

Sponsor Statement

HB 208

Aquatic Farms for Shellfish

***“An Act relating to aquatic farming of shellfish;
and providing for an effective date.”***

The mariculture industry has the potential to increase the availability of fresh seafood to Alaskans, strengthen the competitiveness of Alaskan seafood products in the world marketplace and provide a premium product year-round.

Because this industry is so new to our state, a number of problems have arisen with the regulating process – which undoubtedly, is complex because of the number of agencies that oversee aquatic farming; i.e., Fish and Game, Environmental Conservation, Natural Resources and Governmental Coordination. According to farmers, regulations proposed by Fish and Game are far too restrictive and unreasonable, and prohibitive; farmers feel the regulations discourage, rather than encourage entrants into this potential lucrative industry.

In a good faith effort to mitigate the unsatisfactory relationship between government agencies and the industry, HB 208 is being introduced as companion legislation to Senator John Torgerson’s SB141.

HB 208 requires the Department of Natural Resources to offer public leases on 60 suspended shellfish sites, 20 clam sites and 10 geoduck sites. These lease sites are in addition to those already permitted. Security bonds must be posted according to the value of the product on-site and will be returned upon termination of the lease. Farmers must abide by the sustained yield principle of management when harvesting the wild stock. The Commissioner of DNR must solicit nominations from industry for sites that do not interfere with established commercial, subsistence or personal use.

HB208 is the means for encouraging the state to develop another resource that will add economic diversity to our coffers -- while protecting the right of Alaskans to harvest a common property resource.