

# Fishermen hope to continue JVs

by Steve Pilkington

for the Tundra Times

Alaskan and other American fishermen are looking for a way to continue joint venture fisheries with foreign processors in the Bering Sea, even though the government's long-term policy is to phase out such operations.

The future of twenty joint ventures hangs in the balance while Congress debates a proposal to allow a limited number of foreign vessels to operate under the American flag.

The proposal to "reflag" the overseas processors would allow American fishermen to continue to sell bottomfish directly to the processors, and delay the "Americanization" of U.S. fisheries.

"I'm seeing jitters in the joint venture industry already," said Trefon Angasan of South Naknek, vice-president of the American High Seas Fisheries Association, and Chief Executive Officer of Great Pacific Fisheries. Great Pacific, based in Anchorage, runs one of 28 vessels involved in joint ventures.

The process of "Americanizing" the industry began in 1976, when Con-

gress passed the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, commonly known as the 200-mile limit.

The emphasis began to be placed on getting American vessels into the potentially lucrative bottomfish business.

However, overseas vessels have continued to play a major role in the fisheries over the years, although their role has been carefully controlled by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, which limits the foreign catch.

The allocations for overseas vessels have been decreasing as part of the council's — and the nation's — efforts to get more American vessels into the industry, both as catchers and processors.

But now, faced with dwindling allocations to foreign vessels buying fish over-the-side from American boats, some members of the joint venture industry are looking for ways to continue their business with overseas processors.

The proposal to reflag a limited number of foreign vessels for a given period of time would get around the

problem.

Proponents of the move, such as Trefon Angasan, say it is too early to phase out the joint ventures.

After originally supporting a more rapid phase-out, Rep. Don Young of Alaska has now asked Congress to allow limited reflagging.

The plan is for a five year extension of joint ventures in order to give the domestic fisheries time to prepare processing ships to handle the current joint venture load.

If Young's amendment passes, it would create a 'window' for a small number of foreign boats.

Opponents of the reflagging measure see the five year extension as a "loophole" for offshore processors. Some see the measure as opening the door to future extensions beyond the five years now proposed.

Also, the U.S. processors see the continuation of joint ventures as an end to the already active legislation which was supposed to have Americanized the industry.

A mark-up session on the House legislation is tentatively scheduled by the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee for June 9.