



Bering Sea Elders Group

BERING SEA ELDERS GROUP

RESOLUTION 2024-02

TITLE: A RESOLUTION TO ADDRESS WASTE OF OUR RESOURCES, INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY, AND FULLY HONOR THE PROMISES THAT THE UNITED STATES MADE TO ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLE

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

Whereas, BSEG represents Cup'ik, Yup'ik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, and Inupiaq people who have lived in relationship with the traditional irreplaceable resources found in the Bering Sea since time immemorial; and

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

Whereas, the right to continue to harvest our traditional resources and live our traditional subsistence ways of life was one of the commitments that Congress made to Alaska Native people when it enacted Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980; and

Whereas, in ANILCA, Congress declared that the continuation of the opportunity for subsistence uses on public lands and waters is “essential to Native physical, economic, traditional, and cultural existence” and expressly provided a subsistence priority for rural Alaskans on most federal lands and waters in Alaska; and

Whereas, our people currently live under legal frameworks that have created multiple complicated and overlapping systems of management. This management is dictated by international agreements, the federal government, and the State of Alaska, but not by us, and without collaboration; and

Whereas, after decades of mismanagement of our rivers and the Bering Sea, salmon populations in Western and Interior Alaska are in crisis and the loss of chum, Chinook, and coho salmon fisheries has created a multispecies food security and subsistence crisis, which has cascading effects on the whole ecosystem and all of the communities within it; and

Whereas, BSEG was formed nearly two decades ago out of a mutual concern about the problems associated with trawling and other harmful large-scale commercial fisheries practices; and

Whereas, at BSEG's 2023 Summit, BSEG passed Resolution 2023-02, in which BSEG declared a disaster in our traditional waters of the Bering Sea; and

Whereas, bottom trawling destroys the sea floor ecosystem and pelagic trawling has been shown to be nearly as destructive; and

Whereas, bycatch is wanton waste, and we were taught by our Elders to take only what we need and waste nothing; and

Whereas, the extensive damage from extractive commercial fishing practices, especially large-scale factory trawling, poses a significant threat to the ability of our People to hunt and fish as we have since time immemorial; and

Whereas, over the last decade, BSEG has worked to support, maintain, and strengthen the existing bottom trawl boundary in the Northern Bering Sea; and

Whereas, intercept fisheries, including Area M, harvest salmon that would otherwise return to our streams and rivers; and

Whereas, our Tribes sustainably stewarded the Bering Sea for thousands of years, and our People are now being forced to bear the burden of conservation efforts; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: Addressing the Bering Sea ecosystem crash requires an intergovernmental approach that must include new, meaningful limits on bycatch, reconsidering the definitions of trawling, and protecting areas that are currently closed to bottom trawling from trawl-related bottom contact, including in research; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: Our people value accountability: the burden of conservation efforts should fall first on the shoulders of the people and industries who have brought about this imbalance, and nothing should be off the table, including a moratorium on factory trawling for a period of time sufficient for our salmon to recover; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: The State of Alaska should suspend the Area M salmon fishery or abolish the mixed-stock policy in Area M; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: Commercial fisheries should be allowed to catch no more salmon than subsistence fishers are allowed to catch; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That BSEG calls for new legal frameworks that bring cohesion and alignment to in-river and at-sea fisheries management, prioritize Tribal leadership, affirm and forever protect Alaska Native hunting, fishing, and gathering rights,

recognize the subsistence priority across all agencies and management bodies, and fully honor the promises that the United States made to Alaska Native people, our right to self-determination, and our right to steward our waters.

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 2nd day of October, 2024.