



UNITED FISHERMEN OF ALASKA

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March 9, 2018

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair
Senate Resources Committee
Alaska State Legislature, Room 427
State Capitol, Juneau AK 99801

Re: Support for SJR13 – Sea Otter Co-Management

Dear Chair Giessel and Committee Members,

United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA) is the statewide commercial fishing trade association, representing 35 commercial fishing organizations participating in fisheries throughout the state, and the federal fisheries off Alaska's coast.

UFA Supports SJR13 and its companion legislation HJR 35.

In 1960, 400 Sea Otters were introduced to the waters of Southeast Alaska by the Department of Fish and Game without a management plan in place. Over the past 50 plus years, the sea otter population in Southeast has increased at an alarming rate. In 2010, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service estimated over 11,000 otters at a growth of 13% per year, which extrapolates to a population of nearly 70,000 by 2025.

As a result, sea otters have nearly wiped out shellfish stocks used for subsistence, personal use, and sport fishing. Commercial fisheries are closed due to unsustainably low abundance. Southeast residents rely on healthy shellfish stocks as a food source and livelihood and they are watching the otters destroy shellfish stocks before their eyes. The loss of commercial harvests have resulted in negative economic impacts to fishermen, processors and seafood dependent communities which have experienced a loss in employment wages and associated economic activities.

There is a solution. Southeast Alaska Natives have hunted sea otters since time immemorial. However, under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, they are forbidden to sell intact sea otter pelts and can only sell pelts that have been customarily altered for art or clothing.

Alaska is a model for the management of harvestable resources for sustained yield and is the only state in the United States, which cites this model of management in the Alaska Constitution. The mandate within the Alaska Constitution to manage for sustained yield conflicts with the current interpretation and enforcement of the Marine Mammal Protection Act by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Implementation of a sustainable harvest management regime would serve the dual purposes of managing and maintaining sea otter populations and protect the Southeast shellfish population, allowing it to recover.

Section 119 of the US Marine Mammal Protection Act allows the Secretary of the Department of Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with Alaska Native organizations for the development of marine mammal co-management structures with Federal and State agencies, and the creation of local management plans for the harvest of marine mammals for subsistence use, and to provide important subsistence shellfish resources through ecological balance.

United Fishermen of Alaska urges State and Federal government managing authorities to work with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the Alaska Native and non-Native leaders to develop strategies for an ecological balance of shellfish resources and the re-introduced sea otter population of Southeast Alaska, including shellfish enhancement programs. We ask that these groups actively consider means of expanding and enhancing small business and broader economic opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska.

United Fishermen of Alaska supports expanding the hunter base by allowing all Alaska Natives to hunt and create handicrafts from sea otters allowing the wholesale sale of native handicrafts from sea otters. We support the efforts of the Shellfish Preservation Alliance (SPA) to further these actions.

Please find our attached Resolution 2018 – 01: A Resolution In Support of Sea Otter Management, which the UFA board voted to support at our Spring 2018 meeting.

Thank you for your consideration.



Jerry McCune
President



Frances H. Leach
Executive Director

CC: Senator Bert Stedman

Attachment

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers • Alaska Independent Tendermen's Association • Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association • Alaska Scallop Association
Alaska Trollers Association • Alaska Whitefish Trawlers Association • Armstrong Keta • At-sea Processors Association • Bristol Bay Fishermen's Association
Bristol Bay Reserve • Cape Barnabas, Inc. • Concerned Area "M" Fishermen • Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association • Cordova District Fishermen United
Douglas Island Pink and Chum • Freezer Longline Coalition • Golden King Crab Coalition • Groundfish Forum • Kenai Peninsula Fishermen's Association
Kodiak Regional Aquaculture Association • Kodiak Seiners Association • North Pacific Fisheries Association • Northern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association
Petersburg Vessel Owners Association • Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation • Purse Seine Vessel Owner Association
Seafood Producers Cooperative • Southeast Alaska Herring Conservation Alliance • Southeast Alaska Fisherman's Alliance
Southeast Alaska Regional Dive Fisheries Association • Southeast Alaska Seiners • Southern Southeast Regional Aquaculture Association
United Cook Inlet Drift Association • United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters • Valdez Fisheries Development Association



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UFA Resolution 2018 – 01

A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF SEA OTTER MANAGEMENT.

WHEREAS, United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA) is the statewide commercial fishing trade association, representing 35 commercial fishing organizations participating in fisheries throughout the state, and the federal fisheries off Alaska's coast, with the mission "*To promote and protect the common interest of Alaska's commercial fishing industry, as a vital component of Alaska's social and economic well-being; and*

WHEREAS, in the late 1960's, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game reintroduced approximately 400 sea otters in six different locations to near shore waters of Southeast Alaska in the absence of a long-term management plan; and

WHEREAS, the federal government, which has jurisdiction under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), has established no effective management plan for protecting the ecosystems affected by sea otters and maintaining an ecological balance of shellfish resources; and

WHEREAS, the unmanaged proliferation of reintroduced sea otters, which consume non-quantified yet substantial volumes of the crab, abalone, urchins, sea cucumbers, clams and other shellfish upon which the region's residents also heavily rely, appears to be contributing to a degradation in the ecological balance in many areas leading to diminished harvests of these important resources for subsistence and commercial purposes; and

WHEREAS, without proper management, the sea otter population in southern Southeast Alaska has grown at an alarming rate (over 5,800 observed in 2003 and a 2010 aerial survey by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service revealed an estimate of over 11,000 otters a growth rate of 13% per year, which extrapolates to a population of nearly 70,000 by 2025); and

WHEREAS, the drastic increase and high density of reintroduced sea otter has, in some areas, so depleted shellfish stocks that subsistence, personal use, and sport fishing is almost non-existent, and commercial fishing is closed due to unsustainably low abundance; and

WHEREAS, monies derived from the harvest of Alaska's sustainably managed aquatic resources form a major component of the economies of Alaska's coastal communities and thereby make them particularly sensitive to situations negatively impacting yields from those resources; and

WHEREAS, a degradation in the ecological balance of a diversity of species has taken place in many areas; and

WHEREAS, residents of Alaska rely on shellfish not only for their livelihood, but for survival in a subsistence way of life; and

WHEREAS, Southeast Alaska's indigenous inhabitants have hunted sea otters since time immemorial; and

WHEREAS, Alaska Natives under the Marine Mammal Protection act are denied the customary and traditional ability to sell intact sea otter pelts; and

WHEREAS, Section 101 of the US Marine Mammal Protection Act further allows for the use of marine mammal pelts in the creation of authentic native articles of handicraft and clothing; and

WHEREAS, under the Act, such value added fur products, so created, are already allowable for sale in both intra and interstate commerce; and

WHEREAS, Alaska is a model for the management of harvestable resources for sustained yield and is the only state in the United States which cites this model of management in the Alaska Constitution; and

WHEREAS, the mandate within the Alaska Constitution to manage for sustained yield conflicts with the current interpretation and enforcement of the Marine Mammal Protection Act by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and

WHEREAS, implementation of a sustainable harvest management regime would serve the dual purposes of maintaining sea otter populations at a level suitable for continued ecological balance and expanded economic opportunity; and

WHEREAS, Section 119 of the US Marine Mammal Protection Act allows the Secretary of the Department of Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with Alaska Native organizations for the conservation of marine mammals, the development of marine mammal co-management structures with Federal and State agencies and the creation of local management plans for the harvest of marine mammals for subsistence use and providing protection to important subsistence shellfish resources creating an ecological balance; and

WHEREAS, the loss of commercial harvests have resulted in negative economic impacts to fishermen, processors and seafood dependent communities which have experienced a loss in employment wages and associated economic activities; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT UNITED FISHERMEN OF ALASKA urges the appropriate Federal agencies work with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the Alaska Native and non-Native leaders in the Southeast region, to establish strategies and plans for an ecological balance of shellfish resources and the re-introduced sea otter population of Southeast Alaska, including shellfish enhancement programs; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that United Fishermen of Alaska urges State and Federal government managing authorities, in developing those management plans, to actively

consider means of expanding and enhancing small business and broader economic opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that United Fishermen of Alaska, as a means of expanding and enhancing economic opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska, urges Federal authorities to consider expanding the scope of allowable uses for sea otters taken for subsistence purposes; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that United Fishermen of Alaska, supports expanding the hunter base by allowing all Alaska Natives to hunt and create handicrafts from sea otters; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that United Fishermen of Alaska, supports allowing the wholesale sale of native handicrafts from sea otters; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that United Fishermen of Alaska supports the efforts of the Shellfish Preservation Alliance (SPA) to further these actions; and

LET IT BE RESOLVED FURTHER, the State and Federal government managing authorities are requested to find ways to revive the lost economies from Alaska regions due to the relocation and re-colonization of sea otters in Alaska.

By the UFA Board of Directors, February 28, 2018.



Jerry McCune, President



Attest: Frances Leach
Executive Director