

# Alaska King Crab

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Anchorage Daily News

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## **State official says Ocean Beauty didn't conspire on her watch**

The Associated Press

*(Published: May 5, 2003)*

ANCHORAGE (AP) - A state commercial fisheries commissioner said Monday that for as long as Sealaska Corp. owned the processor, Ocean Beauty Seafoods, the company never tried to artificially lower prices paid for Bristol Bay sockeye salmon.

"There was no motive to lower prices" to Bristol Bay permit holders, said Marlene A. Johnson, currently a commissioner with the Alaska Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission. Johnson is a retired board chairman of Sealaska Corp., in Juneau.

Employees of Ocean Beauty, which the regional Alaska Native corporation purchased in 1979, "were dedicated to the company, dedicated to Sealaska, and I think they were above playing around," she said. Sealaska sold Ocean Beauty in 1990 to an Indonesian company.

Johnson, who served on the board of Ocean Beauty from 1982 to 1990, testified as the class action lawsuit being heard by a Superior Court jury began its twelfth week. The plaintiffs, 4,500 Bristol Bay sockeye salmon permit holders, allege that Japanese importers and Seattle-based processors, including Ocean Beauty, conspired from 1989 to 1995 to lower prices paid to fishermen.

Defendants have argued that world economic conditions and a glut on the salmon market were the real culprit.

Johnson said Ocean Beauty board members set policy, leaving daily management to employees.

At the crux of the plaintiffs' case is that processors and importers continually discussed prices amongst each other, usually through frequent telephone conversations.

Asked if she was aware that Ocean Beauty managers made price verification calls

to other processors, Johnson said "if they didn't they should have.

"I called companies to find out what prices were."

Johnson said Sealaska had a policy that fishermen, a number of whom were Sealaska shareholders, "should be treated fairly, paid fairly."

If shareholders have concerns, "they aren't bashful about calling you to tell you what they want,' she said.

The trial began Feb. 3. Judge Peter A. Michalski told attorneys last week that the case must go to the jury by May 27.

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