



Bering Sea Elders Group

BERING SEA ELDERS GROUP

RESOLUTION 2023-02

TITLE: RESOLUTION DECLARING A DISASTER IN OUR TRADITIONAL WATERS OF THE BERING SEA AND CALLING FOR A HOLISTIC PLAN TO RESTORE BALANCE TO THE INTERCONNECTED BERING SEA WEB OF LIFE

Whereas, the Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) is an organization comprised of 38 federally recognized Tribes on the west coast of Alaska; and

Whereas, our people have subsisted from the Bering Sea for millennia, and are committed to continuing stewardship of the Bering Sea for millennia to come; and

Whereas, our federally recognized Tribal Governments have government-to-government relationships with the other sovereigns that have management power and authority over the Bering Sea, and have the right to participate fully in all decisions that affect our Tribes; and

Whereas, the Bering Sea is integral to our cultural identity and well-being as Yup'ik, Cup'ik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, and Inupiaq people, and the water is as important to us as the land; and

Whereas, the Tribal members of the Bering Sea Elders Group represent Cup'ik, Yup'ik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, and Inupiaq people who rely on subsistence fish, marine mammals, birds, berries, and other traditional irreplaceable resources found in the Bering Sea and surrounding lands; and

Whereas, our people rely on a diversity of marine mammals, fish, birds, and other resources from the ocean to sustain our way of life; and

Whereas, the Bering Sea Elders Group was formed more than fifteen years ago out of a mutual concern in our regions about threats to the health and well-being of the Bering Sea; and

Whereas, as Traditional Knowledge holders, our people hold a living body of knowledge that we have passed on from generation to generation. Our knowledge of the Bering Sea has been developed over millennia, is invaluable, and is intertwined with our peoples' identity, culture, values, and way of life; and

Whereas, the knowledge of the Elders about how to live with the ocean and the land was given to us by our ancestors with instructions not to keep it for ourselves, but to pass it on to our children so that they may continue to prosper and continue our way of being;

Whereas, the resources we rely on were given to us by the Creator, and we have a responsibility to care for those resources and to pass this inheritance and our knowledge to our children and grandchildren; and

Whereas, the Bering Sea Elders Group, since our beginning, has worked to lift up and record our peoples' knowledge of the Bering Sea through work such as *The Northern Bering Sea: Our Way of Life*; and

Whereas, our ancestors taught us never to take more than we need or waste the resources we have been given, to share food with our community, and that disrespecting the natural world and natural resources would have negative consequences for our food sources and our survival; and

Whereas, while technology has changed, our traditional values remain the foundation of our culture. Respect for the natural world and caring for our resources are key to our ability to thrive off the ocean and land; and

Whereas, we see that the whole Bering Sea ecosystem—in which each part, including plants, birds, fish, and marine mammals, is connected to all other parts in an inter-dependent web of life—is out of balance; and

Whereas, the other sovereigns with management power and authority over the Bering Sea have managed the Bering Sea and our formerly abundant resources in ways that sanction waste in the form of bycatch. They prioritize large-scale commercial fishing over subsistence and prioritize private profit over our people and cultures, and their poor management has created the Bering Sea disaster; and

Whereas, the Bering Sea Elders Group has, over the past fifteen years, passed resolutions to address the imbalances that we see in the Bering Sea; and

Whereas, we have passed resolutions that call for lasting protections for the Bering Sea and that call for changes in the current management structures that marginalize our peoples' voices and knowledge. These include resolutions that address concerns over bycatch and the destruction of the ocean floor, call for amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, assert protections for our food sovereignty, center and uplift our traditional knowledge, and call for a co-production of knowledge approach to natural resource management decisions; and

Whereas, to advance the priorities articulated in our resolutions, the Bering Sea Elders Group has prioritized working in partnership with Tribes and other Tribal Organizations because we are most powerful when we are working together as one voice;

Whereas, our Tribes, people, and partners have testified in front of inequitable management bodies for years to share our knowledge and our concern about the worsening crisis in our waters, but our voices have not resulted in meaningful action or change; and

Whereas, this Bering Sea ecosystem crisis threatens our food sovereignty, our physical, economic, traditional, and cultural existence, and our very survival.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: the Bering Sea Elders Group declares a state of disaster for the Bering Sea ecosystem; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: the Bering Sea Elders Group calls for a new approach that is guided by our teachings, recognizes that our subsistence is our survival, and rebuilds the abundance of the waters that have sustained our people for millennia; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: the Bering Sea Elders Group reaffirms all of the resolutions we have passed over the last fifteen years, but in addition calls for the development of a holistic plan to address the disaster and restore the interconnected Bering Sea web of life to its original state; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: the Bering Sea Elders Group asserts that this holistic approach must affirmatively work to restore and replenish all species in the interconnected Bering Sea web of life; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED: the Bering Sea Elders Group asserts that this holistic plan must not be another management decision made solely by federal and state governments, and their agencies, but must be co-developed among the sovereigns in the region, with the full participation, partnership, and leadership of our Tribal Governments.

ADOPTED by the tribally designated Elder Representatives of the Bering Sea Elders Group, and signed on behalf of those Tribes during its Annual Summit held in Anchorage, Alaska on this 4th day of May, 2023.