

BERING SEA ELDERS GROUP

Summer Newsletter, 2013

Inuuniagniqput –

The way we live as people
(Inupiaq)

Yuungnaqsaraq –

Our way of being
(Central Yup'ik)

Key yaq tak tak –

Way of life
(St. Lawrence Yupik)

OUR MISSION

To bring together elders as one voice to protect our traditional ways of life and the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children's future.

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Youth Intern Wanted!

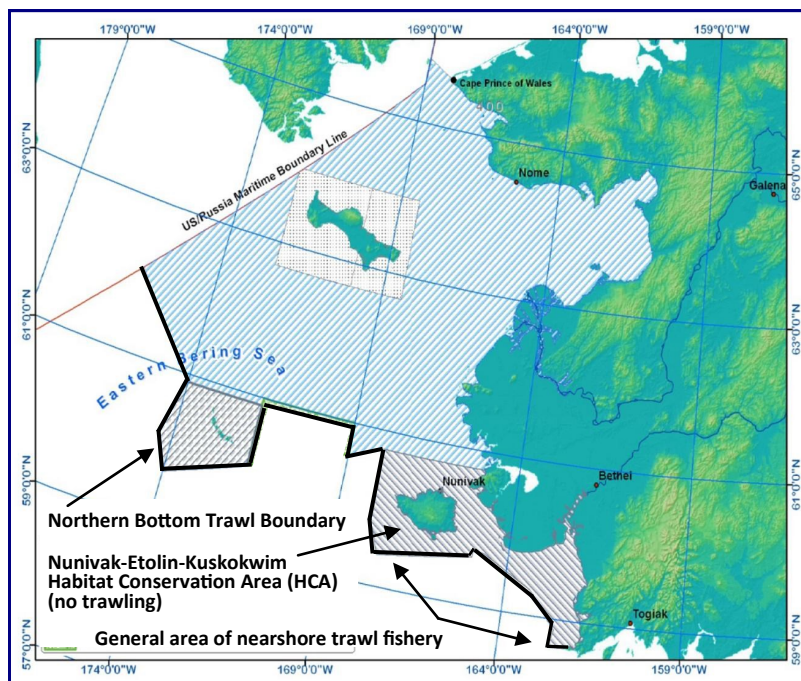
The Bering Sea Elders Group and AVCP are hosting a youth intern, age 18-25. The internship will feature communication between elders and youth on the Elders Group objectives to secure an enduring vision for the Northern Bering Sea. Further info: Contact Casie at (907) 543-7341.

Bering Sea Elders Group and AVCP Reach Agreement with Nearshore Bottom Trawl Fleet

What is the Northern Bottom Trawl Boundary?

With support from 25 tribal resolutions in 2007, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council voted to establish the Northern Bottom Trawl Boundary in the Bering Sea. Part of that decision included creating the "Nunivak Island-Etolin Strait-Kuskokwim Bay Habitat Conservation Area" (HCA). Bottom trawling is currently prohibited north of the overall boundary (as far west as the U.S./ Russian border). This includes the HCA. South of the HCA, there is a nearshore bottom-trawl fishery for yellowfin sole and other flatfish. Because the trawl gear operates on the bottom, it takes a significant amount of halibut and other species as bycatch. There are also concerns about the effect of trawl gear on seafloor habitat and subsistence resources.

The original southern boundary of the Nunivak-Etolin-Kuskokwim HCA was based on an agreement between representatives of the bottom trawl industry and the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP). But because there were unresolved concerns in the original decision, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council agreed



that in 2011 it would consider changes to the HCA. This would provide another opportunity to consider better protection for subsistence and local community fisheries.

Several things followed. First, the Bering Sea Elders Group formed with participation from villages in the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bering Strait regions. The group's purpose was to bring elders together from across both regions, and to address future decisions about the bottom trawl boundary overall and the Nunivak-Etolin-Kuskokwim HCA. Also during that time, five fishing companies formed the Alaska Seafood Cooperative. The coop includes 17 factory trawlers that participate in Bering Sea bottom trawl fisheries. These vessels target yellowfin sole during part of the year (April to June) in the nearshore waters outside the Nunivak-Etolin-Kuskokwim HCA.

See HCA, p. 2

HCA, continued from p. 1...

Negotiation between Native Groups and Alaska Seafood Cooperative

Over the last few years the Bering Sea Elders Group and AVCP met with the Alaska Seafood Cooperative more than 20 times to resolve concerns about the nearshore bottom trawl fishery, including the HCA boundary, halibut bycatch and the overlap between the trawl fishery and traditional hunting and fishing areas. Attorneys for the Bering Sea Elders Group and AVCP represented village concerns in a formal

negotiation. A draft agreement was reached in late 2012. Resolutions approving the agreement were adopted at the ACVP Convention and by the Bering Sea Elders Group executive committee. Parties to the agreement presented it to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. They accepted the report and congratulated the parties for working together in good faith to address conflicts. The agreement was formally signed in April 2013.

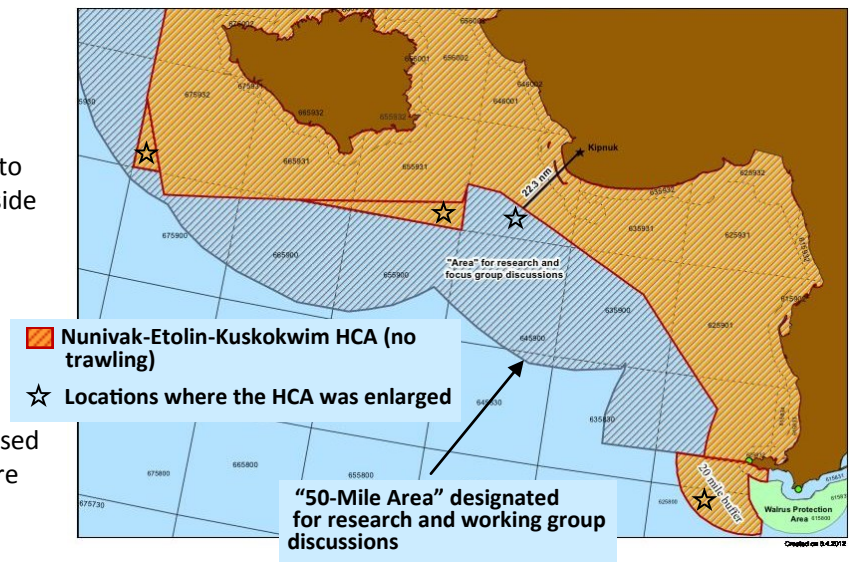
Further info: Natalie Landreth or Erin Dougherty at Native American Rights Fund.

What the Agreement Says

There are two primary parts to the agreement:

1. Boundary adjustments to the Nunivak-Etolin-Kuskokwim HCA (see map):

- The lines around Nunivak Island were adjusted to clarify that there will be no trawling allowed inside Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) statistical areas 675932, 655931, and 665931.
- A 20-nautical mile trawl closure around Cape Newenham to protect walrus was added.
- The segment of the boundary near Kipnuk was moved 1 mile farther out with the understanding that future information will be used to consider whether to move the boundary more offshore.



2. Establishment of the Chaninik Qaluyat Nunivak Working Group (CQN Working Group).

- The CQN Working Group is intended to be an adaptive management group, meaning that it will enable the villages to be involved in decisions about the best fishing practices for the yellowfin sole bottom trawl fishery in the 50-nautical mile area (see map). This area was shown to be important for subsistence, local fisheries and marine mammal migration by the Bering Sea Elders Group in its report, *The Northern Bering Sea: Our Way of Life*. The Working Group will share information, including catch and bycatch data from the trawl fishery, trends in the local halibut fishery and subsistence. It will also strive to design and fund research that will be useful to all parties.

The purpose of the CQN Working Group is to provide opportunity for a productive yellowfin sole fishery while minimizing the impact of that fishery on the people who use the region to maintain economic, nutritional, and cultural well-being. The CQN Working Group will strive to reduce impacts of the yellowfin sole fishery over time, as guided by research, traditional knowledge, and best available technology and fishing practices. (Please note that the Working Group will only be addressing issues related to bottom trawl fisheries for yellowfin sole and other flatfish. Salmon bycatch in these fisheries is minimal. *The Working Group will not be addressing salmon bycatch or other salmon-related issues affecting the Yukon-Kuskokwim region.*)

The CQN Working Group will exist for five years, and may continue after that.

The Working Group is made up of 10 people total — five representatives from Alaska Seafood Cooperative and five from the Native community. Of the five Native community representatives, one will be from Bering Sea Elders Group, one will be from AVCP, and three will be from communities in the affected area. The Bering Sea Elders Group asked tribes in the

area for nominations to fill the three at-large seats. Members will be Fred Phillip (Bering Sea Elders Group), Peter Julius, Goodnews Bay (At-large), Charlie Spud, Sr., Mekoryuk (At-large), and David Bill, Sr., Toksook Bay (At-large). AVCP's representative will be finalized soon. The Working Group will have one co-chair from Alaska Seafood Cooperative and one from the Native delegation.

There will be a part-time technical staff person at AVCP who will support tribal members on the Working Group by reviewing and analyzing fisheries data and helping members prepare for meetings.



Bering Sea Elders Group and AVCP negotiate with Alaska Seafood Cooperative during a two-day meeting in Seattle. Elders present: David Carl (Kipnuk), David Bill, Sr. (Toksook Bay), Michael Hunt (Kotlik), Paul John (Traditional Chief), David O. David (Kwigillingok) and Fred Phillip (Elders Group executive director)

The Working Group will meet twice a year — once in the spring, before the yellowfin sole fishery occurs in our nearshore waters, and once in the fall, after the trawl fishery is closed and data can be distributed to the Working Group.

Goals of the Working Group

- Develop a process that encourages open communication between the parties and a working relationship that will result in better understanding of each other's fisheries and way of life, and lead to real projects and actions.
- Reduce halibut bycatch mortality over time in the area in terms of rate (pounds of halibut bycatch per ton of groundfish) and the total amount of halibut bycatch.
- Use the best available fishing gear and other techniques, and the best fishing practices. This will be guided by current and future research to achieve specific goals, including halibut bycatch reduction.
- Collect information about 1) harvest of yellowfin sole and other groundfish, 2) directed halibut catch by local boats in our communities, and 3) subsistence harvest in the area. Information will come from state and federal agencies and the International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC), supplemented by information from the Alaska Seafood Cooperative, AVCP, Bering Sea Elders Group and the affected tribal communities. This will help us develop a better understanding about the trawl fishery, our halibut fishery and subsistence.
- Identify and implement research that will help achieve the goals of the Working Group.
- Use and incorporate Native traditional knowledge and knowledge of yellowfin sole fishermen.

North Pacific fishery Management Council Discontinues Efforts to Develop a Northern Bering Sea Research Plan

The North Pacific Fishery Management Council reviewed a Northern Bering Sea Research Plan prepared by scientists at the National Marine Fisheries Service. The plan was to study the potential effects of a bottom trawl fishery in the northern Bering Sea where there has not been trawling in the past. The research results were to be used to regulate the possible expansion of bottom trawl fisheries in the future.

After hearing testimony from Native and conservation organizations, federal fishery managers decided not to move

forward with the research plan. Taking no action means that the bottom trawl boundary will remain in place (acknowledging that the Nunivak-Etolin-Kuskokwim HCA is an ongoing subject of discussion between the Bering Sea Elders Group, AVCP and the Alaska Seafood Cooperative).



Delegates to the Bering Sea Elders Group Summit in Nov. 2011 discuss a vision for the Northern Bering Sea.

About the Bering Sea Elders Group

The Bering Sea Elders Group was established in 2007 because of to our concerns about the proximity of bottom trawling to some of our villages and the potential movement of industrial fisheries into northern Bering Sea waters. Participating tribes join by resolution and appoint one elder and an alternate to serve.

We have one mind – to protect our traditional way of life, and the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on and our children’s future.

Bering Sea Elders Group—Executive Committee

David Bill, Sr., Toksook Bay – Chair (907) 717-5860

David O. David, Kwigillingok – Vice Chair

Michael Hunt, Kotlik

Dick Lincoln, Tununak – Treasurer

John Phillip, Kongiganak – Honorary Member

David Carl, Kipnuk – Sergeant at Arms

Charlie Saccheus, Elim

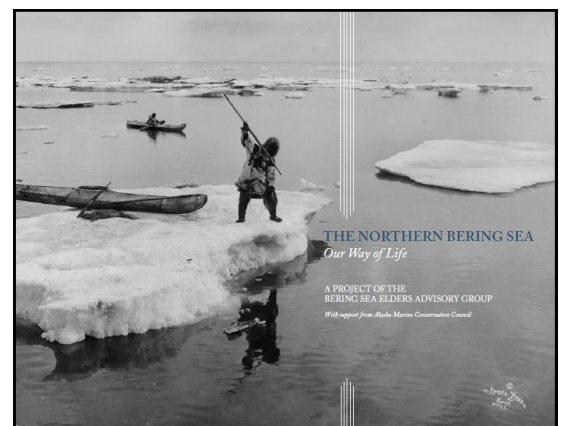
* Note: The Elders Group is in the process of increasing the Executive Committee membership to include equal representation from the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bering Strait regions.

Acknowledgments

- We appreciate the support from attorneys with Native American Rights Fund and Trustees for Alaska in the negotiations with the Alaska Seafood Cooperative. We also thank Sky Starkey with AVCP for his leadership and important contribution to the outcome.
- Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association— For services they provide as our fiscal sponsor.
- Kawerak, Inc. and AVCP for ongoing discussions with the Elders Group regarding a vision for the Northern Bering Sea.



Thirty-nine tribes participate in the Bering Sea Elders Group.



The Northern Bering Sea: Our Way of Life is available at www.beringseaelders.org

The report includes maps showing extensive areas where Alaska Native hunters and local fishermen harvest ocean resources, and the marine waters important to the resources we rely on. It illustrates that the whole Northern Bering Sea is the storehouse that supports our way of life.