



Bering Sea Elders Group



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 26, 2021

Media contacts:

Marissa Mercurieff, Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, (907) 717-3429  
Gage Hoffman, Association of Village Council Presidents, (907) 543-7308  
Julie Raymond-Yakoubian, Kawerak, Inc., (907) 443-4273  
Mike Williams, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, (907) 765-2061  
Mellisa Johnson, Bering Sea Elders Group, (907) 891-1229

The following statement was issued by five leading Alaska Native Tribes and Tribal organizations, including regional non-profit consortiums for 76 Tribes, in response to the introduction of the Sustaining America’s Fisheries for the Future Act by Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA-2) and Rep. Ed Case (D-HI-1).

Amos Philemonoff, Sr., President, Aleut Community of St. Paul Island: “The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island supports this bill, which makes meaningful and necessary updates to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. We have long voiced our concerns to federal and state fishery managers about the need to update the MSA, as the impacts of climate change and bycatch degrade our ecosystem and threaten our commercial and subsistence fisheries. We are encouraged that this bill provides for two voting seats for our Tribes on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, giving us a much-needed voice in the decision-making process. We thank Congressman Huffman for his leadership in addressing these important issues.”

Vivian Korthuis, CEO, Association of Village Presidents: “The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) thanks Congressman Young, Congressman Huffman, and their staff for their dedication in protecting our subsistence way of life through the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). We appreciate their decision in giving Alaska’s tribal communities a seat at the table through the inclusion of designated Tribal voting seats on the NPFMC. AVCP is in full support of the MSA reauthorization bill as it aligns with our core value of protecting our land and subsistence way of life for us and for future generations.”

Melanie Bahnke, President, Kawerak, Inc.: “Our Tribes are stewards of our oceans, and we are not merely users of resources, but intimately connected and part of the ecosystem in the Bering Sea. Our oceans and our people are facing unprecedented threats due to climate change and

bycatch. The Magnuson-Stevens Act needs an update, and this bill provides critical solutions to these emergencies. Most importantly, for the first time, this bill specifically acknowledges the importance of subsistence fishing and adds Tribal representation to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, giving our Tribes a long overdue seat at the decision-making table. Kawerak supports this bill and we are grateful for the co-sponsors recognition of the unique government to government relationship the United States of America has with federally recognized Tribes.”

Mike Williams Sr., Chair, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission: “We need to have voices representing the many Indigenous Peoples in Alaska, especially on this important Council that makes policy decisions about our salmon. Our livelihoods depend on good management of our fisheries across the Alaskan coasts and in our rivers, and it is very important that two valuable Indigenous voices are included into the MSA. This will help share Traditional Knowledge to make management decisions that will be good for the health of our people and our fisheries in Alaska. KRITFC appreciates the work Rep. Huffman and Rep. Case have done. We hope that the MSA is reauthorized as introduced in, and we look forward to putting our knowledge into the important decisions made by the Council regarding the high seas fisheries where our salmon grow before returning to our rivers.”

Mellisa Johnson, Executive Director of the Bering Sea Elders Group: “Bering Sea Elders Group speaks and works together as one voice to protect and respect our traditional ways of life, the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children’s future. As Elders, we are messengers to our children, our tribal councils, and the people who make decisions that affect our marine resources, ecosystem, and ways of life. Our people have long deserved to be part of the management bodies that affect our lands and waters, including Tribal representation on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council. BSEG is in full support of Rep. Huffman’s MSA reauthorization bill.”

#### NOTES TO EDITOR:

Aleut Community of St. Paul Island is the federally designated name used to identify the community of Unangan, also known as Aleuts, residing on St. Paul Island in the Bering Sea.

The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) is the regional non-profit Tribal consortium for 56 federally recognized Tribes in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

Kawerak, Incorporated is the Alaska Native non-profit Tribal consortium for the 20 federally recognized Tribes of the Bering Strait region.

The Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission is an inter-tribal fish commission composed of 33 Tribes on the Kuskokwim River.

The Bering Sea Elders Group is a consortium guided by tribally-designated Elders from 38 Tribes located in the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bering Strait regions.