



December 1, 2021

Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Subcommittee
House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Jared Huffman and Ranking Member Cliff Bentz:

We write to submit this testimony to the record for the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife's hybrid legislative hearing on H.R. 59, H.R. 4690, and H.R. 5770 held on November 16, 2021. As Tribes and Tribal organizations of Western Alaska, the Eastern and Northern Bering Sea, and Interior Alaska, representing over 110 federally recognized Tribes, we submit this testimony in support of the *Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act*, H.R. 4690 as introduced by Representatives Jared Huffman.

We applaud the *Sustaining America's Fisheries for the Future Act's* (Act) acknowledgment of the importance of subsistence fishing to Indigenous communities in Alaska, and the inclusion of subsistence throughout the Act. The incredibly productive Bering Sea region, including countless species of seabirds, marine mammals, fish, and invertebrates have sustained our Tribal communities for millennia. Our oceans have critical cultural and subsistence value for our coastal communities, and we are committed to protecting them for future generations. As a result of climate change, we face, and will continue to face, unprecedented changes to our region. Our fishery management system must adapt to manage sustainably in the face of climate change. We welcome the provisions of this Act that confront the impacts of climate change and directly address them through fishery management and planning.

Importantly, this Act also remedies the longstanding membership imbalance on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC). It is critical that Tribes are equitably included in the decision-making that will impact our marine resources, ecosystems, and ways of life. This Act ensures that Tribes can meaningfully participate in fisheries management by creating two Tribal voting seats on the NPFMC. We support the bill as written, which would provide for two voting Tribal seats, and then the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration can, after notice and comment and Tribal consultation, promulgate regulations further detailing the process for nominating and selecting the Tribal members. We have stewarded the lands and waters in our region since time immemorial and this Act gives Tribes a long overdue seat at the decision-making table.

HR 4690 also takes important steps to address the critical issue of bycatch by removing the qualifier “to the extent practicable” from National Standard 9. While many Indigenous communities throughout our region have had their subsistence and commercial salmon and halibut fisheries completely shut down, bycatch is allowed to continue at high levels in the trawl fisheries offshore. Removing the qualifier “to the extent practicable” from National Standard 9 (Section 503) is a much-needed change, which will reorient the MSA towards the original intent of reducing bycatch. This change is key to the sustainability of our fisheries, and to creating a more just and equitable management system.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. As introduced, the *Sustaining America’s Fisheries for the Future Act* would create a more just and sustainable fishery management process in the North Pacific and we fully support it.

Sincerely,



Melanie Bahnke
President
Kawerak, Inc.



Vivian Korthuis
Chief Executive Officer
Association of Village Council Presidents



Amos Philemonoff
President
Aleut Community of St. Paul Island



PJ Simon
Chief/Chairman
Tanana Chiefs Conference



Mike Williams Sr.
Chair
Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission



Brooke Woods
Chairwoman
Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission



Mellisa Johnson
Executive Director
Bering Sea Elders Group

Cc: Representative Don Young