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Utermohle
2/6/01

CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10( )

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY

Offered:
Referred:

Sponsor(s): HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

A RESOLUTION

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS the reasons for the decline in the population of Steller sea lions are poorly understood; under one theory, the decline is associated with the harvest of groundfish, including pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel; and

WHEREAS the National Marine Fisheries Service, as the result of litigation and criticism by a federal district court, has undertaken a series of increasingly strict restrictions on groundfish fishing in more than 100,000 square miles of fishing areas in the waters off Alaska; and

WHEREAS the National Marine Fisheries Service lacks an adequate scientific basis for such restrictions on groundfish fishing and has not explained why the restrictions are

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scientifically or legally necessary; and

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

WHEREAS these regulations would significantly restrict the groundfish fisheries off Alaska and dramatically alter the conservative and proven management plans that have been continually refined and strengthened over the past 20 years; and

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

WHEREAS the economic loss to the groundfish fishing fleet in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska is estimated to be up to $500,000,000 if the regulations remain in effect through the first half of 2001; and

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

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

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

BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature expresses its support for the efforts of the United States Congress and Senator Ted Stevens to place restrictions on the

implementation of the alternatives contained in the November 30, 2000, biological opinion prepared by the National Marine Fisheries Service; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature also expresses its support for the independent scientific review of the November 30, 2000, biological opinion for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries; and be it

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

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Donald L. Evans, United States Secretary of Commerce; the Honorable William T. Hogarth, Acting Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service, United States Department of Commerce; and to the Honorable Ted Stevens and the Honorable Frank Murkowski, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.

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Utermohle
2/12/01

CS FOR HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 10( )

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

TWENTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION

BY

Offered:
Referred:

Sponsor(s): HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

A RESOLUTION

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS the reasons for the decline in the population of Steller sea lions are poorly understood; under one theory, the decline is associated with the harvest of groundfish, including pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel; and

WHEREAS the National Marine Fisheries Service, as the result of litigation and criticism by a federal district court, has undertaken a series of increasingly strict restrictions on groundfish fishing in more than 100,000 square miles of fishing areas in the waters off Alaska; and

WHEREAS the National Marine Fisheries Service lacks an adequate scientific basis for such restrictions on groundfish fishing and has not explained why the restrictions are

scientifically or legally necessary; and

WHEREAS a United States District Court order in July 2000, banned all trawlers from fishing within 20 miles of 122 rookeries and haul-outs and three large "at-sea foraging areas" in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska from Prince William Sound to the Aleutian Islands chain; and

WHEREAS the court order would significantly restrict the groundfish fisheries off Alaska and dramatically alter the conservative and proven management plans that have been continually refined and strengthened over the past 20 years; and

WHEREAS the November 30, 2000, biological opinion for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries that was prepared by the National Marine Fisheries Service had the effect of closing the majority of the groundfish fishery and suggested similar restrictions in the salmon and herring fisheries; and

WHEREAS the economic loss to the groundfish fishing fleet in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska is estimated to be up to $500,000,000 if the regulations remain in effect through the first half of 2001; and

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

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

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

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

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature also expresses its support for the independent scientific review of the November 30, 2000, biological opinion for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska State Legislature respectfully requests the United States Department of Commerce, the National Marine Fisheries Service, and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to develop a scientifically sound and legally sufficient management program for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries that maintains the pollock, Pacific cod, and Atka mackerel fisheries in conjunction with the Endangered Species Act of 1973 for the protection and restoration of the Steller sea lion by December 31, 2002 and to develop measures to restore listed endangered species that minimize adverse economic consequences on affected fishing industries and communities.

COPIES of this resolution shall be sent to the Honorable Donald L. Evans, United States Secretary of Commerce; the Honorable William T. Hogarth, Acting Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service, United States Department of Commerce; and to the Honorable Ted Stevens and the Honorable Frank Murkowski, U.S. Senators, and the Honorable Don Young, U.S. Representative, members of the Alaska delegation in Congress.

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA
2001 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Fiscal Note Number:
Bill Version:
( ) Publish Date:

Revision Date/Time (Note if correction):
Dept. Affected:
Title: Groundfish Fisheries and Steller Sea Lion
BRU:
Component:
Sponsor: House Resources Committee
Requester: Special Committee on Fisheries
Component Number:

Expenditures/Revenues (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007
Personal Services						
Travel						
Contractual						
Supplies						
Equipment						
Land & Structures						
Grants & Claims						
Miscellaneous						
TOTAL OPERATING	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
CAPITAL EXPENDITURES						
CHANGE IN REVENUES ( )						

FUND SOURCE (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts						
1003 GF Match						
1004 GF						
1005 GF/Program Receipts						
1037 GF/Mental Health						
Other (Specify Type)						
TOTAL	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Estimate of any current year (FY2001) cost: 0.0

POSITIONS

Full-time						
Part-time						
Temporary						

ANALYSIS: *(Attach a separate page if necessary)*

Prepared by: Katrina Matheny
Phone 465-4925
Division Special Committee on Fisheries Aide
Date/Time 2/7/01
Approved by:
Date
Agency

For distribution information, call the Governor's Legislative Office

(Rev 11/2000 OMB)

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

REPRESENTATIVE DREW SCALZI
State Capitol, Juneau
Alaska 99801-1182

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(907) 465-2689; (800) 665-2689
Fax: (907) 465-3472
Email: Representative_Drew_Scalzi@legis.state.ak.us

HJR:10 Sponsor Statement

Relating to the management of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska ground-fisheries and the protection and restoration of the Steller sea lion.

The sharp decline of the Western Area Steller sea lion population from 120,000 to 25,000 animals in the past 30 years prompted a U.S. District Court Judge to impose a groundfish trawl ban on Alaska's coastal waters effective August 2000. The judge stated that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) violated the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by failing to write an adequate biological opinion for protection of the declining sea lion population. The ban dry-docked fishing fleets from waters within 20 nautical miles of sea lion breeding and resting areas, encompassing approximately 100,000 square miles of prime fishing waters in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska from Prince William Sound to the Aleutian Islands.

Thanks to the direct efforts of Senator Ted Stevens, the August measures were suspended through 2001 and forty-four million federal dollars were allocated to review the biological opinion released by NMFS in November, 2000. Many industry and government experts feel the opinion lacks adequate scientific basis for such restrictions. The North Pacific Fisheries Management Council and the National Academy of Sciences will conduct an independent scientific review of the NMFS biological opinion. Additionally the governor has formed a Steller Sea Lion Restoration Team to assess factors affecting the decline of the species and the need for fishery restrictions.

According to Senator Stevens, the impacts of a ban on this fishery are far-reaching:

- $1 billion pollack and cod fishery at risk (1,000 boats)
- $500-800 million dollar impact on fishing industry
- one-half billion dollar impact on the entire state's economy
- commercial fishing loan industry will lose billions of dollars
- lost tax base will make ghost towns in Western Alaska
- Native Alaskan development programs lose $50 million/year; thousands of Native jobs lost
- social impacts on communities include unemployment and related domestic problems; loss of community infrastructure employment, i.e., teachers, police officers, government officials
- national trade deficit raised by $250 million

Supporting Senator Stevens' measure to temporarily postpone fishery restrictions until the NMFS biological opinion can be scientifically-reviewed means biology-based management decisions can be implemented for both the protection of the Steller sea lion and Alaska's important trawl fishery.

DS:ph

02/01/01

AFDF

Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, Inc.

February 8, 2001

Members
Alaska State House of Representatives
House Resources Committee
Juneau, Alaska

Dear Committee Members:

With this letter the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation is going on record in support of passage of House Joint Resolution No. 10 relating to the management of the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries and the protection and restoration of the Steller Sea Lion.

While the ongoing shift in population numbers of Steller Sea Lions merits concern, attention and, ultimately, action, it is very important to base regulatory decision making on sound science.

The current Federal approach is clearly being driven legal and political pressure, rather than a well-documented scientific assessment of the ecosystem. In the long run, management actions taken for other than scientific purposes will result in a complete loss of credibility for the regulatory process. If that regulatory process is perceived to be corrupt, the public will not support it and the "Failure of the Commons" is inevitable.

AFDF was chartered over twenty years ago to lead development of Alaska's underutilized seafood resources. Much of our early work was focused on bringing the groundfish industry into being. It would be tragic if all that has been built around Alaska' s groundfish abundance was to fail for such a faulty premise.

Sincerely,

Marc S. Jones
Executive Director, Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation

900 West 5th Ave., Suite 400 Anchorage, AK 99501 907-276-7315 fx 907-271-3450 afdf@compuserve.com www.afdf.org

Resource Development Council
for Alaska, Inc.

121 W. Fireweed Lane, Suite 250, Anchorage, AK 99503
Phone (907) 276-0700 Fax (907) 276-3887
e-mail resources@akrdc.org http://www.akrdc.org

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February 8, 2001

Representative Drew Scalzi
State Capitol, Room 13
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Re: HJR 10, Groundfish Fisheries and Steller Sea Lion

Dear Representative Scalzi:

The Resource Development Council for Alaska, Inc., (RDC) is writing to express its strong support for HJR 10.

RDC is a statewide organization made up of all resource sectors, business associations, labor unions, Native corporations, tourism providers, local governments and thousands of individuals. RDC's purpose is to expand the state's economic base through the responsible development of our natural resources.

RDC supports the economies of local Alaskan communities which are dependent on the groundfish fishery. To this end, RDC endorses HJR 10, which supports the independent scientific review of the November 30, 2000 biological opinion for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands and Gulf of Alaska groundfish fisheries. RDC also applauds Senator Stevens' legislation which delays implementation of the alternatives contained in the biological opinion until the independent scientific review is complete.

Thank you for introducing HJR 10. You have RDC's full support.

Sincerely,

T. Owens

Tadd Owens
Executive Director

This Edition Sponsored by: **Pacific Seafood Processors Association**

Resource Review

A periodic publication of the Resource Development Council, Inc.

"Fishermen, fish processing plants and communities from Cordova to Dutch Harbor have survived and thrived despite earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, freezing spray and fluctuations in fish and shellfish abundance. The question now is can the communities from Cordova to Dutch Harbor survive the Endangered Species Act or will once thriving communities become ghost towns?"

Sea lion restrictions cripple fishing industry, coastal communities

By Chris Blackburn
Alaska Fish Data Bank

When the third quarterly pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska opened August 20, more than half the fleet stayed tied to the dock. Out of the 41 vessels that make up the Kodiak pollock fleet, 15 vessels stayed at the dock. Of the 52 vessels in the Sandpoint area fleet, 35 stayed at the dock. The tie-up was not due to price, but to safety considerations.

The vessels that remained at the dock had been displaced from their fishing areas near shore by Ninth Circuit Judge Thomas E. Zilly who, on July 19, issued an interim injunction effective August 8 which prohibited trawling within 20 nautical miles (NM) of the shore under the authority of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The Gulf of Alaska trawl fleet is mainly composed of vessels less than 60 to 100 feet in length – vessels designed to fish near shore. To venture 20 NM out is exceedingly dangerous.

The vessels that did try to fish the third pollock season found little pollock outside the 20 NM barrier and actually spent more money looking for pollock than the value of the small amounts of pollock they were able to find.

It is the 30-year decline of Steller sea lions in the Central and Western Gulf and Bering Sea/Aleutians that has brought the ugly realities of the ESA to the Alaska fishing industry. Between 1976 and 2000, the Western Area Steller sea lion population has declined from 120,000 animals to 25,000 animals.

According to National Marine Fish-

(Continued to page 4)

Many local residents in Kodiak have hard feelings toward environmental groups pressing for an end to trawling in Steller sea lion critical habitat areas.

Impacts of trawling ban in critical habitat areas

- The ban on bottom fishing could reduce the tax base for local communities by as much as 60 to 70 percent.
- The fishing industry stands to lose well in excess of $100 million annually from prohibitions on trawling in Steller sea lion critical habitat areas.
- Fishermen will face substantially higher risk factors as the ban forces their smaller boats further off shore into dangerous seas.
- The economic base of coastal communities depend heavily on fish. Revenues from fishing funds schools, hospitals, roads, and local merchants.
- The area closed to trawling is currently at least 50,000 square miles of near-shore ocean from St. Elias to Attu, a distance of 2,000 miles. The distance from the Canadian border to Key West, Florida is 1,800 miles.

Steller sea lion debate rages, judge's decision approaching

(Continued from page 1)

eries Service (NMFS), the number of Steller sea lions declined at a steep rate from 1976 to 1988. By 1988 there were only 40,000 animals remaining. Since 1988 the rate of decline has slowed. It could be said that the situation for sea lions is improving, but this is not how NMFS Protected Resources Division views the picture nor that allowed under the ESA.

Little attention was paid to the Steller sea lion decline until 1990 when sea lions were listed as threatened under ESA. The Alaska Sea Grant Program held a meeting in Anchorage to discuss measures to help sea lion recovery. Prohibiting the shooting of Steller sea lions was agreed to by all fishermen. Beyond a ban on shooting, no one had any ideas to help Stellers because the cause of the decline had not been identified – nor has it been to this day.

The threatened listing in 1990 gave Greenpeace an opportunity to sue NMFS in an effort to reduce the Gulf of Alaska pollock quota. The Gulf communities intervened, as did the State of Alaska under Governor Wally Hickel. The Judge ruled in favor of the interveners. The Judge also admonished NMFS for failing to update its Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). Despite the admonishment, NMFS failed to update the SEIS.

That failure, in the face of continued declines in the Steller sea lion population, left the door open for the current lawsuit filed by Greenpeace, American Oceans Campaign and Sierra Club.

Updating the SEIS is a long process which the agency is trying to do in a few months. Judge Zilly has turned down the biological opinions submitted so far. The judge has made it clear that he wants a document that explains how all the Alaskan fisheries fit together in the areas of Steller sea lion decline – a request which science may not be able to fulfill due to lack of knowledge.

In the early days of Steller sea lion research, blood samples indicated "nutritional stress" which was translated by marine mammal biologists as meaning sea lions were not able to find enough food. Industry has offered its opinion that rather than not enough food it was more likely that some dietary elements may have disappeared during the 1975 regime shift during which crab and shrimp vanished in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea while pollock and Pacific cod increased dramatically.

Currently pups leave the rookeries fat and healthy. In fact, according to NMFS, the pups born in areas of sea lion decline are leaving their rookery fatter than the pups born in Southeast Alaska where sea lions are increasing.

There are several hypotheses that could explain the sea lion declines, including the possibility that pollock have overrun the ecosystem or that the decline of fatty fish during the regime shift caused nutritional stress, or that the decline of the ocean productivity is low enough that there is not enough food to sustain the number of Steller sea lions seen in 1996 or that the million metric tons (MT) of arrowtooth flounder biomass in the Gulf whose diet is 90% pollock is out competing sea lions. However, the ESA does not simply wait for nature. The ESA requires action and the only action which can be taken is managing people since nature is unmanageable.

Right or wrong, the only hypotheses available in an ESA action is one that fingers human actions. The Protected Resources Division hypothesis is that fishing is competing with sea lions and depriving them of food. Based on the food competition theory, mitigation measures closing areas to fishing could make sense until it is pointed out that the fish taken by the industry represent 10-20% of the biomass, leaving 80-90% of the fish for sea lions, but the untested conjecture that fishing competes with sea lions is NMFS position.

Judge Zilly is tasked with the role of approving management measures which will, with certainty, reverse the decline of Steller sea lions as required by the ESA. Unfortunately there are no clear, certain answers. Frustrated with NMFS inability to deliver an adequate

(Continued to page 5)

Matt Moir of Alaska Pacific Seafoods briefs RDC board members last month in Kodiak on the Steller Sea lion issue. Moir noted that the Kodiak fleet and local processing plants employing hundreds of local residents have been severely impacted by the ban on trawling.

RDC Board visits Kodiak

Community Outreach September 2000

Anchorage Mayor George Wuerch watches Kodiak Harbormaster Marty Owen navigate his vessel "The Sea Breeze" along Kodiak's waterfront.

RDC board members pose before the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Ironwood. The RDC board toured the U.S. Coast Guard base at Kodiak. The base is the largest Coast Guard facility in the U.S.

RDC board members were treated to a waterfront tour of Kodiak's port by Harbormaster Marty Owen.

John Lucas describes the wine-making process at his Kodiak winery.

Steller Sea lion protection measures draw fire in Kodiak

Continued from page 4)

RDC Board member Al Burch of the Alaska Draggers Association leads an RDC delegation to the fleet's docks in Kodiak.

biological opinion as required by the ESA, Judge Zilly granted the plaintiffs' interim injunction which banned trawling within the critical sea lion habitat defined as the 20 NM from the shore. The interim injunction remains in effect until NMFS produces a satisfactory biological opinion. The opinion is due October 31. And No one knows how long the Judge will take to make his decision.

Meanwhile, many boats in the Gulf of Alaska will remain at the dock when the D season pollock fishery opens October 1 rather than risk fishing more than 20 NM from shore. When the boats can't fish or cannot find fish, there will be no work for processing workers, many of which are year-round residents of their communities.

The economic base for Alaska coastal communities is fish. When the pollock C season opened August 20, there was 23,000 MT of pollock quota available. Because most of the pollock biomass was within the 20 NM critical habitat, the boats that did fish were only able to catch 9,620 MT before the season closed. The 13,413 MT left in the water was worth $2,217,169 ex-vessel. Also lost was the severance tax and raw fish tax which is a significant part of a coastal community's income base.

Fishermen, fish processing plants and communities from Cordova to Dutch Harbor have survived and thrived despite earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, freezing spray and fluctuations in fish and shellfish abundance. The question now is can the communities from Cordova to Dutch Harbor survive the Endangered Species Act or will once thriving communities become ghost towns?

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Judge accepts sea lion protection plan

New restrictions placed on Alaskan trawlers

Wednesday, December 6, 2000

By MAUREEN CLARK
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- A federal judge in Seattle has lifted an injunction barring trawl fishing in areas designated as critical habitat for the endangered Steller's sea lion.

FIND
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U.S. District Judge Thomas Zilly's decision, issued yesterday, allows the National Marine Fisheries Service to move ahead with new restrictions on commercial fishing for cod, pollock and Atka mackerel in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska.

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"What this means is that, instead of the courts managing the trawl fisheries, it's now back in the stewardship of the federal government," said NMFS spokesman Ron Berg.

Zilly handed down the injunction last Augu ., saying the agency had not done enough to protect the sea lions, whose numbers in western Alaska have declined by 80 percent since the 1970s.

Home Remodel

The fisheries service submitted its latest sea lion protection plan last Thursday. The judge accepted the plan and lifted the trawl ban.

The nearly 600-page NMFS report on the cause of the Steller's sea lion decline concluded that many factors, including environmental changes, have contributed to the problem. But the report said commercial fishing is a significant factor in the decline.

NWsource AFFILIATE
MSNBC
The WIRE
digitalcity

Critics allege the agency has no scientific proof that commercial fishing has hurt sea lion populations.

The report calls for new restrictions on when and where the commercial fleet can fish. It also includes harvest limits and seasonal closures.

The harvest of bottomfish off Alaska is worth more than $1 billion a year. The fishery, the nation's largest, produces a variety of products, including imitation crab and the fish patties and fish sticks used by fast-food

restaurants.

NMFS restrictions will affect the large factory trawlers, based in Seattle, as well as fishermen from Alaska's coastal communities who use smaller boats.

The agency has estimated that the new restrictions will cost the industry as much as $191 million, but critics say that estimate is far too conservative.

Glenn Reed, president of the Seattle-based Pacific Seafood Processors Association, which represents factory trawlers, says the plan will drive up costs for his members because they will be forced to travel farther out to sea to find fish. But Reed said it's the small-boat fishermen in Kodiak who will be hit hardest by the changes.

"I don't think people understand the depth of the economic loss that they're going to suffer there. I think they could see a 60 (percent) to 90 percent reduction in their ability to catch fish," Reed said.

The federal plan divides the cod, pollock and Atka mackerel fishing grounds, seasons and quotas. The plan also creates 3-nautical-mile no-fishing zones around all sea lion haulouts. Previously, only sea lion rookeries, or pup-rearing areas, enjoyed 3-mile protection zones.

Environmental groups including Greenpeace had filed the lawsuit that led to the injunction. Greenpeace spokeswoman Niaz Dorry said the group was satisfied that the injunction had served its purpose.

"Its purpose was to get a comprehensive scientific analysis from the fisheries service regarding the impact of fishing on the ecosystem and specifically the Steller's sea lion situation," Dorry said.

Dorry said the NMFS report supports the group's conclusion that the huge harvest of groundfish has depleted the sea lions' food supply.

Lawyers for the government, fishermen, processors and environmentalists were scheduled to discuss the NMFS restrictions in a status conference Friday.

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SELECTED AREAS THROUGH JUNE 10, 2001

10 and 30nm Pollock Trawl Exclusion Zones

10 and 30nm NO Trawling

Atka Mackerel fishing restricted area, See 50 CFR 679

No Directed fishing for Pollock in Aleutian SubArea

Pollock fishing restricted area, See 50 CFR 679

3nm No Fishing

3nm No Transit

RPA Site

Rookery

Haulout

Alaska Towns

Area 1

Area 2

Area 3

Area 4

Area 5

Area 6

Area 7

Area 8

Area 9

Area 10

Area 11

Area 12

Area 13