

# Final agreement reached on state water quality standards

Calling it one of the major achievements of his administration to date, Gov. Tony Knowles recently announced new water quality standards for the state.

Knowles said resolution of a long-standing dispute has resulted in standards that are intended to be user-friendly to industry but tough enough to protect the environment.

"This decision is very important for Alaska jobs and families," Knowles said. Industry benefits

from having clear standards to work with and from knowing that the Administration is willing to work with them to resolve regulatory disputes. And all of Alaska's family benefits from having high standards for the protection of our precious liquid assets."

The governor called four major stakeholders in the issue to a meeting in Juneau. They included Judy Brady, executive director of the Alaska Oil and Gas Association, Becky Gay, executive direc-

tor of the Resource Development Council, Eric Jorgensen, attorney for the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund and Gershon Cohen, director of the Alaska Clean Water Alliance. With Gene Burden, commissioner of environmental conservation, acting as mediator, the two sides met for six hours before reaching a common understanding on specific modifications and a process for future revisions on the water quality standards.

"Perhaps just as important as

the decision is the process involved," Knowles said. "This decision was reached by holding public hearings, then evaluating all the data and the testimony received. More than that, we then sat down with both sides and worked towards consensus. It wasn't easy, but the process works."

Knowles expressed gratitude for the efforts of Brady, Gay, Jorgensen and Cohen, as well as Commissioner Burden. Particip-

pants in the talks were also positive about the result, according to a press release from the governor's office.

At issue were water quality regulations adopted in 1994 after an extensive, 5-year, public review process. Signed into law on the last day of the Hickel Administration, the regulations were almost immediately challenged by the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, the Alaska Clean Water Alliance as well as fisheries and tourism organizations.