

## **Follow-up to questions/discussion at PSPA's Feb. 22, 2011 presentation to House Fisheries Committee on Alaska's Seafood Processing Industry**

### Question on workers who are not U.S. citizens

First, we want *to correct our response to a question about whether the seafood industry employs workers authorized to work in the U.S. under J-1 and H-2B visas*. Mr. Reed responded that he believed the industry employed fewer H-2B visa workers than in the past and that, while the industry had employed J1 visa workers in the past, he didn't believe they were employing holders of those visas today.

In subsequently looking into this question, it appears that most of the workers from other nations employed by the seafood industry are what was formerly termed "resident aliens." That is, they are individuals with Permanent Resident Cards (known as "green cards"), meaning they are authorized by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) to live and work in the U.S. on a permanent basis, but have not gained full citizenship status. However, we have learned that many seafood companies do continue to fill some portion of their workforce needs with J-1 and/or H-2B visa holders.

According to the CIS website, the J-1 classification is part of the "Exchange Visitor Program," under which the Department of State allows non-immigrants to enter and/or to work in the U.S. for short periods of time under certain circumstances. The website says, "Examples of exchange visitors include, but are not limited to: Professors or scholars, research assistants, students, trainees, teachers, specialists, nannies/au pairs, camp counselors." J-1 workers in the seafood industry are usually students, working for a short period of time in the U.S.

The CIS website states that the "H-2B non-agricultural temporary worker program" requires that:

The employer must establish that its need for the prospective worker's services or labor is temporary, regardless of whether the underlying job can be described as permanent or temporary. The employer's need is considered temporary if it is a one-time occurrence, a seasonal need, a peak-load need, or an intermittent need."

As we explained at the February 22 meeting, those conditions typify the challenges often faced by the seafood processing industry in meeting its workforce needs. Many of the industry's labor needs are seasonal, intermittent, and spike during the peak of fishing seasons. Some companies do employ a small number of H-2B workers, particularly for positions that require specific, difficult-to-find skills.

### Questions about use of job recruitment services or agencies

Most seafood companies work with/through Alaska Dept of Labor Seafood Employment office for recruitment and seafood worker screenings. The industry hires virtually every individual who passes DOL's screening process. In collaboration with AK-DOL, companies participate in Job Fairs and hold their own recruitments at Job Center offices and elsewhere around the state. Some also collaborate with local and tribal organizations and CDQ groups.

Additionally, most companies make extensive efforts to recruit employees in Alaska and elsewhere (in other U.S. states or countries) through their own HR departments and/or through other U.S.-based recruitment services, facilitators, and agencies of various types.

During the hearing, a committee member mentioned “scalping agencies” sometimes used by the visitor industry to bring in foreign workers. Our member companies do not use the type of agency to which they believe that term refers.

### Non-resident hire

While the seafood industry would prefer, and benefit from, having a very high rate of Alaska resident hire, and has put significant effort into trying to recruit and retain Alaskan workers, there is a host of factors working against the ability to dramatically increase the raw numbers. Alaska has a relatively small statewide pool of available resident workers to draw from to fill the thousands of seasonal processing jobs that must be filled in order to get Alaska’s huge seafood harvests processed and off to market. Additionally -- to varying degrees, due to plant locations and seasonality, species processed, and other variables -- resident hire is hampered by the fact that seafood plants are often in remote areas of the state with very small local and regional populations; processors must compete for workers with other seasonal businesses in Alaska and elsewhere (such as tourism); peak seafood seasons often coincide with months when Alaskans have their own busy season (fishing, hunting, kids out of school, etc); and many Alaskans are simply not willing to accept the unglamorous work, months away from home, and long work hours required for many seafood processing jobs – particularly the entry-level processing line jobs.

As we explained at the Fisheries Committee meeting, the industry is currently undertaking a concerted effort to develop ways to recruit and train more Alaskans to fill the higher-pay, skilled labor positions that represent true career opportunities in the industry. We believe this focus holds great promise and opportunity for Alaskans and the industry. We look forward to working with the legislature, communities, educators, state agencies, and others toward realizing the potential benefits of this developing initiative.

While the industry will continue to strive to increase resident hire at all job levels, it is important to keep in mind that it is essential and fortunate – for fishermen, communities, the State, and the industry itself -- that the seafood industry has been able to succeed in the difficult task of filling the thousands of positions necessary to have a viable seafood processing industry in Alaska.

### Question about percentage of Alaska seafood that does not go through at least initial processing in-state

From what we have been able to ascertain, the answer we gave at the hearing, that very little seafood leaves Alaska without at least initial processing, was correct. While some seafood is quite highly processed in-state, most other seafood receives one or more initial processes such as heading, gutting, cooking, glazing, and/or freezing prior to shipment for further processing or directly to markets. When seafood does leave the state with little or no initial processing, it is because that approach will allow that particular seafood to reach the marketplace at the most competitive and marketable form and price possible, which ultimately brings the most value to fishermen, processors, and Alaska.