

Joint Legislative Salmon Industry Task Force

Legislative Members

Senator Ben Stevens, Chair
Representative Gary Stevens, Vice-Chair
Senator Kim Elton
Representative Bill Williams
Senator Alan Austerman, Alternate
Representative Drew Scalzi, Alternate



Public Members

Sue Aspelund
Sam Cotten
Duncan Fields
Don Giles
John Lowrance
Robin Samuelson
Gary Slaven
Stephanie Madsen, Alternate
Chris Moss, Alternate

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb. 3, 2003

CONTACT: Ron Irwin, Senate Majority Press
(907) 465-3803

Salmon Task Force Delivers Report and 14 Bills **Backers say Good Start but More Work For Task Force Lies Ahead**

(JUNEAU) -- After months of work, more than 50 public meetings in nearly a dozen communities and a review of hundreds of proposals: The Joint Legislative Salmon Industry Task Force delivered its final report to the Legislature on Friday.

In an attempt to produce a report that illustrated the concerns of the salmon industry statewide the task force and its subcommittees traveled to many communities around the state including: Ketchikan, Petersburg, Sitka, Sand Point, Soldotna, Homer, Cordova, Anchorage, Dillingham, Kodiak, Seattle and on KDLG's "Talk of Alaska."

The report was coupled with 14 pieces of proposed legislation to address some immediate issues concerning Alaska's declining salmon industry, as well as a request to extend the task force until January 2005. Sen. Ben Stevens (R-Anchorage), who chaired the task force, said that this was just a start and that much more is needed if we are to reclaim our salmon industry.

"There is so much happening right now in regard to the world salmon market, it is difficult to get your arms around it all in just a few months," said Stevens. "What we did do was establish a communications conduit between fishermen, processors and the Legislature. Communicating and working together is the key to finding solutions to the problems facing our salmon industry."

Task force vice-chair, Rep. Gary Stevens (R-Kodiak) agrees. He said that the proposals the task force submitted to the Legislature are only short-term fixes. He is personally hoping for a task force extension to go back and consider some long-term industry changes.

"While I am looking forward to the debate in the Legislature over the proposals we have submitted, I hope our colleagues in both bodies recognize that our work is not yet finished," said Rep. Stevens. "We held many public hearings and heard from lots of people and that is a process we will need to continue if we are going to revitalize Alaska's salmon industry."

The bills submitted for the Legislature to consider this year include a salmon product development tax credit for fisheries businesses to promote incentive for new salmon product forms and processing ventures. In an attempt to encourage new entrants into the processing sector, a measure lowering bonding

requirements and modifying the tax payment schedule has been submitted in the task force recommendations.

(MORE)

Page 2
Task Force
Feb. 3, 2003

Furthermore the House and Senate will consider allowing “transporters” to act as tendering agents for fishermen. This would provide more autonomy and flexibility for fishermen to explore new market opportunities.

One subcommittee was charged with coming up with ideas for ensuring good quality salmon from time of capture to the market place.

“We must move past the status quo,” said Rep. Stevens. “If we are going to compete with fish farms we must provide a superior product. The first step is to continually improve the quality of the fish at the time of catch.”

As a result the quality subcommittee presented a bill requiring mandatory chilling and delivery standards for salmon. There are many methods currently employed by the industry and the task force explored additional methods.

Sen. Alan Austerman (R-Kodiak) introduced the bill last year that called for the formation of this task force. He said he is pleased with how much the task force accomplished, but echoed the calls for more work to be done.

“I never envisioned our getting all of the answers to all of the questions in one year,” said Austerman. “This task force must continue.”

Sen. Kim Elton (D-Juneau) served on the task force and said he was glad to see everyone so serious about addressing the problems before the panel.

“The task force recognized we had a duty beyond just making noise,” said Elton. “The value of the salmon industry is leaking away and our coastal economy is suffering.”

The Legislature will be considering the extension request later on this session. Sen. Stevens will be on hand to answer questions about the report at the Senate Majority Press Availability on Tuesday, Feb. 4, 2003 at 9:30 am in the Beltz Committee Room on the second floor of the State Capitol Building. Media outside of Juneau may participate via teleconference by dialing toll-free (888) 263-1555.

###

***Journalist Notes:** Copies of the Salmon Task Force report are available in the Senate Majority Press Office. Actualities are available on our website: www.akrepublicans.org.