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Sponsor Statement

HB 89

Didemnum vexillum (Dvex), also known as Sea Vomit, is an aggressive tunicate invader that grows rapidly and has few known natural predators. It creates metabolic toxins that help it smother substrates and other organisms to create monoculture infestations from intertidal, subtidal to deep sea habitats. As demonstrated in a recent infestation in Whiting Harbor near Sitka, the rapid spread of Dvex is a threat to the mariculture industry, commercial fisheries and ecosystem integrity.

HB 89 provides the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) with the statutory authority, and a fund, to swiftly address outbreaks of aquatic invasive species such as Dvex.

HB 89 requires ADF&G, in coordination with the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Department of Natural Resources, and other applicable agencies, to establish and carry out a rapid response plan to an incipient aquatic invasive species.

HB 89 gives ADF&G the authority to use chemical, biological, mechanical, or physical methods to deal with the outbreak. It allows for expedited review of plans for dealing with invasive species, and directs ADF&G staff to prioritize eradication of the invasive species over other management issues for a specific area.

HB 89 specifies that affected private property owners shall be considered, but still allows responding agencies to be held harmless for damages caused by their invasive species treatment. Impacts to native species shall be minimized if possible.

Sea Vomit and other aquatic invasive species have the potential to seriously impact our lucrative commercial fishing, mariculture, and recreational fishing industries. HB 89 gives Alaska the tools to rapidly combat this threat.