

SPONSOR STATEMENT

SB 141

Aquatic Farms for Shellfish

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game recently proposed new mariculture regulations that were met with sharp criticism from the aquatic farming industry. The industry feels that the proposed regulations impose such restrictive and unreasonable operational procedures for farmers that, if implemented, would constitute a regulatory ban on shellfish farming in Alaska. SB 141 is a good faith effort to mitigate the unsatisfactory relationship between the aquatic farming industry and the Department. This legislation is also intended to preserve an industry that has been proven successful in diversifying the economy of Alaska.

SB 141 requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to offer public leases on 60 suspended shellfish sites, 20 clam sites, and 10 geoduck sites. These leases are in addition to permits already issued. The leasing program charges more money for sites rich in harvestable shellfish and less money for barren sites. If shellfish are located on the site, the farmer must abide by the sustained yield principle of management when harvesting the wild stock. When selecting the sites for lease, the Commissioner of DNR must solicit nominations from the industry and select sites that don't interfere with established commercial, subsistence, or personal use.

SB 141 is a step in the right direction to maintain the existence and prosperity of a valuable Alaskan industry without interfering with the right of all Alaskans to harvest a common property resource within the state.