



# Alaska State Legislature

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## **Rep. Scalzi: Fisheries Deserve Sound Science**

### **HJR 10 Endorses Studies of Sea Lion-Pollock Interaction**

(JUNEAU) – A legislative resolution emphasizing the need for sound science to guide decisions about ground fish management in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska is due for its first hearing today in the House Fisheries Committee.

Rep. Drew Scalzi (R-Homer), co-chair of the House Resources Committee, introduced House Joint Resolution 10 to endorse U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens' efforts to delay closure of Alaska's largest ground fishery to protect Steller sea lions.

"We want to protect our sea lion population, but wholesale closure of the pollock fisheries without making sure the decision is based on sound science would be a huge mistake," said Scalzi, who works as a commercial fisherman and fish buyer. "A closure would have disastrous effects, not only on the fishery itself, but also on the entire state's economy."

The biological reason for declining Steller sea lion populations is not fully understood, and legal tussling between environmentalists, federal fisheries managers and their scientists over the issue last year prompted court orders first to close, then open pollock fishing in critical sea lion habitat. The orders cover 100,000 square miles of prime fishing waters from Prince William Sound to the Aleutian Islands.

After fisheries managers last fall sought to settle the matter by calling for an independent scientific review of biological justification for the closure, Sen. Ted Stevens helped pass legislation devoting \$40 million to fund the work, to pay for other state research projects, and to delay any fishing ban until late in 2001.

"The pollock fishery brings \$800 million to the fishing industry and a half-billion dollar boost to the state economy, and keeps almost 1,000 fishing boats and their crews working," said Scalzi. "Given the potential damage to Alaska in terms of lost taxes, defaulted fishing loans, and unemployment in small fishing communities, we need to take our time and do our homework."

Several federal agencies this year will work to develop a scientifically sound, legally defensible independent review of the biological justification for allowing continued pollock fishing in the disputed areas, and the work will be closely watched by scientists and fishermen alike, he said.

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