

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Introduced: 1/31/01

Referred: House Special Committee on Fisheries, Resources

A RESOLUTION

1 **Relating to the management of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska**
2 **groundfish fisheries and the protection and restoration of the Steller sea lion.**

3 **BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

4 **WHEREAS** the population of Steller sea lions has substantially declined over the past
5 25 years; and

6 **WHEREAS** the National Marine Fisheries Service has listed the western Alaska
7 population of Steller sea lions as endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973; and

8 **WHEREAS** the reasons for the decline in the population of Steller sea lions are
9 poorly understood; under one theory, the decline is associated with high levels of groundfish
10 (particularly pollock), Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel harvest; and

11 **WHEREAS** the National Marine Fisheries Service, as the result of litigation and
12 criticism by a federal district court, has undertaken a series of increasingly strict restrictions
13 on groundfish fishing in areas where Steller sea lions congregate; and

14 **WHEREAS** the National Marine Fisheries Service lacks an adequate scientific basis
15 for such restrictions on groundfish fishing and has not explained why the restrictions are
16 scientifically or legally necessary; and

1 **WHEREAS** regulations promulgated by the National Marine Fisheries Service in July
2 2000, banned all trawlers from fishing within 20 miles of 122 rookeries and haul-outs and
3 three large "at-sea foraging areas" in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska from Prince William
4 Sound to the Aleutian Islands chain; and

5 **WHEREAS** these regulations had the effect of closing the majority of the groundfish
6 fishery; and

7 **WHEREAS** the economic loss to the groundfish fishing fleet in the Bering Sea and
8 Gulf of Alaska is estimated to exceed \$170,000,000 if the regulations remain in effect through
9 the first half of 2001; and

10 **WHEREAS** additional immeasurable economic losses would be suffered by
11 businesses, families, and individuals who rely on this fishery for economic support and by
12 state and local governments that receive taxes from this fishery; and

13 **WHEREAS** the United States Congress, through the efforts of Senator Ted Stevens,
14 has been able to delay to some extent the full impact of these regulations and new measures
15 proposed in the biological opinion of November 30, 2000; and

16 **WHEREAS**, during 2001, the United States Department of Commerce and the
17 National Marine Fisheries Service are to cooperate with the North Pacific Fishery
18 Management Council and the National Academy of Sciences in conducting an independent
19 scientific review of the November 30, 2000, biological opinion for the Bering Sea/Aleutian
20 Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries; to prepare proposed conservation and
21 management measures for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish
22 fisheries; to develop and implement a coordinated comprehensive research and recovery
23 program for the Steller sea lion; and to provide funds for payment to communities, businesses,
24 groups, and individuals to mitigate the economic losses caused by Steller sea lion protection
25 measures;

26 **BE IT RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature expresses its support for the
27 efforts of the United States Congress and Senator Ted Stevens to place restrictions on the
28 implementation of the alternatives contained in the November 30, 2000, biological opinion
29 prepared by the National Marine Fisheries Service; and be it

30 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature also expresses its support
31 for the independent scientific review of the November 30, 2000, biological opinion for the

1 Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries; and be it

2 **FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the
3 United States Department of Commerce and the National Marine Fisheries Service to work
4 with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to develop a scientifically sound and
5 legally sufficient management program for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of
6 Alaska groundfish fisheries that harmonizes the pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel
7 fisheries with the requirements of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 for the protection and
8 restoration of the Steller sea lion in western Alaska by December 31, 2002.

9 **COPIES** of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Donald L. Evans, United
10 States Secretary of Commerce; the Honorable Penelope D. Dalton, Assistant Administrator,
11 National Marine Fisheries Service, United States Department of Commerce; and to the
12 Honorable Ted Stevens and the Honorable Frank Murkowski, U.S. Senators, and the
13 Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.