

STATE OF ALASKA THE LEGISLATURE

2001

Legislative
Resolve No.

15

Source

CSHJR 10(FSH)



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.