



Sponsor Statement v.D

HB 329 Aquatic Farm and Hatchery Leases

“An Act relating to state tideland leases; and relating to aquatic farming or related hatchery operation site leases.”

House Bill 329 promises to provide a significant boost to Alaska’s aquatic farming industry, known as mariculture. This legislation has the potential to bolster the state’s economy, help preserve its environment, and enrich its coastal communities by streamlining the tideland lease process and extending lease durations to up to 25 years.

Mariculture, the cultivation of marine shellfish and aquatic plants, stands as a beacon of sustainable economic growth for Alaska. Mariculture not only generates employment opportunities across various sectors but also injects vitality into coastal communities. The industry fosters commerce, both domestically and internationally, while nurturing a vibrant ecosystem in Alaska’s pristine waters.

One of the key features of HB 329 is the simplification of the lease acquisition process. Currently, prospective mariculturists endure a lengthy multi-agency application and review process which generally takes years to complete. This bureaucratic hurdle often deters potential farmers from entering the industry. HB 329 aims to lessen this burden by enabling quicker access to tidelands, enabling farmers to concentrate more on farming and less on paperwork.

Moreover, the extension of the lease duration to 20 years provides for long-term stability for mariculturists and encourages sustained investment in the industry. This stability is crucial for the development of robust mariculture operations. There is also a clause that gives current lessees a first-preference to the lease if they are in good standing with DNR and ADF&G on their reports.

The environmental benefits of mariculture are also noteworthy. Shellfish and seaweed play a vital role in maintaining water quality by filtering out pollutants and excess nutrients. They provide essential habitat for diverse marine life and help mitigate ocean acidification—a pressing concern.

Furthermore, mariculture aligns with Alaska’s rich cultural heritage, complementing existing traditions and customs in coastal communities. By promoting the sustainable utilization of marine resources, mariculture strengthens the bond between Alaskans and their natural surroundings.

With HB 329 paving the way for a more supportive regulatory framework, Alaska’s mariculture industry is poised to flourish, creating jobs, stimulating commerce, and safeguarding the state’s precious marine ecosystems. As stakeholders rally behind this initiative, Alaska’s coastal communities stand to reap the benefits of a thriving and sustainable mariculture sector for generations to come.