

# ALASKA LEGISLATURE

*Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins*

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## **HB 188 — Regional Fisheries Trusts** **Sponsor Statement**

HB 188 improves Alaskans' opportunity to access Alaska fisheries and empowers Alaska communities to achieve greater economic self-sufficiency.

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 state-issued limited entry permits which provide access to Alaska fisheries are leaving Alaska, particularly rural Alaska. The cost of running a fisheries business has climbed as fisheries have modernized and professionalized, increasing the price of entry for new and young fishermen. Rising financial barriers to entry have cost Alaska's fishing communities jobs, economic potential, and tax revenue.

Regional fisheries trusts, as envisioned by HB 188, empower Alaska's fishing communities with a tool to retain fishing permits and improve economic opportunity. Fisheries trusts can hold permits and lease them to Alaska fishermen for a limited period of time, offering a stepping stone between deckhanding and individual permit ownership. Just as you would rent an apartment before you buy a house, fisheries trusts offer people with skills and know-how an opportunity to get experience skippering a boat, make mistakes, and save some money before making the huge, potentially six-figure legal decision to buy a permit.

As with the Commercial Fishing Revolving Loan Fund, which has helped hundreds of Alaskans enter fisheries, regional fisheries trusts provide state residents a more accessible path to entering Alaska fisheries. Though not a silver bullet, trusts offer fishing communities a common-sense tool which allows responsibility, hard work, and expertise to be the measure of a fisherman's success — not their access to credit.

Similar to RSDAs, fisheries trusts are self-determining and opt-in. Two thirds of the municipalities in a region must affirmatively petition to establish a fisheries trust. Trusts are locally governed and designed with a limited scope — after a maximum of six years, a fisherman must individually purchase a permit to continue in the fishery. There is a firm cap on the number of permits a trust can acquire, to protect against distorting the permit market.

Partners behind this legislation, including this legislative office, have spent more than two years working on HB 188, building and rebuilding policy with a wide range of stakeholders, including fishermen, processors, academics, policymakers, lawyers and more. The concept was released publicly last year, for maximum transparency and input. There are still revisions to be made and work to be done.

If you have questions, comments, or concerns, we are here to answer them. Reid Magdanz in the office of Rep. Kreiss-Tomkins is staffing the legislation and available at 465.3306 or [Reid.Magdanz@akleg.gov](mailto:Reid.Magdanz@akleg.gov).