

Cowper blasts Congress for vote on fish panel

Gov. Steve Cowper expressed disappointment recently in response to a U.S. House committee vote earlier this month to add two seats to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, which manages fishing in the North Pacific.

"Unfortunately, it appears as though the committee got snookered by procedural arguments when the real issue is what's best for the resource," Cowper said. "This is nothing more than a blatant attempt by factory trawlers to overrun the existing process. The worst part is the factory trawlers have a long history of wasting fish, and that abuse comes directly out of the wallets of Alaska fishermen.

"We fought hard against this vote, and we're going to fight this all the way to the president. We're not going to let a well financed special interest roll Alaskans," he said.

The House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, by a voice vote Oct. 5, approved an additional seat each for Washington and Oregon on the council, which manages fisheries



out to 200 miles in the U.S. exclusive economic zone off Alaska. Cowper had lobbied against the addition of the seats, which was promoted by Washington state members of Congress.

The governor noted that this spring the Washington- and Oregon-based factory trawlers stripped row out of up to 40,000 metric tons of pollock in the Gulf and tossed the meat overboard. As a result, the entire quota was used up by March 23, leaving shore plants in Kodiak with no pollock for the rest of the year.

The issue next moves to the House floor. The U.S. Senate is considering its own reauthorization of the so-called Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act, which contains the amendment for the additional seats.