

Senate OKs bill supporting ban on driftnets

This Senate gave final approval recently to a fisheries bill that strengthens the U.S. position against driftnets and retains the Alaska majority on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.

The legislation, which extends the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, includes an amendment authored by Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, that supports the United Nations resolution calling for a moratorium on the use of high seas driftnets by June 1992.

The Stevens amendment also states

that international agreements on the use of driftnets that are negotiated before the 1992 moratorium should require 100 percent satellite coverage and adequate observers on driftnet vessels.

In addition, the amendment calls for a permanent ban on destructive fishing practices beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone of any nation.

"This is yet another way of putting the Japanese, Taiwanese and South Koreans on notice that high seas driftnets are unacceptable and will not be tolerated," Stevens said.

"Step by step, we're getting closer to ending this destructive practice," he added.

Stevens said the bill passed makes no change in the makeup of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. Earlier this year, Stevens said he fought successfully in the Senate to retain the Alaska majority on the council. The original House of Representatives version would have added two seats and shifted control of the group to Washington and Oregon interests.

"It's critical that we keep control over the management of fishery

resources off our coast," he said.

The legislation also gives the council the authority to recommend to the secretary of the Department of Commerce an observer program and fee system for Alaska fisheries, Stevens said.

Another provision of the bill bans the practice of roe stripping.

After passing the conference report on the Magnuson reauthorization, the Senate returned it to the House of Representatives to correct a provision that would prevent data collected by observers from being used for enforcement purposes.