

Governments seek ban on driftnets

JUNEAU — Gov. Steve Cowper announced earlier this month that five Western states and British Columbia have joined forces to seek a ban on driftnet fishing on the high seas.

The ban is one of seven steps proposed in a joint proclamation by the governments aimed at eliminating the high seas interception of salmon, other fish species, marine mammals and seabirds that are caught in huge driftnets operated by fishermen from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

The other steps, all of which could be implemented immediately, include a prohibition on the sale of illegally

harvested salmon, reductions in Japanese high seas fisheries, better enforcement of international fisheries agreements and creation of a multinational research organization.

"These nets are deadly effective against anything they encounter — seals, birds and millions of fish," Cowper said. "They not only cost Alaskans and other West Coast fishermen millions of dollars a year, but they are directly responsible for senseless carnage on the high seas."

The joint proclamation calls for an international ban on the use of the nets through the United Nations and other

international forums. It also calls on the Canadian and U.S. federal governments to pursue six other steps, including:

- Further reductions in Japanese land-based and mothership directed high seas salmon fisheries.

- Additional measures to reduce damage by high seas fleets on salmonids, albacore, seabirds, marine mammals and other marine resources.

- Establishment of a new convention in the North Pacific, to be signed by Canada, Japan, the Soviet Union and the United States, to prohibit the

directed or incidental harvest of salmonids on the high seas beyond the 200-mile zones.

- Creation of a multinational research organization, the Pacific International Council for Exploration of the Seas.

- Secure long-term commitments for substantially increased staff and funding to monitor and enforce international fisheries agreements.

- Negotiate international agreements to prohibit the sale, import or transshipment of salmon illegally harvested on the high seas.