

House calls for reduced groundfish allocation

Citing disappointments at the collapse of negotiations with Japan on the high seas interception of Alaskan salmon, the State House of Representatives has sent a letter to Secretary of State George Schulz, urging him to withhold all further groundfish allocations to the Japanese until the issue is resolved.

The letter charges the Japanese government with failure to negotiate in good faith, despite efforts of state and federal governments to convince the Japanese that interception represents a serious foreign policy issue.

The State of Alaska has been extremely careful to manage its commercial fisheries to avoid interception of salmon stocks destined for Japan. At the same time the Japanese have been allowed to catch and purchase billions of pounds of groundfish in our 200-mile zone each year.

Representative John Binkley, a member of the U.S. negotiating team

and the House Special Committee on Fisheries, today on the House floor called the situation "piracy on the high seas."

"Every time one of these foreign fishermen catch one of our fish," said Binkley, "they are literally stealing food from the mouths of our subsistence fishermen and cash from the pockets of our commercial fishermen."

"Our fish," said Binkley, "spawned and hatched in our rivers, swim out to sea to mature where they have to run through a gauntlet of nets and fishermen to make it back for us to harvest."

Alaskan fishermen, according to Binkley, have made the hard economic choices to strengthen our fishing resources. They have followed regulations of time and area closures. They have reduced net sizes to allow more fish to escape. Alaskans have made the hard choices between using streams for mining or for salmon spawning.

Still the salmon runs in western Alaska have deteriorated, according to Binkley, because of the massive netting capabilities and vigorous efforts by foreign fisheries on the high seas.

In May of 1985 the Alaska Legislature, by resolution, urged the federal government to withhold allocations of groundfish to the Japanese should they fail to negotiate in good faith. In December the North Pacific Fishery Management Council echoed those concerns to the U.S. State Department. Governor Sheffield this past week called for a reduction of 10,000 metric tons of groundfish already allocated to the Japanese as an expression of U.S. dissatisfaction with the breakdown of negotiations.

The letter to Schulz was signed by all 40 members of the House of Representatives. Binkley said he is encouraged by the unanimous support this issue has received from all Alaskans.