

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

April 16, 2003
9:12 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair
Representative Peggy Wilson, Vice Chair
Representative Cheryll Heinze
Representative Dan Ogg
Representative David Guttenberg

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Ralph Samuels
Representative Ethan Berkowitz

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

CS FOR SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 12(RES)
Supporting the halibut bycatch utilization project of the Alaska
Food Coalition.

- MOVED HCS CSSJR 12(FSH) OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS ACTION

BILL: SJR 12

SHORT TITLE: SUPPORTING HALIBUT BYCATCH PROJECT

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEVENS G

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
03/13/03	0491	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/13/03	0491	(S)	RES
04/02/03		(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/02/03		(S)	Moved CSSJR 12(RES) Out of Committee MINUTE(RES)
04/04/03	0691	(S)	RES RPT CS 6DP SAME TITLE
04/04/03	0691	(S)	DP: OGAN, SEEKINS, STEVENS B, WAGONER, LINCOLN, ELTON
04/04/03	0691	(S)	FN1: ZERO(DFG)
04/07/03	0732	(S)	RULES TO CALENDAR 4/7/2003
04/07/03	0732	(S)	READ THE SECOND TIME
04/07/03	0732	(S)	RES CS ADOPTED UNAN CONSENT

04/07/03	0732	(S)	ADVANCED TO THIRD READING UNAN CONSENT
04/07/03	0732	(S)	READ THE THIRD TIME CSSJR 12(RES)
04/07/03	0732	(S)	COSPONSOR(S): ELLIS, ELTON, DAVIS,
04/07/03	0732	(S)	LINCOLN, OLSON, HOFFMAN, THERRIAULT,
04/07/03	0732	(S)	COWDERY
04/07/03	0733	(S)	PASSED Y17 N- E3
04/07/03	0733	(S)	TRANSMITTED TO (H)
04/07/03	0733	(S)	VERSION: CSSJR 12(RES)
04/08/03	0836	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/08/03	0836	(H)	RES
04/08/03	0860	(H)	CROSS SPONSOR(S): LYNN
04/09/03	0900	(H)	FSH REFERRAL ADDED BEFORE RES
04/16/03		(H)	FSH AT 9:00 AM CAPITOL 124

WITNESS REGISTER

SENATOR GARY STEVENS
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented sponsor statement for SJR 12.

TREVOR JONES, Chair
Alaska Food Coalition
Kodiak, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: As project coordinator, answered questions
pertaining to SJR 12.

ACTION NARRATIVE

TAPE 03-24, SIDE A

Number 0001

CHAIR PAUL SEATON called the House Special Committee on
Fisheries meeting to order at 9:12 a.m. Representatives Seaton,
Wilson, Heinze, Ogg, and Guttenberg were present at the call to
order.

SJR 12-SUPPORTING HALIBUT BYCATCH PROJECT

CHAIR SEATON announced that the only order of business would be
CS FOR SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 12(RES), Supporting the

halibut bycatch utilization project of the Alaska Food Coalition.

Number 0083

SENATOR GARY STEVENS, Alaska State Legislature, sponsor of SJR 12, said the resolution was a result of concerns expressed by the "Alaska Food Bank." The legislation demonstrates support of the halibut bycatch project devised by the Alaska Food Coalition. He noted that the Alaska Food Coalition does a great job of providing food for people in the state who are less fortunate and who need assistance. Senator Stevens mentioned that fishermen who operate trawl vessels are not allowed, by federal law, to keep "accidentally caught halibut" and have to throw that halibut overboard. He said fishermen as well as processors are willing to voluntarily devote their time and effort to handle and process otherwise unused halibut to make use of it for charitable purposes. He said the Alaska Food Coalition has developed a plan and has the funds available to distribute the product throughout the state.

Number 0232

SENATOR GARY STEVENS informed the committee that if passed, SJR 12 would go to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and also to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to support the issuance of a Prohibited Species Donation Permit to begin this project of using halibut bycatch. He clarified that this would not be used on vessels without observers, thereby avoiding the possibility of catching more halibut than necessary. Senator Stevens said that what was remarkable about SJR 12 was that both fishermen and processors have volunteered to participate in a project that allows the product to be used by people in Alaska who need it.

Number 0369

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON inquired about the projected numbers of fish involved in the project.

SENATOR GARY STEVENS responded that Trevor Jones would better be able to answer that question, but said he assumed the project would start out slowly to make sure that the system was working. He said that food banks throughout the state are anxious to access the program and he referenced a similar program in the Seattle area in which a permit is used that pertains to halibut from the Bering Sea.

Number 0430

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked how often, after catching halibut, fishermen on boats need to throw the fish back.

SENATOR GARY STEVENS confirmed that fishermen catch a lot of halibut by mistake and that there are bycatch numbers, but said he didn't have that statistic.

Number 0478

CHAIR SEATON offered that in the Gulf of Alaska, he thought the amount was 750 metric tons. He then asked the sponsor what time period would be involved, wondering if the project would be year-round or would involve a specific window of time.

SENATOR GARY STEVENS said the permit offered by NMFS has specific requirements regarding time elements and amounts. He suggested that the project would involve a small percentage of the large amount of halibut bycatch and that it would be a reflection of the Alaska Food Coalition's needs within the state.

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE asked if it was known how much of the halibut bycatch is dead.

SENATOR GARY STEVENS responded that if the halibut are dead, this utilization project offers an alternative to just disposing of the fish, and that perhaps if the halibut were alive, they would be thrown overboard. He reiterated that this would be an opportunity to utilize just some, not all, of the dead halibut.

Number 0614

CHAIR SEATON explained that there is a requirement that live halibut are to be discarded; the halibut are sorted and put overboard quickly. The amount of 750 metric tons refers to the estimated mortality - the amount of dead halibut - and not the total amount of halibut caught. He said that when he was at the [North Pacific Fishery Management Council], there was an estimated 15 to 17 percent mortality of longline-caught halibut and an estimated 80 to 85 percent mortality of trawl-caught halibut. He said his understanding is that SJR 12 deals specifically with trawl-caught halibut. He added that the assumption used to be a 100 percent mortality rate, but after

further study it was found that 15 to 20 percent of the trawl-caught halibut did survive.

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE wondered if it was traumatic for halibut, since they were caught at such depths, to be brought all the way up to the surface and then be thrown back overboard.

Number 0743

CHAIR SEATON commented that halibut don't have a swim bladder, so that unlike rockfish, if they are brought up too quickly, their bladders don't expand and they are not injured in that particular way. He suggested that one way fish are injured in a trawl fishery is that when the trawl net is swept along the bottom, either in shallow water flats or deep water flats, the fish accumulate - perhaps 50 or 40 tons - and there is a mass of fish in the back of the trawl. He explained that the water circulation isn't good and depending upon the length of the tow, the fish can be basically "drowned" because of being packed into the back edge, also called the cod end of the net. He repeated that the fish are almost squeezing out of the net, and if halibut are stuck there, there is not good water circulation, they are packed in, and by the time they are pulled out [they are dead].

Number 0820

CHAIR SEATON continued that there are restrictions on the length of tows in attempts to reduce halibut bycatch, but there are still halibut that will die. The requirement is to immediately discharge "live and kicking" halibut. In the Gulf of Alaska, depending on the fishery, there is a question regarding the size of the halibut; the average size can be 2 1/2 pounds, with a lot of small as well as large halibut mixed in with flounder. He said he doubted that this aspect would be addressed in the permit, but thought it would be addressed by processors because, if flounder were being processed at the same time, the size would be consistent.

Number 0898

SENATOR GARY STEVENS reiterated that this was a volunteer operation and that the processors were willing to spend a minimal amount of time on gutting and freezing.

Number 0932

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON wondered how the processors would work on the details, suggesting that perhaps a certain day of the week would be set aside.

SENATOR GARY STEVENS responded that this would be controlled by processors.

CHAIR SEATON added that under the permit, the question of "how much can be taken and brought in" would be need to be agreed upon because SJR 12 allows for the right to have halibut on board if it is being delivered to a committed halibut processor. He said the intent of this specific permit was to make sure that the retained halibut are sequenced through this permit.

Number 1019

CHAIR SEATON stated that one problem with SJR 12 was that originally the indication was that this could be done from unobserved vessels. He said he'd conferred with the sponsor and wanted to suggest a verbal amendment as follows:

On page 2, line 7, delete the sentence after the word "the" and insert "issuance of a Prohibited Species Donation Permit using halibut bycatch from vessels with observers".

Number 1113

REPRESENTATIVE HEINZE [moved to adopt] the foregoing as Amendment 1.

Number 1171

CHAIR SEATON explained that Amendment 1 ensures that illegally caught halibut will not be allowed on board. He mentioned what is called "whole haul" as an example in which fish are caught and dumped into the fish hold without sorting for halibut, which is legally required.

Number 1216

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON objected to Amendment 1 because she wanted to know Senator Gary Stevens' opinion.

SENATOR STEVENS responded that Amendment 1 clarifies the resolution, saying that he would be pleased to add it to the resolution.

Number 1260

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON withdrew her objection.

CHAIR SEATON asked if there was any further objection. There being no objection, Amendment 1 was adopted.

Number 1294

TREVOR JONES, Chair, Alaska Food Coalition, said he was available to answer questions, and said that as coordinator for the project, he wanted to commend fishermen and processors for their willingness to participate.

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON asked how the plan would proceed; she wondered if the fish would be fresh or frozen and what timelines were being considered.

Number 1366

MR. JONES responded that there was an agreement with the processors that the halibut would be headed, gutted, frozen, and then stored until there was a shipment ready to go to a network of food banks. He mentioned that the "Food Bank of Alaska" would be involved with getting shipments to various places in the state such as Nome, Barrow, Juneau, and "to about every community in the state."

Number 1416

CHAIR SEATON commented that it was great to have the product going to food banks in Alaska rather than having it go to Seattle. He then asked if a "size range" had been investigated.

MR. JONES replied that consideration was being given to begin with 18-inch fish, but added that it would be kept "a little bit open" to allow for experimentation regarding what would work best and also to avoid bringing fish back to shore that couldn't be utilized. He said that starting at the 18-inch mark would allow for a reasonable return, considering the efforts that would have to go into the fish.

CHAIR SEATON asked if the intent was that the fish would be frozen whole, headed and gutted, or if a fillet machine would be used.

MR. JONES responded that consideration was being given to eventually filleting the halibut, skin on, and also perhaps moving toward shatter packs or to [individually quick-frozen fish] to reduce packaging size for the convenience of food banks, which may operate with a limited infrastructure of freezers.

CHAIR SEATON commended Mr. Jones and the Alaska Food Coalition for work that has been done on the project.

Number 1550

REPRESENTATIVE WILSON moved to report CSSJR 12(RES), as amended, out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal note. There being no objection, HCS CSSJR 12(FSH) was reported from the House Special Committee on Fisheries.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Fisheries meeting was adjourned at 9:32 a.m.