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Huge freezer ship to make the most of the cod it catches

The largest fishing vessel built in the Northwest in more than two decades is moving toward completion at Tacoma's J.M. Martinac Shipbuilding.

By Hal Bernton

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The largest fishing vessel built in the Northwest in more than two decades slid into the water at Tacoma's J.M. Martinac Shipbuilding last Saturday, catching the predawn high tide in its inaugural launch.

Decks, electronics, crew accommodations and other systems will be installed on the 184-foot Northern Leader by spring. Then the freezer longliner will head for Alaska, where it will use baited hooks to catch cod.

"We'll be sailing into Elliott Bay around the first of May," said Keith Singleton, spokesman for Alaskan Leader Fisheries, which is

spending nearly \$35 million for the vessel.

The Northern Leader is equipped to extract the maximum value from each fish in a slower-paced processing effort. That's possible because of a change in federal law that enabled cooperatives to form and divide up the catch. The change ended the earlier derby system, in which each longliner vessel raced to catch as much fish as possible.

Singleton said all the fish will be bled in refrigerated water tanks to boost the quality and shelf life of the cod fillets, which will be marketed in the U.S. as a sustainable product.

Cod heads, which are roughly 80 percent protein, will be exported to Africa and elsewhere as an inexpensive food source. Cod liver and oils are favored in Europe, and the carcasses will be ground into fertilizer used in Eastern Washington.

"What we are aiming for is to have a 100 percent utilization of all the fish caught on board," Singleton said.

The Northern Leader has a diesel-electric propulsion system that will reduce pollution and improve efficiency, cutting fuel consumption by about 300 to 500 gallons per day compared with conventional marine engines, he said.

The ship will have a maximum crew of 28, some of whom will harvest the cod while others process

the catch.

Alaskan Leader Fisheries is owned by a partnership of seven fishing families from Kodiak, and the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corp., which represents native villages in southwest Alaska.

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