

Bottomfish talks open

ST. PAUL, PRIBILOF ISLANDS - - The Aleutian Pribilof Fisheries Development Conference began here Wednesday with a call from Aleut leaders for Native organization to lead resource development planning efforts for the region.

Larry Mercurieff, President of the Tanadgusix Corporation of St. Paul and chairman of the board of the Aleut Corporation, welcomed the participants, including Aleut corporation directors, village leaders, representatives of international fisheries development interests, state legislators, opinion leaders, and many other guests to the island community.

Planning for this control will take the united effort of all Aleut organizations," Mercurieff said.

The need for planning was addressed also by the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association executive director and St. George Tanaq Corporation president Patrick Pletnikoff in opening remarks at the conference.

"It is our strongest recommendation to all our people to get into the bottom fish business as soon as possible, learn all

they can, joint venture with knowledgeable, experienced fisherman worldwide and carve a permanent place for themselves in these fisheries," he said.

Pletnikoff urged a commitment of surplus oil tax dollars from the state for planning. "We must insist that our state legislators appropriate some of the swollen oil coffers income for the study, planning, and development of this renewable resource before it is given away to (See BOTTOMFISH page Eight)

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foreign interests or depleted by ignorance and lack of proper planning," Pletnikoff urged.

The Aleut leader suggested two objectives for bottom fisheries development. First, he said, a regional fisheries plan should be developed for the Pribilof Aleutian Area.

Secondly, he noted, training efforts must be started to provide for a work force in the industry from the Aleut population.

"Why not train the people who live here and want to stay here all their lives?" he asked.

Pletnikoff said Native people were determined to take these neutral roles in the bottom fish industry.

"We are determined to proceed to carve out a niche for the Aleut people in the fisheries business and have already developed joint venture agreements which will give us the most sophisticated fisher-processor vessels ever to ply the waters of the Pribilofs" he said.

Panels on the first day of the conference reviewed the fisheries industry in the region from the view point of fisherman, processors and government interest.

The conference, scheduled through Sept. 6 is sponsored by the Alaska Native

Foundation, State of Alaska, and the office of the Governor. It is intended to provide villagers with information on the new industry, its opportunities, and potential social impact on the Native communities of the Aleutian Pribilof region.

"This is an historic occasion. One which will be remembered by up and coming generations of Aleuts as maybe the recreation of the United Aleut Nation, for the purpose of controlling our own future for a change." Mercurieff said.

Mercurieff warned that Aleut people and their organizations and corporations will have to cooperate closely and be well organized to avoid outside exploitation of local and regional resources.

"We've got a big fight on our hands. When we start talking about controlling our own resources, because up there, there are very large, well organized, well funded groups and organizations who would not want this to happen."

"Why should they?" he added. "They've made millions and millions, and billions from our own backyard - - only because we were not as organized." he stated.

The Aleut board chairman told the conference that well financed outside interests are already scouting coastal areas in Alaska for places to begin large-scale fisheries development. Planning must begin immediately he emphasized.

"It is time for us to plan our own control, so that whatever is done in our country, is done with our people in mind at all times.