishermen's Fund limit to \$10,000. This is intended to help ensure that Alaska's fishermen have better access to health care when injured while fishing. Updating the claim limit to \$10,000 will bring this very worthwhile program back to providing a meaningful level of assistance as the payer of last resort for commercial fishermen and crew that sustain injuries or illness while fishing.

The fund is financed from revenue received from each resident and nonresident commercial fisherman's license and permit fee. Commercial fishermen and crew members pay 39% -- or up to \$50 each -- of their annual license fees into this account. In 2008, there were 13,706 commercial fishing permit holders who contributed to the fund.

The account has grown to \$11.5 million even as health care costs have risen, due in part to continuing improvements in fish industry safety.

This increase is not projected to jeopardize the sustainability of the fund.