

Sheffield calls for oversight hearings to review salmon interception agreement

JUNEAU — Gov. Bill Sheffield has called for congressional oversight hearings this fall to review the summer's implementation of a recently negotiated agreement with Japan regarding interception of Alaska salmon on the high seas.

Sheffield also said he intends to appoint a standing advisory group to work on this issue composed of Alaskans representing the commercial, subsistence and recreational fisheries impacted by these interceptions.

"Although the result of long and hard negotiations, that agreement was just a small step along the road of ending 34 years of Japanese interception of Alaska salmon," Sheffield said.

"This agreement is only a step forward if it has been properly implemented. The oversight hearings could evaluate the enforcement, monitoring and research efforts conducted this season, and review the adequacy of the agreement and federal support for funding."

Sheffield said he intends to formally request the oversight hearings be conducted by either Alaska Sens. Frank Murkowski or Ted Stevens.

The recommendations for hearings

and an advisory committee came as a result of an informal brainstorming meeting called by Sheffield earlier in Anchorage to plan strategies for further action on this issue.

The advisory group he will appoint "can form the core of any future state delegation to negotiations and can start drafting a state policy to guide us in the future," the governor said.

"While we all know that we wish to eliminate interceptions, we have never adopted a formal policy on the high seas interception question. I believe such a policy document would have value in dealing with the federal government and other nations and help ensure that our course is constant over the years.

Following 10 months of negotiations, the United States and Japan reached agreement in March on moving the land-based Japanese fishing fleet further west on the high seas in order to reduce interception of Alaska salmon. The agreement, ratified April 9 by the International North Pacific Fisheries Commission, requires monitoring and research activities which can serve as the basis for further negotiations.