

# Legislation targets plastic garbage

WASHINGTON — The Senate recently passed legislation designed to reduce damage to wildlife and the environment caused by plastic driftnets and plastic pollution in the North Pacific.

The driftnet and plastic pollution provisions, which originally were introduced as two separate bills by Sen. Ted Stevens, were included in an omnibus fishing bill.

"Passage of this legislation is the first step in bringing under control the massive amounts of plastic floating in the North Pacific," Stevens said. "Driftnets discarded by foreign fishing fleets and plastic trash are ruining the environment and killing seabirds and marine mammals.

"Non-degradable driftnets are a particular problem because they have the potential to needlessly fish and entrap marine life for decades after they have been discarded," he added.

The bill passed Dec. 19 would direct the secretary of commerce to research the environmental impacts of driftnets in the North Pacific and the feasibility of establishing a driftnet identification system so foreign nations could be held accountable for discarded driftnets.

In addition, the legislation calls on the Commerce Department to study the use of biodegradable materials in driftnets and the establishment of a bounty system to provide an incentive for the retrieval of lost or abandoned plastic netting.

The legislation also would direct the administration to negotiate research,



monitoring and enforcement agreements with foreign nations whose fishing fleets use plastic driftnets. The United States could embargo the fishery products of countries that fail to cooperate in monitoring and enforcement.

Stevens said that the monitoring, enforcement and driftnet identification provisions of the legislation would also help control incidental catches.

"We believe thousands of Alaska origin salmon are intercepted every year by foreign fishing fleets using driftnets, yet many of the violating countries have refused to work with us on the problem," Stevens said. "This bill would give us some enforcement authority over those nations which continue to ignore the irresponsible practices of their fishing fleets."

The plastic pollution provision of the legislation implements an international treaty approved by the Senate in November. The treaty would prohibit the dumping of plastics and other garbage into the oceans.

The bill would apply the treaty to

U.S. ships anywhere in the world and all foreign ships while they are located within U.S. waters.

The omnibus fishery bill also includes a new Governing International Fisheries Agreement, which provides for joint venture fishery operations between the U.S. and Japan after Jan. 1.

In 1986, about half of the total lan-

dings of fish in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska were taken by harvesters operating under joint venture agreements with foreign companies. A majority of these agreements are with Japanese firms.

The legislation passed the House of Representatives Dec. 18. It will now be forwarded to the president for his signature.