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Referred: House Special Committee  
on Fisheries and Finance

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1 IN THE HOUSE

2 HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 40

3 IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

4 THIRTEENTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

5 Relating to the protection of Bering Sea  
6 fisheries.

7 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:

8 WHEREAS the United States Department of the Interior has conducted the  
9 Norton Sound Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Oil and Gas Lease Sale No. 57  
10 and the St. George Basin OCS Oil and Gas Lease Sale No. 70, in which off-  
11 shore tracts in the Bering Sea were offered for lease to the petroleum  
12 industry for the production of oil and gas; and

13 WHEREAS the Norton Sound and St. George Basin areas are critical  
14 habitats for invaluable resources necessary for the well-being of the  
15 citizens of Alaska, including zooplankton and other microorganisms basic to  
16 the biological community of the Bering Sea region, bottom fish, shellfish  
17 including king crab and clams, salmon, herring, smelt, tomcod, flounder,  
18 whitefish, sheefish, and arctic char, and other valuable fisheries resour-  
19 ces of the State of Alaska as well as seals, walrus, and endangered whales,  
20 which are of economic and cultural importance to the citizens of Alaska;  
21 and

22 WHEREAS Norton Sound and St. George Basin are areas which are primary  
23 habitat on a seasonal basis for numerous resources in which the State of  
24 Alaska has a significant interest; and

25 WHEREAS residents of at least 130 Alaska communities are dependent for  
26 their livelihood on the Bering Sea fisheries and on other biological re-  
27 sources that are dependent upon the fisheries, including walrus, black  
28 (bowhead) whale, gray whale, oogruck (bearded seal), spotted seal, ringed  
29 seal, beluga, polar bear, and numerous species of migratory waterfowl and

1 seabirds; and

2 WHEREAS the State of Alaska has significant interest in and a consti-  
3 tutional responsibility for the management and protection of onshore and  
4 nearshore biological resources which are dependent on the expansive tide-  
5 lands and wetlands of these regions and which are greatly affected by any  
6 alteration in the chemical or sedimentary composition in these critical  
7 habitats, including sea birds, migratory waterfowl, land birds such as  
8 ptarmigan, freshwater and anadromous fish, and land animals including  
9 moose, caribou, reindeer, arctic hare, beaver and other land animals, as  
10 well as edible plants including abundant resources of berries and greens;  
11 and

12 WHEREAS the residents of 58 Norton Sound communities have unanimously  
13 endorsed the alternative of a delayed Norton Sound OCS oil and gas lease  
14 sale in order to permit the development of the technology required to  
15 protect the biological resources of Norton Sound during petroleum explora-  
16 tion and development; and

17 WHEREAS the knowledge of local conditions possessed by residents of  
18 the 58 Norton Sound communities was not appropriately considered before the  
19 decision to lease Norton Sound tracts, to such an extent that the residents  
20 of Norton Sound were prompted to bring legal action against the United  
21 States to void the Norton Sound OCS lease sale; and

22 WHEREAS many communities in Bristol Bay and along the Alaska Peninsula  
23 and Aleutian Chain, as well as numerous fishing groups, have urged that  
24 leasing in the St. George Basin be delayed to protect the Basin's enormous  
25 fisheries resources; and

26 WHEREAS a number of these communities and organizations, including the  
27 Aleutians East Coastal Resource Service Area Board, recognized the inade-  
28 quacy of the stipulations on OCS lease sale No. 70 and were forced to  
29 attempt to secure adequate protection for their resources through legal

1 action; and

2 WHEREAS the Coastal Resource Service Area Boards for both Norton Sound  
3 and St. George Basin regions recommended delay for the OCS leases off their  
4 coasts; and

5 WHEREAS the State of Alaska has not to this time supported the recom-  
6 mendations of these boards; and

7 WHEREAS the scientific community has expressed serious concern that  
8 not enough is known about the behavior of Norton Sound and St. George  
9 Basin, and the Bering Sea to permit an informed OCS development decision to  
10 be made at this time, and that insufficient data has been obtained concern-  
11 ing weather and currents, ice movement, sedimentology, effects of ingestion  
12 by humans of oil-contaminated biological resources, removal of oil contami-  
13 nants from the Norton Sound and St. George Basin environments, effects of  
14 oil spills on a range of biological resources including fish and deposit-  
15 feeding organisms, alteration of migratory patterns of animals from indus-  
16 trial disturbances, effects of noise from tankers and seismic boats and  
17 other industrial activity, and the behavior of salmon smolt and crab larvae  
18 and other valuable state resources; and

19 WHEREAS recent mysterious disappearances of numerous commercial and  
20 fishing vessels in the Bering Sea, including two modern vessels specifical-  
21 ly designed for Bering Sea operations, indicate that a serious potential  
22 exists for contamination and destruction of valuable state resources from  
23 industrial accidents involving petroleum tanker traffic; and

24 WHEREAS development of Norton Sound and St. George Basin oil fields is  
25 not in the best interests of the nation and the State of Alaska because the  
26 large number of offshore oil and gas tracts being leased for exploration  
27 and development will not generate adequate tax revenue for the resource  
28 being offered, especially considering the priceless value of the fisheries  
29 resource to the citizens of the state and the nation, and the lack of

1 independent economic justification for developing these fields at this  
2 time; and

3 WHEREAS the State of Alaska, in acknowledgement of the environmental  
4 and renewable resource value of Norton Sound, and in accordance with the  
5 advice and expertise provided by elders and other local expert witnesses,  
6 and after extensive public hearings, acted to cancel a similar state lease  
7 sale in the Norton Sound region, Lease Sale No. 38;

8 BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests  
9 the Governor of the State of Alaska, through the Alaska commissioner of  
10 environmental conservation and the Alaska commissioner of fish and game,  
11 and in consultation with local residents of the Bering Sea periphery and  
12 the Alaska scientific community, to develop a long-term, adequately sup-  
13 ported monitoring plan and monitoring program, in order to apprise Alaska  
14 citizens of the exact status of Bering Sea biological resources during all  
15 phases of Norton Sound and St. George Basin OCS oil and gas exploration and  
16 development; and be it

17 FURTHER RESOLVED that the governor is respectfully requested to submit  
18 to the legislature within 30 days after the effective date of this resolu-  
19 tion recommendations for subsequent actions to be taken by the State of  
20 Alaska in order to properly and lawfully discharge its responsibility for  
21 the management and protection of state resources, including fisheries and  
22 other biological resources, of the Bering Sea environment; and be it

23 FURTHER RESOLVED that the governor, before presenting the State of  
24 Alaska's recommendations upon future OCS oil and gas lease sales off the  
25 coast of Alaska, is respectfully requested to ensure that the interests of  
26 Alaska citizens, and specifically the interests in the state's fisheries,  
27 are adequately represented in the environmental impact analyses and  
28 throughout the leasing, exploration and development processes.