

# Legislation calls for full-time fish panel

by Sen. Willie Hensley

for the Tundra Times

Recently, I introduced legislation in the Senate to create a full-time fisheries management commission to replace the existing Board of Fisheries.

This legislation proposes to correct a basic problem of the present board system of fisheries management: the lack of time to adequately address increasingly complex fisheries issues.

In recent years there has been a phenomenal growth of fisheries issues and developments that demand the attention of the board.

The expansion of commercial fisheries into previously unharvested areas and the development of new fish products and markets have caused the economic activity, value and competition associated with fisheries to multiply.

A further development has been aquaculture. In some areas, there is also increasing competition between the different user groups — commercial, sport and subsistence.

The Board of Fisheries also must participate in treaty negotiations and cooperative efforts with the North Pacific Fisheries Management

Council.

With this increase in complexity, the ability of our part-time Board of Fisheries to address the issues in a forthright and unbiased manner has been severely strained.

The 100 days or so that the board typically convenes each year has not been sufficient to resolve major issues or conflicts. This year alone, more than 600 proposals were not even brought up for consideration.

The overload dilutes the board's formal process and the standards used for decision making. This breeds suspicion, mistrust and, in the end, contempt for the process itself.

It is clear that we are in need of a more attentive and judicious approach to fisheries management if we are to have long-lasting solutions.

In my view, this is no discredit to the current or previous board members. I believe they have given laudable service to the state, most at tremendous personal sacrifice. However, the duties and requirements of today's fisheries management are beyond the scope of a part-time board.

My proposal establishes a five-member commission. The commissioners are paid by the state and serve four years in staggered terms. They



---

*'This proposal may not be the only solution, but something radically different must be done.'*

---

are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the Legislature. They cannot have a proprietary interest in any fishery while serving on the commission.

It is not my intention to replace the public members of the current board with bureaucrats. Rather, it is to allow those people whose experience would qualify them for the current board a

chance to devote themselves full-time to handling the management responsibilities in a fair and judicious manner.

This proposal may not be the only solution, but something radically different must be done.

The future of the resource requires it; 100,000 Alaskans dependent on the resources deserve it.