

# Stevens introduces bill to cut damage from foreign nets

U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens has introduced legislation designed to reduce damage to wildlife and the environment caused by pelagic driftnets used by the Japanese, Koreans and Taiwanese in the North Pacific.

The bill would require stricter monitoring of foreign driftnet fishing fleets and would implement a net bounty program to pay persons who retrieve discarded driftnet or other plastic fishing net materials.

Stevens said he introduced the legislation in response to the growing use of the driftnets, which entangle marine wildlife while used for fishing and continue to kill fish, marine mammals and seabirds after they have been discarded by foreign fishing boats. Since the nets are made of plastic, they do not disintegrate but continue to collect in the ocean.

"Different vessels fishing in the North Pacific set at least a million miles of net and lose or discard as much as 1,000 miles each year," Stevens said. "These plastic 'ghost nets' continue to create a devastating curtain of death for the living marine resources of the high seas for many years after they have been cut loose or lost by the high seas fishing fleets."

There are approximately 1,700 vessels from Japan, Taiwan and the Republic of Korea which set plastic driftnets during their fishing seasons. Each vessel sets a net which is suspended vertically in the water by floats and allowed to drift with the high seas currents. The nets, which are typically 9 to 20 miles long, are set in the evening and retrieved the following morning.

"The 172-vessel Japanese mother-ship salmon fleet constitutes only 10 percent of the total number of vessels in the North Pacific, but the discarded nets from these vessels alone may kill as many as 500,000 to 750,000 seabirds a year, and 5,000 Dall's porpoise," Stevens said.

