

BERING SEA ELDERS GROUP

Resolution Expressing a Vision for the Northern Bering Sea

November 3, 2011

PREAMBLE:

Alaska Native peoples living on the Bering Sea coast, keen observers of the world around us, are witnessing changes in seasonal patterns, sea ice and animals. In recent years Bering Sea ice has formed later in the year and melted earlier in spring. In some years, even when the ice extends far to the south, it is thin. These changes affect where different animals find food, how they survive and where they may be available to us for hunting.

While ocean temperatures and ice conditions in the Bering Sea vary greatly year-to-year, the long-term trend over time is expected to be warming. How the Northern Bering Sea ecosystem will be affected and the long-term future for our ocean resources is uncertain.

The teaching of our ancestors was based on respect for what the ocean provides. Respectful actions are rewarded by hunting success; disrespectful actions have negative consequences. We were taught never to waste what the Creator has given us, to share our food with the community and to listen to our Elders because they acquired wisdom over a long life and sharp observation. Today, while technology has changed, our traditional values and our hunting, fishing and gathering ways of life, remain the foundation of our culture. Respect for the natural world and caring for our natural resources are necessary for our people to continue thriving off the ocean and land, and providing for our children's inheritance.

WHEREAS: The Bering Sea Elders Group is an association of Elders established to work together as one voice for the protection of our traditional ways of life, the web of life that sustains the ocean resources we rely on and our children's future; and

WHEREAS: Federal fishery managers recognized the importance of the Northern Bering Sea by establishing a bottom trawl boundary to prevent these large-scale fishing fleets from moving into northern waters where they have not operated before; and

WHEREAS: Alaska Native tribes on the Bering Sea coast are concerned about the potential for future expansion of bottom trawl fisheries and other large-scale industries into the Northern Bering Sea because of the sensitivity of the whole ecosystem that supports our ways of life; and

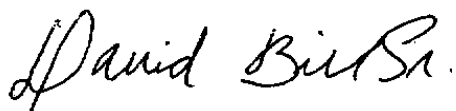
WHEREAS: The Association of Village Council Presidents and Kawerak, regional tribal consortiums, support the mission of the Bering Sea Elders Group.

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NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Bering Sea Elders Group:

1. Urges the federal government to undertake a rigorous tribal consultation process for all decisions affecting the Northern Bering Sea.
2. Recommends the formation of a Northern Bering Sea reserve as permanent protection from future large-scale industrial activities. The Northern Bering Sea should be reserved for traditional use and ecosystem research that brings together western science and traditional knowledge for continued understanding of climate change, and its consequences for marine life, ocean habitat, communities and cultures. This region warrants special attention because of its unique ecological and cultural characteristics:
 - The Northern Bering Sea is vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of climate change. The long-term consequences of climate change for the region are uncertain. Allowing bottom trawl fisheries or other large-scale industries into the region will add new stress to the already fragile ecosystem and the traditional resources we depend on.
 - Ocean habitat and the ice-dependent species that are listed under the Endangered Species Act, or designated as candidate species for listing, should be protected, including the critical habitat offshore in the Bering Sea pack ice established for the spectacled eider.
 - The Northern Bering Sea is already fully utilized by the tribes who have been thriving off of the ocean's bounty since time immemorial. Our local economies and food security are based on hunting, gathering and small-scale fisheries that will be damaged by the potential introduction of bottom trawl fisheries or other large-scale industries in the future.

Passed November 3, 2011 at the Bering Sea Elders Group Summit – Bethel, Alaska.



David Bill, Sr. – Chair