

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Senator Joe Paskvan

State Capitol Building, Room 7
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182
<http://paskvan.aksenate.org/>



Phone (907) 465-3709
Fax (907) 465-4714
sen.joe.paskvan@legis.state.ak.us
Senate District E – Fairbanks, AK

Sponsor Statement

SB 163

An Act increasing the allowances for injury, disability, or heart attack payable from the fisherman's fund; and providing for an effective date.

The Alaska Fishermen's Fund was established in 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 \$2500 since 1959. If this \$2500 in 1959 been adjusted for the Consumer Price Index, it would be worth approximately \$18,229.64 today. While the upper limit on claims has remained unchanged, healthcare costs have steadily risen.

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

SB 163 updates the Alaska Fishermen's Fund limit to \$10,000 to help ensure that Alaska's fishermen have 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 to fund this account. In 2008, there were 13,706 commercial fishing permit holders who contributed to the fund, including 135 from the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

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

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

I urge your support for SB 163.