

National Seafood Marketing Coalition

Creating jobs & economic growth

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U.S Seafood Industry Unites to Create Jobs

“The formation of a national seafood coalition is underway to market our Nation’s seafood”

December, 20, 2010, Juneau, Alaska – In a historic effort to sustain jobs in the U.S. domestic seafood industry, the National Seafood Marketing Coalition (Coalition) has crossed industry lines from the Gulf of Mexico to Hawaii, and from the Great Plains to the Great Lakes and beyond to garner industry-wide support for the development of a National Seafood Marketing Fund (NSMF). The NSMF will be distributed among five Regional Marketing Boards. The overall goal is to fund the development of broad-based, sustainable marketing strategies within each region that will grow consumer demand for domestic seafood, increase its value, and strengthen the U.S. seafood economy through industry-wide job growth.

So how does this differ from previous national efforts? The key to this proposal is local control rather than that of operational oversight from an agency outside of the region. No one knows the specific marketing and development needs within a region better than those actively involved with that part of the seafood industry.

The Coalition is working on national legislation that will direct a long-term, sustainable source of funding to the NSMF that will help finance industry-wide marketing efforts across the nation. Various funding sources, similar to the Saltonstall-Kennedy Act of 1956, are being explored. This proposed legislation would officially establish five Regional Seafood Marketing Boards to receive dedicate and manage the funds within each region through a grant process that will provide local control.

At a meeting in Seattle, Dane Somers, Executive Director of the Maine Lobster Promotion Council said, “The Coalition has the right plan, at the right time, for all the right reasons. It’s time the country comes together for a common purpose, to express their strong desires to help each other to create new markets, provide stronger benefits and make sure that all Americans have healthy, safe, sustainable seafood products from local sources.

The five Regional Marketing Boards proposed are: Western Pacific (Hawaii)/Alaska, Pacific, Gulf/Caribbean, NE Atlantic/Great Lakes and SE/Mid-Atlantic. Members appointed to each of the boards will represent a cross section of all aspects of the U.S. seafood industry. That includes all U.S. seafood producers, mariculture and aquaculture producers, harvesters and other industry support services. Board members will reflect the expertise and interest of the seafood industry within each local region.

At a meeting held in Seattle in early December, industry leaders from 24 states convened to further the development efforts of the Coalition, and to define the aspects of legislation that will benefit the industry across the board. "This meeting was historical and made me enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with other fishing families around the nation to tell our story. The NSMF will direct the energies of stakeholders within the U.S. fishing industry to create a more secure future for U.S. fisheries, families and jobs," said Natalie Webster, Executive Director of the American Albacore Fishing Association.

The Coalition was founded by leaders of the Alaska seafood industry and is the direct result of a five-year pilot project, on which the national concept is based. Arni Thomson, President of the United Fisherman of Alaska (UFA), has helped to spearhead the idea of the Coalition. He says: "UFA is very pleased to see this coalition expand and prepare important legislation for this next Congress. Attendees at the Seattle meeting demonstrated the will to cooperate and compromise. This synergy will allow them to forge ahead for the overall good of the U.S. fishing and seafood industry."

This unified effort has been presented and vetted across the country and one thing is clear; the message from the U.S. seafood industry is consistent. Bruce Schactler, Director of the Coalition stated, "It's in the best interest of the U.S. to maintain a strong industry for job growth. Industry-wide marketing efforts will grow demand for seafood, increase its value, grow the economy, increase jobs in the industry and increase tax revenues. These economic benefits will also be accompanied by an increase in the health of Americans as consumption of seafood increases."

A steering Committee is being created with three delegates from each of the five regions. The steering committee will continue to work on national legislation, develop specific operational plans and a budget process for moving forward.

In a surprise effort, the Coalition received early funding support from the Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers (ABSC). Jim Stone, who is the ABSC representative to the Coalition says: "In these difficult economic times, promotion of America's domestic seafood production offers clear economic benefits for the country. ABSC wants to show our support for the Coalition and be the first in the industry to write a check. We challenge all industry sectors to come onboard and follow our lead."

To date, 46 letters of support have been sent to Congressional leaders from around the U.S., including a letter from Alaska's Governor Sean Parnell with resolutions from the Florida, Maine and Alaska legislatures, urging Congress to act on legislation to create a National Seafood Marketing Fund.

For details on the Coalition's December 2010 meeting, contact Bruce Schactler at (907) 738-6451 or by email at bschactler@ak.net.

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