

State, fish groups discuss improvements in Community Development Program

by Jeff Richardson
Tundra Times staff

Fisheries groups met last week with Lt. Governor Fran Ulmer to discuss ways to improve administration of the Community Development (CDQ) Program.

"Fran, representing the State of Alaska, is clearly enamored of the program," said Richard Tremaine of the Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association. "They're trying to make it so it works a little bit smoother."

Last week's discussions, and additional meetings planned for early February, are intended to solidify the economic gains made since the program was launched two years ago.

The CDQ initiative allows 56 coastal villages of western Alaska, organized into six community development consortiums, to split the 7.5 percent of the pollock quota (about 100,000 tons per year). Each consortium has a corporate fishing/processing partner which trains and hires village residents. In addition, revenues from selling

the quota harvest are to be invested in village economic diversification.

Currently, the program, which is halfway through a four-year trial period, generates \$20 million annually in local investment capital.

The State of Alaska has substantial oversight responsibility for the CDQ program to insure it is responsive to local needs and meets long-term goals. Tremaine says the oversight is important - even necessary - but at times has been cumbersome, not allowing the consortiums enough latitude to make timely decisions in the field.

"The approval time for a shovel is about 45 days," he quipped, and noted that three state agencies share oversight. "The state's working on that, how to coordinate better with itself. What the state's asking for is good business. It's a mentorship in many ways and we need to structure that a bit."

While another major fisheries initiative, the Individual Fisheries Quota program, remains under court challenge, Tremaine says prospects for making the CDQ program permanent are currently good.

"Some of the major opponents have quieted down," he said. "This is a great little system, and the state's trying to make it work better for the regions, and to learn."

Tremaine said the "resource rental" principles of the CDQ program might be applicable to other industries, such as timber, providing a way both to stabilize and diversify local economies.

Community development organizations participating in the CDQ program include Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association (5 villages); Bristol Bay Economic Development Corp. (14); Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Assoc. (1); Coastal Villages Fishing Cooperative (17); Norton Sound Economic Development Corp. (15); and Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Assoc. (4).

The CDQ program was established as a way of allowing western Alaska residents an opportunity to participate in the rich Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands fisheries which have been closed to them because of the high capital investment required.