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Testimony offered to Cook Inlet Salmon Task Force

Alaska State Legislature

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by Ray Riutta, Executive Director

Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Task Force. ASMI was asked to come and share information about sustainability, and how it figures in Alaska's seafood promotion effort. Alaska is the model for sustainable fisheries management, and this is increasingly important in today's global seafood marketplace.

Ten years ago, we increased the amount of emphasis we were putting on sustainability, and incorporated it into our key messaging, however at that time it was arguably a third-tier message for Alaska Seafood. Now it is one of the top-tier messages we are communicating to our customers. It is one of our major points of differentiation, where we are point out what distinguishes Alaska seafood from other products in the market.

Sourcing seafood sustainably has become more important to retailers, chefs and foodservice operators. This is not just a fad in corporate culture, or a nod to conservation groups. It is a real

scramble for raw materials in the face of increasing demand for seafood, combined with awareness that to build a strong business you have to be able to rely on a stable source of supply.

Alaska accounts for over half the nation's commercial seafood harvest, and because our fisheries are managed sustainably, we are an attractive source for premium quality seafood for customers all over the world.

In the face of a proliferation of eco-labels for seafood, springing up in Europe and the U.S., Alaska Seafood needs to stand on its own. Outside eco-labeling regimes are trying to define which seafood is sustainable and determine how fisheries are managed. Our challenge is to separate Alaska seafood – the entire portfolio of Alaska seafood products -- from other products in the marketplace, and to communicate to customers that the Alaska Seafood logo appears on products that all are harvested in accordance with principles of sustainable fisheries management. We are up against stiff competition from eco-labeling concerns at home and abroad.

We invited 100 key Alaska seafood customers from the U.S., Europe and Asia to our sustainability forum in Anchorage this past July. They heard first from a sustainable fisheries expert with the “FAO” -- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations -- which has developed internationally recognized criteria

for sustainable fisheries management. Alaska's management meets or exceeds these international criteria. The forum also included presentations from the head of NMFS, ADF&G, the IPHC (Halibut Commission), and the deputy director of our North Pacific Fisheries Management Council. As a result, forum attendees heard in great detail about every aspect of our management, and how for fifty years Alaska has managed its fisheries sustainably as mandated in the Alaska Constitution. They learned that Alaska makes its decisions based on sound science. They heard about the separation of management from allocation, the transparency of the allocation process, habitat protection, enforcement, and strict adherence to harvest limits. It was all of great interest to these big buyers, for they are under the gun to advance sustainable sourcing at their own companies. The Forum resulted in positive media coverage for Alaska, and is expected to exert positive impact on purchasing decisions.

We have developed a family of printed resources, most also published on the internet to support our effort to educate customers and consumers about sustainable Alaska seafood. You have a kit before you, and much of the information is also published on the web at [www.AlaskaSeafood.org](http://www.AlaskaSeafood.org).

Let me emphasize that ASMI had witnessed brand displacement in some markets, and the purpose of the ASMI

sustainability initiative is to reclaim brand equity, stimulate more widespread use of the Alaska Seafood logo by the Alaska industry and its customers, and raise awareness that the logo signifies seafood from sustainably managed fisheries.

It is incorporated into all of our programs: U.S. retail, U.S. foodservice and international marketing, communications and seafood technical. It is also a cornerstone of public relations and media activities. Here are some examples of activities and resources:

- \* The on-line interactive Seafood U training tool for foodservice and retail staff includes information on sustainability.
  
- \* Many of the sustainability materials have already been translated into European and Asian languages to facilitate educating our overseas customers.
  
- \* Outreach to the conservation community is ongoing.
  
- \* New advertisements in consumer and trade publications provide additional emphasis on sustainability (examples can be seen on the ASMI website and in ASMI's e-newsletter for the Alaska seafood industry, Newsbrief--- sign up today on the ASMI homepage

[www.alaskaseafood.org](http://www.alaskaseafood.org) or just look at back issues archived on the seafood industry portion of the website).

\* New retail and foodservice themed promotional materials advance the sustainability theme.

\* Sustainability centers established at trade show booths at International Boston Seafood Show, and European Seafood Exposition; sustainability materials showcased at all trade shows.

\* Pacific Marine Expo will include a joint UFA-ASMI presentation celebrating 50 years of sustainable fisheries management and Alaska Statehood.

\* ASMI's next meeting of its Board and all Committee members will focus on sustainability, to raise awareness within the industry of the particular points included in Alaska's key sustainability messages.

\* A new sustainability section has been added to the ASMI website. This section has a variety of materials posted on it, including the presentations from the Sustainability Forum and numerous brochures and fact sheets. Sections include resource

management, transparency of process, enforcement, traceability, historic effectiveness, habitat protection, tradition, and an FAO checklist, as well as a sustainability forum section. Downloadable tools are available including the sustainability brochure, sustainability white paper, Marine Protected Areas brochure and white paper, fact sheets and other resources. A wallet card showcasing sustainable Alaska Seafood species has also been created.

As you can see from our efforts to date, this concept of sustainable fisheries management is very important in today's markets. We will continue to develop this theme in the year ahead, to explain to the world that since statehood, Alaska has a proven track record in effective resource management that conforms to international standards. This all rests on our Constitution, the sound scientific management of our resources by the State of Alaska and the National Marine Fisheries Service, and on the public process used to allocate the resources.

Thank you.