

ALASKA LEGISLATURE

Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

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Committees:
State Affairs, Chair
Fisheries
Judiciary



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HB 188 — Regional Fisheries Trusts

Sponsor Statement

The more Alaskans fishing in Alaska’s commercial fisheries, the better.

That’s the vision behind HB 188, which empowers Alaska fishing communities to improve access to the economic opportunity of fisheries right off their shores.

Alaska’s commercial fisheries are a critical and sustainable source of employment, income, and cultural identity. A \$6 billion dollar industry employing over 30,000 people, fisheries have been the economic engine of Alaska’s coastal communities for over a century. Commercial fishing uniquely allows self-sufficient people, businesses, and communities to flourish in places where other economic opportunity is scarce. Alaskans want — and in many places, need — access to sustainable, vibrant fisheries.

But the path to permit ownership has narrowed for many Alaskan fishermen. There is no shortage of Alaskans who are good at running a boat and logging 18-hour days slaying salmon, but it’s harder than ever to break into the industry. The declining number of limited entry permits in many Alaska communities and the greying of the fleet reduce opportunities to transfer knowledge and permits to fishermen starting their careers.

HB 188 gives up to three regions in Alaska the option of establishing regional fisheries trusts, to provide a mechanism to help new fishermen enter Alaska fisheries.

If — and only if — a region chooses to establish one, a regional fisheries trusts would be able to hold permits and then temporarily transfer those permits aspiring fishermen, offering a stepping stone between deckhanding and individual permit ownership.

Just as fishermen can temporarily emergency transfer limited entry permits, regional fisheries trusts can temporarily transfer permits to fishermen wanting to fish in the region. A fisherman can fish a temporarily transferred permit for up to six years.

Fisheries trusts offer fishermen the opportunity to skipper a boat and gain confidence, experience, and resources, better situating them to make the six-figure decision to finance a permit and become an independent fisherman and small business owner.

There is a firm cap on the number of permits a fisheries trust can acquire, to protect against distortion of the permit market. Limited authorization language in HB 188 restricts fisheries trusts to three regions in Alaska, in order to allow real-world vetting of the idea only in regions that choose to opt in to the opportunity.

Trusts combine the components of other, well-established tools to help improve fisheries opportunities. Similar to regional seafood development associations, fisheries trusts are self-determining and opt-in. Two thirds of the municipalities in a region must petition to establish a fisheries trust. Somewhat similar to regional nonprofit aquaculture associations, trusts are regionally governed, in order to be responsive to the needs of local communities and fishermen. Similar to and complementing the hugely successful Commercial Fishing Revolving Loan Fund, trusts connect fishermen with the resources they need to start a business as the field becomes more and more capital-intensive.

Partners around Alaska — fishermen, processors, academics, policymakers, attorneys, municipalities, state and federal agencies, and more — have spent more than three years developing HB 188, contributing time, energy, and good ideas. The concept has been public for nearly two years, to provide for maximum transparency and public input.

Fisheries trusts are not a silver bullet: they offer an innovative and common-sense tool for fishing communities to help fishermen convert their work ethic, responsibility, and fishing skills into economic opportunity.

If you have questions, comments, or concerns, our door is open. Reid Magdanz in the office of Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins is staffing the legislation and available at 465.3306 or Reid.Magdanz@akleg.gov.