RC 030

To: Chairman Tom Kluberton, Alaska Board of Fisheries

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Re: Prop 185 &186 and the Historic Nature And Importance Of The Area M Fishery

The Aleutians East Borough (AEB) was established in 1986. Many of the communities that comprise the AEB have been there for a century or more. The Aleut people who live in these communities and the region have been there for time immemorial. The Aleuts, or Unangax, have continuously used the abundant natural resources, including the ocean and all of its wealth to survive during our time and occupation. The archaeological record supports both the continued occupation, and hunting and fishing in the waters around the AEB and further acknowledges the contribution the Aleut people played in the ecosystem (Dunne et. al. 2016).

Fishing played a key role in where our ancestors settled. Villages have always been located near the sea and salmon streams (Jacka 1999). To this day, all of our communities are located on the coast, and all of them are tied to the fishing industry. The fishing industry has allowed us to remain in the place we have called home for thousands of years. The six communities that make up the AEB are a consolidation of many other communities that were abandoned for various reasons, mostly economical. Some of the abandoned communities include Pauloff Harbor, Belkofski, Ikatan, Squaw Harbor and Unga. Numerous families from these places are still present in the borough and carry on with the livelihood of our ancestors, basing our communities on traditions of fishing and subsistence, which go hand in hand. Without one, it is difficult to have the other (Reedy 2015).

In previous BOF meetings, we have had to prove to outsiders and insiders that we are in fact local and Native, and we do have the right to fish. The entirety of our region was completely occupied as of 7,000 years ago with evidence of subsistence activities 10,000 years ago (Laughlin 1980). From the time of contact in the 1740s, we have been adapting to changes in the structure of governance that allow us to continue harvesting our resources. We, like all other Native groups, have incorporated new methods of technology that have contributed to the continued success of our people. We have used our traditional knowledge about the land, sea, and animals to become advocates of our own heritage, proving time and time again that we are the stewards of the land, and we do deserve the right to the resources that we have utilized for generations. Our people know and understand the land and the sea, as well as the behaviors of the animals well enough to make educated decisions about what is best for our people, our communities, our resources, our fisheries, our fleets and our future.

The future of our region lies in our fisheries, and we are focused on doing what we can to keep our fisheries alive so that we do not deplete our resources. We are committed to the science that keeps our resources healthy and abundant. This can be seen in the regulations that we support. On the North Peninsula, we stand down every other day to help ensure escapement in rivers and streams along the peninsula. Since 2004, we have begun our fisheries on June 10, in order to allow migrating fish to continue on their journeys. Historically, the amount of fish that we are catch is a small portion of the fish that are bound for elsewhere. Historical catch efforts show that even in the good years, the fish we catch are a fraction of the escapement. These

catches are what we use to sustain our communities and our culture. We have been fishing from these waters, protecting these stocks and depending on these fish since well before statehood. Even so, it seems we are constantly targeted and forced to defend our right to fish, our right to subsist, our right to prosper and our right to live in this place where we have resided for more than 10,000 years (Laughlin 1980).

The fabric of our communities is woven together through the seasons that were first dictated by fish and now are dictated by both fish and policy. We operate around season openers and travel to meetings where we are fighting to keep hold of a resource that defines us as a people. Further, the Alaska State Constitution states that fish are a common resource to be used by all residents. This same resource provides the cornerstone that feeds our communities, both literally and figuratively. It provides our community members with resources to provide for their families, both by bringing in wages and also by allowing people to get their subsistence fish. It contributes to the local governments and helps to keep up our infrastructure and educate our youth. Growing up living off the land and fishing, our children learn the lifecycles of fish, where they spawn, and when they arrive. They also learn how to catch and preserve them for consumption throughout the winter. Young fishermen learn about stock composition based on tides and the temperature of the water. These are not things that are learned from books. They are things that are shared between generations. These are learned behaviors passed down by fathers and grandfathers, mothers and grandmothers, aunts and uncles. Growing up, children are taught how to be ecologists, economists, engineers, advocates, stewards, hunters, fisherman and politicians, all in one.

Over the course of the years, we have had to justify our position as Aleut fisherman and women. We have documented and done everything in our power to showcase that we are indeed a very integral part of the landscape and just as dependent and tied to the natural environment as those who are still lucky enough to have retained other parts of their heritage like their languages. As Aleuts we have had to revitalize many parts of our heritage, and make conscious efforts to enhance what we have and eliminate any more loss of culture.

Currently, there are several proposals that threaten our livelihood, and in turn, also threaten our communities, our culture and our ability to provide for our families in the ways which we have in the past. One of these proposals is Proposal 185 & 186, which would establish a Dolgoi Island Section and a Dolgoi Island Section Management Plan. This area as defined by the *Western Alaska Salmon Stock Identification Program* (WASSIP), would encompass a large portion of the current South Alaska Peninsula fishery. Establishing this as a new area would be detrimental to our fishing fleet. According to WASSIP, we harvest between 3-10% of the harvestable salmon, which is minimal, when you consider the magnitude this would have on the fisherman, their families and our communities in Area M. After reading over the department comments, I understand the department does not believe that approval of this proposal would result in an additional direct cost for a private person to participate in this fishery (ADFG 2016:161). However, the cost of this proposal would be significant to the people and the infrastructure of our communities. Our small fishery, that has been present for time immemorial, is not the problem. We are less than 400 permits, which includes gillnet, drift and seine permits, while other fisheries just north and east of us have over 3,000 and 100+ respectively. The importance of our fishery is not just that of economics, it is our history. We are, in fact, a living

history, and without access to the resources we use to define ourselves, we, too, will become just that, history.

Citations

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