

HB

141

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Mary Pagenkopf

Senate Rules Committee 5/8/97 1:10 PM

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



House of Representatives
Special Committee on Fisheries

SPONSOR STATEMENT

HB 141

A VESSEL PERMIT MORATORIUM FOR THE ALASKA WEATHERVANE SCALLOP FISHERY

I have introduced HB 141 to implement a moratorium within the state waters off Alaska similar to the moratorium being implemented by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council affecting the federal waters off Alaska. Without a moratorium implemented in state waters, it is probable that there would be an increase in effort on our state water scallop stocks, as well as on the associated marine habitat, and create an unmanageable fishery.

World wide scallops have proven to be susceptible to overfishing and boom/bust cycles. Scallops are long lived shellfish. The large scallop meats which bring premium prices come from scallops eight years or older.

The Alaska scallop fishery started in 1968. Nineteen east coast scallop vessels came to Alaska and took 1.7 million pounds of scallop meats. The fishery continued at a harvest level of 1.3 million pounds of meats annually until 1973. Catches dropped off sharply after 1973 and fishing ceased in 1978 when scallop beds were depleted. This boom and bust cycle was repeated in the 1980's and appeared to be repeating for a third time in the 1990's until the state developed a fishery management plan for scallops in 1993. All scallop fishing was stopped in February 1995 in order to prevent an east coast scalloper, Mr. Big, from fishing in unregulated federal waters. The fishery reopened in late 1996 under a federal management plan.

At present weathervane scallops are managed jointly by the federal government and the State of Alaska. There is a federal fishery management plan to delegate management authority of scallops to the state "in process" which has not been finalized. The management plan includes mandatory 100% observer coverage, caps on the amount of crab bycatch which can be

taken and area specific quotas. Under new language in the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, the State of Alaska could exercise management authority out to 200 miles under delegated authority.

It is also in the State of Alaska's best interest that both the State and federal water scallop fisheries have a similar management plans and be managed by the State of Alaska. My goal is delegation of management authority by the U.S. Department of Commerce to the State of Alaska with a more restricted moratorium base. It should be noted that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's Environmental Assessment and Regulatory Impact Review found that far fewer vessels than established by the federal moratorium could efficiently harvest the Alaska scallop quotas.

Within this legislation, I have separated out the weathervane scallop fishery conducted in Area H, Cook Inlet. The Area H scallop fishery is unique in that it is managed as an entirely separate fishery, has different gear specifications, and has more recently been developed. As amended in Senate Resources, this bill will allow Area H scallop boats to fish in the outside fishery as well.

HB 141 is needed to ensure careful conservation of the scallop stocks, as well as the marine habitat in which the scallops live, and to ensure that the bycatch of other marine animals, such as crabs, are properly controlled and managed. It is imperative to implement a moratorium on new entrants into the weathervane scallop fishery now.