

Alaska State Legislature

State Capitol, Room 102
Juneau, AK 99802
Phone: 465-6089
Fax: 465-3472
Toll Free (800) 665-6089
Representative_Paul_Seaton@legis.state.ak.us



345 W. Sterling Highway
Suite 102B
Homer, AK 99603
Phone: 235-2921
Fax: 235-4008

REPRESENTATIVE Paul Seaton

District 35

Shellfish farming has the potential to diversify the economic base of coastal communities impacted by the changing dynamics of the fishing industry. HB 60 allows this expansion of this clean water industry by permitting geoducks to be farmed subtidally in the Gulf of Alaska even if wild geoducks are not present. The bill does not exempt farmers from any health, safety, or other transfer provisions relating to hatchery seed.

The Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery is the only hatchery that supplies mariculture spat and seed in the State. It was initiated by the State to be a self-sustaining operation in association with the private mariculture farms permitted by the State. Their business plan relies on the sale of geoduck seed. However, an informal policy of the Department of Fish and Game prevents geoduck seed from being utilized by farms anywhere outside of southeast Alaska. These restrictions on the sale of geoduck seed cause the sole hatchery for the mariculture industry in Alaska to require continual subsidy by the State. HB 60 will allow the mariculture industry to develop around the Gulf of Alaska, providing a potentially strong market for seed and private sector financing for the operation of the hatchery.

As non-mobile filter feeders eating plankton, farmed geoducks will not prey on any local commercial, sport or personal use fish. There have been no reports of species displacement in the sedimentary habitat by geoduck clams. Farmed geoducks will not interfere with personal recreational boaters as they are cultivated in the sediment below low tide and without the numerous buoys and floating cages used in oyster farms. No infectious disease has been identified in any wild geoduck population or the geoduck farming industries of Washington, British Columbia, or Alaska.

The conflict involving geoducks in southeast Alaska is between the dive fishermen who harvest wild stock and farmers who wish to farm in areas with existing wild stock. HB 60 would circumvent this conflict because there is no wild geoduck stock in the proposed area. This bill will not override any Department of Natural Resources farm site leasing or Department of Fish & Game permit regulation.

HB 60 eliminates unnecessary hindrances to the growth of the mariculture industry in Alaska and provides a potential alternative economic base for coastal communities while adequately considering the health of our marine ecosystem.

Staff Contact, Katie Koester 465-2028

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