

Zharoff supports Bristol Bay joint venture

Senator Fred F. Zharoff (D-Kodiak) and Representative Adeheid Herrmann (D-Naknek) last week expressed satisfaction with a recent court ruling in favor of the Togiak herring roe joint venture between the Bristol Bay Herring Marketing Cooperative and the Japanese North Pacific Longline Gillnet Association.

"I hope the processors will now abandon their court action and allow the joint venture to proceed unchallenged," Zharoff said.

A group of 10 U.S. seafood processing companies filed a notice of appeal in Alaska Superior Court April 12 contesting Governor Bill Sheffield's issuance April 10 of an Internal Waters Fish Processing Permit for the joint venture, organized as the Alaska Herring Corporation. The joint venture has been in existence since 1981. Co-op members, all Bristol Bay gillnetters, deliver their catches to Japanese vessels, where it is processed and transported back to Japan. The herring roe, or eggs, from this spring fishery are a high-priced delicacy in Japan.

Superior Court Judge J. Justin Ripley April 24 turned down the processors' request for a stay on the issuance of the permit pending their appeal. In order to receive the stay, the processors had to prove, to the judge's satisfaction, that they would suffer irreparable harm from the joint venture and that they were likely to prevail on the appeal.

"I am not a proponent of

foreign fishing or processing in our waters when we have shown the capability to catch and process for ourselves," Zharoff said. "But the past record and attitude of the domestic processors has not been all that favorable toward the local Bristol Bay fishermen. They have shown little interest in gillnet-caught herring because of its low roe content. This year, all of a sudden, the processors are saying they will buy all the gillnet herring. But, as the Governor's determination document noted, we have seen no solid expressions of their intent, such as advance purchase agreements or contracts."

Zharoff added, "Rather than creating bitter feelings by going to court, the processors should work on developing good relations with the local fishermen and on demonstrating a good faith intention to purchase gillnet-caught herring at competitive prices."

Representative Herrmann noted, "Another reason the domestic processors have shown a preference for seine-caught fish is that it is a lot easier for their tenders to pick up several tons of herring at one time from a large seine boat than it is to pick up a lot of smaller deliveries from the gillnetters. If the domestic processors want the gillnet fish, they should show their intent by giving equal tender service to both seiners and gillnetters."

The Governor approved the joint venture for 2,800 metric tons of herring, reduced from the 4,230 metric ton original request.