

Alaska State Legislature

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Representative Fred Dyson

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ADF&G Sells Research Catch to Pay Bills **Fish Caucus Meeting Draws Legislative Attention to Practice**

(JUNEAU) – The state Department of Fish and Game’s practice of supporting its commercial fishing research program by selling fish caught through research and test fisheries drew the attention of more than a dozen state legislators at today’s meeting of the Fish Caucus.

Rep. Fred Dyson (R-Eagle River), called a caucus meeting on the topic to raise legislative awareness of a practice that many agree is legal and necessary, but which is becoming a matter of increasing concern in the state’s fishing industry.

“Faced with decreased state revenues and departmental budgets, they got permission from the Legislature to start catching fish and selling them for the sole purpose of financing research projects,” said Dyson, who has worked as a commercial driftnet fisherman in Bristol Bay. “It’s been my goal to get legislators informed about this and to give stakeholders the chance to comment on the downside of what we call the department’s revenue fishing.”

Doug Mecum, director of the division of sportfish, told committee members the department takes in about \$2.7 million a year in revenue and research fisheries, paying about half to the fishermen catching the fish, and keeping the rest. Sale of such fish brings in only about 5 percent of his department’s annual budget, supports critical research and makes up only part of the general fund money cut in recent years, he said.

Fishermen and representatives from various fishing groups told legislators they support fishery research, which provides the scientific basis for sound management of fish stocks. But they voiced fears that as the need for such research expands the practice could grow out of hand, and the state would have an unfair advantage over other fishermen, getting priority access to limited fish stocks, overfishing on weak runs, or even fishing during times and using gear unavailable to other fishermen.

Several fishermen said that their fish taxes and permit fees already return more to the state treasury than the industry receives in regulation and services, and that they would be willing to pay more so the Legislature could give the department what it needs for research and management. Dyson said he expected legislators would consider this position as they continued to discuss the matter and its implications for state fiscal policy.

Among the other legislators attending were Rep. Con Bunde (R-Anchorage), Rep. Hugh Fate (R-Fairbanks), Rep. Ken Lancaster (R-Soldotna), Rep. Lesil McGuire (R-Anchorage), Rep. Drew Scalzi (R-Homer), Rep. Gary Stevens (R-Kodiak), Rep. Bill Williams (R-Saxman), and Rep. Peggy Wilson (R-Wrangell).

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