

Live Crab from the Cold Bay Hub Direct to China

It's an idea that's been around for quite a while, but whose time may have finally come: the transport of live crab directly from the Aleutians East Borough 'hub' port of Cold Bay to markets in China and other Asian countries.

Former Cold Bay terminal manager Monty Martin was a founding member of the Cold Bay Intl Airport Enhancement Committee (CIAEC) in the fall of 2009 soliciting support for the shipment of raw-fish products like king crab, cod milt, fresh salmon fillets and roe, through the Cold Bay hub. The idea is far from new, but has new life, due to recent events.

Back from an official trip to China, DCEED Commissioner Susan Bell was featured on a recent Channel 2 News story: "The administration is definitely increasing our visibility throughout the world, where we see opportunity for increasing our exports and building investment in Alaska, particularly adding value to our products."

On Thursday afternoon Commissioner Bell, along with DOT Commissioner Luiken and other state officials, met with Mayor Mack and other representatives from the Borough and crab industry. The Governor's Rural Affairs Advisor John Moller had set up the meeting for the attendees to discuss the potential new Asian- Alaskan seafood connections. The State of Alaska expects China to be its top export customer in 2011, overtaking Japan, which until recently had been purchasing more of Alaska's goods than any other country.

Alaska Crab Coalition Executive Director Arni Thomson hand carried a letter from Mayor Stanley Mack to the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI) Board of Directors and shellfish committee meeting in Seattle last month: "We believe the time is right and markets are ready for live crab harvested in Aleutians East Borough waters to be enjoyed worldwide." wrote Mayor Mack. Additionally, Mayor Mack is looking for support from ASMI in the AEB's effort to get a tarmac built to the new AEB airport terminal. State DOTPF will need to take the lead on getting an apron to the runway built.

Thomson has been working with Aleutians East Borough Natural Resources Director Ernie Weiss on the transport of live crab proposal for several months, building on previous work done by Monty Martin.

There is a heightened interest for live crab in China, Korea and other points in Asia, and there are 500 planes a week from Anchorage heading to Asia. However, this project aims not to take any business away from Ted Stevens International Airport, but to establish a brand new market option, making use of the location of the 10,420 foot main runway in Cold Bay (with the additional 6600 foot cross-wind runway) so critically close to the crab fishing grounds.

DOT Commissioner Luiken stated at the meeting that regulatory issues wouldn't be the biggest obstacle to the success of the project, but that success would depend on getting the interest of both the airlines and the processors. The business model needs to look at how much product will be available, and how often, to determine if the project is feasible. If

needed, a Customs agent should to be a cost sharing item between industry and government.

Jim Stone with the Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers told the teleconference that his group of harvesters and processors are planning on shipping live snow crab out of Dutch Harbor this January, but are expecting significant dead loss, due to the extra stop in Anchorage. The world class airfield in Cold Bay will support larger planes that can fly directly from the Aleutians East to Asia, eliminating nearly all dead loss.

Ernie Weiss will continue to work with DCCED Deputy Commissioner Curtis Thayer and Arni Thomson to facilitate the forward momentum of the initiative to ship live crab directly to China from Cold Bay.

Aleutians East Borough
Natural Resources Department