

# Islanders seek economic freedom

## Express concern for Island's well-being

power and water, the school post office and store there.

On St. George Island, 30 miles to the south, employment provided by the few federal positions required to monitor the seal herd

and municipal services are threatened by federal austerity measures that could shut off money now providing income sources there.

Their hopes rest on developing the hair crab fish-

eries within three to five years and developing the halibut and squid fisheries in at least five years, Merculieff said. The corporation intends to fish for diverse species to avoid becoming

dependent on a single market or resource.

Few fishermen would have the means to keep the hair crab alive. The crab which the Japanese

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For thousands of years the Alaska Native peoples have been self-sufficient living within their tribal groups dispersed throughout our land. But within a two hundred year time, that has all changed. Drastically.

But with this cultural change of two different and divergent cultures mingling, has come the growth of control, of our mastering the second and controlling culture.

In one instance here is the Pribilof islanders who are making plans to break away from their present almost total economic dependence on the federal government. President of the Tanadgusix Corp. of St. Paul Island, Larry Merculieff said that they are doing feasibility studies on plans to develop three fisheries there.

Their hopes rest on developing Korean hair crab, halibut and squid fisheries to eventually provide residents with year round employment for St. Paul residents and residents of her sister island St. George, 30 miles to the south.

The islands are located in the Bering Sea some 750 miles southwest of Anchorage and have only seasonal employment for most of the island's residents. Presently as with every winter, there is about 80 percent unemployment for 690 residents of both islands.

For those 537 residents that can work during the summer, the annual seal fur harvest keeps them employed for a whole six weeks to herd, kill, skin and process the seals, under the watchful eye of the federal government. Year-round employment at St. Paul is limited to municipal needs,

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would pay \$3 to \$6 per pound for, according to Mercurieff. For the past six months, the village corporation has been doing research on methods for catching the hair crab from the ocean and keeping them alive for shipment to Japan. At first there was a 100 per cent mortality (or death rate) and now there is a 100 per cent survival rate, he said.

Solutions must be found for other problems.

— Analysis of the hair crab fishery is to be finished by the Seattle based North Pacific Fishery Development Inc.

— Experiments with different crab pot designs must be completed

— The crabs molting and reproductive cycles and the crabs quantities must be studied

— Fishing seasons will have to be established to take the crab at its best and when the weather there is calmest

— a local fishing zone must be established around the Pribilofs

— Local residents must be trained to work in the fisheries

Traditionally, the Aleut have caught much of their sustenance from the sea

using bidarkis, their sea lion skin or canvas covered version of the Eskimo kyak. Now families there have aluminum boats used for hunting and fishing.

For the proposed fisheries, the corporation is examining a boat design; 37

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feet in length, able to ride rough water well and small enough to be pulled ashore at the end of a day's work. The boats are relatively inexpensive at \$40,000 to \$70,000. Individual fishermen can invest in them with loans guaranteed by the village corporation.

Mercurieff said that the islands are hurting economically and that he is forestalling firms that are constantly approaching him asking him to use St. Paul as a base for oil and gas exploration or for large fishing ventures.

The Pribilofs are in the middle of what is potentially the largest bottom-

fisheries in the world. We don't want to keep their culture and environment, he said. "We don't want alternatives we can't understand and control."...Like the Dutch Harbor syndrome... massive and chaotic development.