

# Mariculture Association seeks diversification of economy

The Alaska Mariculture Association has called on state policymakers to tackle diversification of Alaska's economy by promoting development of one of Alaska's most promising economic opportunities — mariculture.

AMA issued the request following a meeting of its board of directors in Juneau. Paul Fuhs, AMA president, said the group concluded that the introduction of legislation is the best way to clarify ambiguous statutes and regulations and clearly articulate a policy on sea farming.

"The growing consumer interest in seafood has combined with a leveling of commercial fisheries landings to produce a very positive market climate for cultured seafood," Fuhs said. "We believe Alaska may miss these favorable market conditions by failing to enact a clear state policy.

"This emerging industry in becoming ensnared in red tape, and we're

asking policymakers to help us get free."

Fuhs, who also is mayor of Unalaska and president of the Southwest Municipal Conference, said research by the Attorney General's Office indicates the only commercial mariculture operation sanctioned under current law and regulations is the cultivation of oysters — a non-indigenous species. Meanwhile, the farming of native stocks, such as scallops and mussels, has no established permitting process except for projects falling under scientific or educational purposes.

"Our examination of the legal status of mariculture has revealed a confusing patchwork of often conflicting laws and regulations that result in barriers to applicants," Fuhs said. "While present state law recognizes the legal status of mariculture, there are legal and regulatory uncertainties stifling investments."