

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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HOUSE BILL 156 SPONSOR STATEMENT

House Bill 156 will extend for ten years the “sunset” date for Alaska’s vessel-based limited entry fisheries for weathervane scallops and Bering Sea hair crab. Limited entry into the vast majority of Alaska’s commercial fisheries has been implemented with a skipper-based system that awards permits to individual fisherman based on their prior history of participation in and economic dependence on each specific fishery. Vessel-based limited entry is a very narrow exception to the individual-based system, created by the Alaska State Legislature ten years ago.

In 2002, the Legislature amended that Limited Entry Act to allow vessel-based limited entry permits to be given to vessels with a history of fishing for weathervane scallops and Bering Sea hair crab in State waters. Because of concerns that innovation could have a “slippery slope” effect, and lead to vessel-based limited entry for weathervane scallops and Bering Sea hair crab will automatically be stricken from the statute books on the 30th of December 2013.

While conservation concerns have not allowed for any commercial openings of the Bering Sea hair crab fishery in the last decade, these permits are still held by vessels that are ready and able to harvest hair crab if and when fisheries managers decide that circumstances permit this fishery to open. The past ten years have shown that vessel-based limited entry is working well, grounding in a positive manner the hopes of future harvesting of hair crab. Bering Sea hair crab is of significant economic interests for Bering Sea region. Multiple hair crab vessel-based limited entry permits are held within the region. With successful Bering Sea king crab and opilio crab fisheries that provide job opportunities for residents, it is hopeful that when the hair crab fishery is reopened, those same great opportunities will be available in the Bering Sea Region aboard hair crab vessels.

While opponents of vessel-based limited entry have predicted dire consequences if vessel-based limited entry were allowed to become law, none of these negative predictions has come true. Extending the sunset date for vessel-based limited entry within the Limited Entry Act is good policy, as it will allow for a potential future opening of the hair crab fishery and will allow the weathervane scallop fishery to continue operating as it has.

Please note that there is a Senate companion bill, Senate Bill 54.