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HB 203, VER. A **SPONSOR STATEMENT**

“An Act relating to the use of certain trawl or dredge fishing gear in state water; and providing for an effective date.”

House Bill 203 safeguards Alaska’s marine ecosystems and fisheries by prohibiting trawl or dredge fishing gear that drags across the seafloor in state waters, effective January 1, 2028. It also directs the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to study the impacts of these practices, with a report due by January 1, 2027. HB 203 ensures sustainable fisheries and supports Alaska’s coastal communities and cultural heritage.

Alaska’s oceans are central to our economy and way of life, sustaining commercial fishers, subsistence users, and rural towns. Bottom trawling and dredging damage habitats vital for halibut, salmon, and crab, threatening fish populations. These methods also discard millions of pounds of fish as bycatch, wasting resources valued by Alaskans. HB 203 eliminates these harmful practices, protecting habitats and reducing waste.

For Alaska Native communities, fisheries are a lifeline. Declining salmon runs and habitat loss endanger traditional harvests. By preserving marine ecosystems, HB 203 supports cultural practices and food security. The bill’s study will provide data on ecosystem health and bycatch, guiding science-based management.

Economically, HB 203 strengthens Alaska’s fisheries by promoting sustainable practices. The 2028 effective date allows fishers to adopt alternative gear, minimizing disruption. Existing trawl closures around Kodiak and Cook Inlet show spatial management works, and HB 203 extends this approach.

HB 203 upholds Alaska’s constitutional commitment to sustained yield. We urge support for this bill to protect our oceans, empower our communities, and secure our fisheries for future generations.