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NEWS RELEASE

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**BRISTOL BAY FISHERS SUE OUT-OF-STATE CANNERY OPERATORS FOR
FRAUDULENT AND UNFAIR BUSINESS PRACTICES**

Ekuk, AK (August 18, 2004) – Despite delivering over 75,000 pounds of salmon to the cannery in Ekuk in June and July 2004, fishers Bryan Hodgson, Jean O’Connor, Pat O’Connor and Alfred Cummings have not received a cent from cannery operators. The fishers were promised by cannery operators, Florida-based company Strategica Import-Export Financial Group, and Washington-based company Wild Alaskan Seafood Company, that they would be compensated between forty and seventy five cents per pound for the fish they delivered. They have received nothing.

The 2004 fishing season should have been a prosperous one for fishers at Ekuk, Alaska. The sockeye run at Ekuk was one of the best in years. Fishermen invested thousands of dollars each to set up their fish camps and fishing crews worked intensely, harvesting fish and delivering the salmon to the cannery. Such a year usually means financial success. But this year, the fishers all left their camps empty-handed.

The O’Connors and Cummings have fished at Ekuk for a combined 150 years and this is the first time they have not been compensated for their work. Like many Ekuk fishers, they consistently rely on the fishing at Ekuk as the main source of their annual income. This was Hodgson’s first year fishing at Ekuk. Hodgson, who is otherwise unemployed, relied on promises that this year’s cannery operation would proceed like in previous years. He invested a significant amount of money into setting up his fishing venture. Despite delivering over 25,000 pounds of fish to the cannery, he is left with nothing but a looming debt.

Tina Reigh, the Alaska Legal Services Corporation’s staff attorney handling this matter said, “The operators knew the fishers were working hard and relying on being paid at the end of the season. They continually accepted fish from the fishers with promises to pay. Failing to pay them now, after all of their work, is not only an outrage but is fraudulent and violates Alaska’s Unfair Trade Practices and Consumer Protection Act.”

On the fishers’ behalf, Alaska Legal Services Corporation made a written demand to the operators to compensate the fishers for the fish they delivered. The operators ignored the demand. The lawsuit filed today was the only recourse for the fishers for the time, money, and physical labor they invested after relying on the operators’ promises that they would be paid for the fish delivered to the processing plant. “Alaskans are a trusting people and the processors in this case took advantage of that trust. Now, they are going to face their day in court,” Reigh commented.

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