

**Statement for the Record
Department of the Interior**

**Before the United States House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries**

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 8401, To amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to allow the transport, purchase, and sale of pelts of, and handicrafts, garments, and art produced from, Southcentral and Southeast Alaska northern sea otters that are taken for subsistence purposes.

June 3, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement for the record on H.R. 8401, To amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 to allow the transport, purchase, and sale of pelts of, and handicrafts, garments, and art produced from, Southcentral and Southeast Alaska northern sea otters that are taken for subsistence purposes. The Department supports the intent of the bill.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (MMPA) defines the federal responsibility for conservation of marine mammals, with management authority vested in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for the sea otter, marine otter, walrus, polar bear, dugong, and manatee. The MMPA also establishes a permanent moratorium on taking and importing marine mammals, including parts and products unless otherwise exempted. The MMPA provides exemptions to Alaska Natives for otherwise prohibited take of marine mammals for subsistence purposes or for creating and selling authentic native articles of handicrafts and clothing.

Under current law, Alaska Natives can sell sea otter pelts that are authentic native articles of handicrafts and clothing, which means they have been significantly altered from their natural form and produced, decorated, or fashioned in the exercise of traditional native handicrafts (50 CFR § 18.3). H.R. 8401 would amend the MMPA by allowing the commercial domestic sale of pelts, the creation of handicrafts, garments or art by non-Alaska Natives, and international commerce of these products, as long as the pelt is from an otter from the Southcentral or Southeast Alaska stock of northern sea otters that was originally taken for subsistence purposes by an Alaska Native. The bill provides more certainty for the regulated public by removing the need for “significant alteration” of the pelt prior to sale.

As currently written, it would be difficult to determine whether a pelt, handicraft, or product was sourced from a legally harvested sea otter and the Department would welcome the opportunity to work with the sponsor and Subcommittee to provide technical assistance to address this concern and ensure effective implementation and enforcement of the legislation to provide more opportunity for those engaged in subsistence hunting.