Exxon Ruling Disappoints Kodiak Fishermen

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Casey Kelly/KMXT

In Kodiak, home of the largest fishing fleet affected by the Exxon Valdez spill, fishermen and others are reacting with disappointment to yesterday’s news from the Supreme Court. Many were counting on a higher award to help them pay for things like retirement and upgrading their boats. KMXT’s Casey Kelly has more.

Ron Kuczek is getting ready for another Kodiak salmon season aboard his boat, the Sandra Jean. A 30-year veteran of various fisheries around the island, Kuczek says the summer of 1988—a year before Exxon Valdez—was one of the best his family’s small fishing operation had seen.

(Kuczek 1 :07s “…we all know what happened.”)

What happened was, there was no salmon fishery for the island that summer. When it reopened in 1990, Kuczek says prices that fishermen received for their catch were down, and stayed down for years to come. But he says the emotional toll has been just as hard to deal with as the financial one.

(Kuczek 2 :09s “…deeper than on the surface.”)

Kuczek says if plaintiffs had received the original 5-billion dollar jury award, or even the reduced 2.5 billion dollar settlement, he probably would have used his share to pay for a new boat. Now he’ll look at making upgrades to the one he has, and he wonders how companies like Exxon will be deterred from creating disasters like the Valdez spill.

(Kuczek 3 :14s “…not hurting by any means.”)

Another longtime Kodiak fisherman, Oliver Holm, agrees.

(Holm 1 :18s “…untouchable by ordinary citizens.”)

Holm says he’s not
sure what he’ll do with his share of the settlement. The case has dragged on for so long without resolution that he’s mostly just glad now that it’s finally over.

(Holm 2 :11s “…done
too much planning.”)

Kodiak Island
Borough Mayor Jerome Selby says it might be a good idea for plaintiffs to start thinking about how they’ll spend their settlement checks, even if the amount isn’t what they had hoped.

(Selby 1 :14s “…relieved
that the thing is done.”)

The borough and
the City of Kodiak were also party to the class action lawsuit against Exxon. Like the rest of the plaintiffs, Selby says local governments will be looking forward to finding out how much money will be coming in when the final settlement amounts are announced.

In Kodiak, I’m
Casey Kelly.

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