

Osterback extolls bottomfish

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Research, not new boats or more processing plants, will best accelerate Kodiak's entry into the bottom fish industry, Kodiak shrimp trawlers told State Rep. Alvin Osterback, D-Sand Point, at last night's bottom fish symposium.

"In the long run," Osterback said, "bottom fish will be bigger than the pipeline, because it's a renewable resource."

Osterback, chairman of the legislature's Interim Resources Committee, is traveling to coastal communities throughout the state to learn from fishermen how state monies could be used to help develop an Alaskan bottom fish industry. Sen. Kay Poland, D-Kodiak, was also present at last night's hearing.

A dozen Kodiak shrimp trawlers and processors listened while Osterback detailed the state and federal loans available for new gear, equipment and boats.

"If you put a lot of bottom fish boats up here and they can't make it," Bud Angell of the trawler Misty said, "they're going to go into shrimp and we're already hurting."

A research program to locate bottom fish is needed, Al Burch, manager of the Alaska Shrimp Trawlers Association told Osterback.

In reply to a question from

Osterback, Jon Black, manager of New England Fish Co.'s Gibson Cove plant where a bottom fish line is being installed, said he foresaw a problem getting boats to fish bottom fish 12 months a year. So far boats are only willing to fish for bottom fish during the off season when shrimp is closed, Black said.

"It's tough for people to give up a known fishery where they know they will make money for an unknown fishery," Black said. "There's an opportunity for some sort of subsidy program to prove you can make money on a year round basis."

Kodiak boats are too small to fish bottom fish in the Bering Sea and the Kodiak harbor is not big enough to accommodate a fleet of large boats.

"Not many of us want to go out and play in the Bering Sea and compete against the Japanese and Russians," Hilsinger said. "The foreign little catcher boats are 120 feet long. To be able to compete we'd have to build new boats and we're not going to put a lot of money into something not knowing if it will work or not..."

"And Kodiak is not set up for more boats 120 to 150-feet. Where are you going to put them, Hilsinger said. "We need a new boat harbor."

Large boats 120-feet and over would probably exceed 200 gross tons, Osterback pointed out, and require licensed officers aboard. Osterback said he had discussed changing the regulations in Washington, D.C., and with Admiral Hayes of the Coast Guard.

"The most important thing is to get a U.S. bottom fishery started quickly," Osterback said. Earlier he pointed out that foreign boats now take 99 percent of the bottom fish caught in U.S. waters.

As well as New England Fish Co., in Kodiak, Peter Pan Seafoods in King Cove is readying to process bottom fish. "The biggest bottom fishery will be in the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea," Osterback said. Efforts are underway to fund a boat harbor on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs, he said, to allow processors to build close to Bering Sea bottom fish stocks.

City Manager Ivan Widom said the impact from the 200-mile limit was apparent in Kodiak right now and the city could use all the state funds it could get. For oil impact "there's a lot of federal money out there somewhere," Widom said, "but 200-mile limit impact funds are virtually non-existent."