

**Petersburg Borough, Petersburg, Alaska
RESOLUTION #2018-07**

**A RESOLUTION REQUESTING THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO SUPPORT
SEA OTTER MANAGEMENT IN SOUTHEAST ALASKA BY AMENDING THE
MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION ACT AND URGING THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR TO PERMIT ALASKA NATIVE ORGANIZATIONS
AND THE ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME TO CO-MANAGE, TAKE,
AND STUDY MARINE MAMMALS UNDER THE MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION
ACT**

WHEREAS, the Petersburg Borough is a small island fishing community located in Southeast Alaska with a population of approximately 3,100 residents; and

WHEREAS, Petersburg Borough residents are dependent on abundant, sustainable resources from the coastal waters of Southeast Alaska; and

WHEREAS, in the late 1960's the Alaska Department of Fish and Game reintroduced approximately 400 sea otters in six different locations in Southeast Alaska's coastal waterways without a long-term management plan; and

WHEREAS, the federal government, which has jurisdiction under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), has established no effective management plan for protecting the ecosystems affected by sea otters and maintaining an ecological balance of shellfish resources; and

WHEREAS, without proper management, the sea otter population in southern Southeast Alaska has grown at an alarming rate (over 5,800 observed in 2003 and a 2010 aerial survey by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service estimated over 11,000 otters, a growth rate of 13% per year, which extrapolates to a population of nearly 69,000 by 2025); and

WHEREAS, the unmanaged proliferation of reintroduced sea otters, which consume non-quantified yet substantial volumes of the crab, abalone, urchins, sea cucumbers, clams and other shellfish upon which the region's residents also heavily rely, appears to be contributing to degradation of the ecological balance in many areas leading to diminished harvests of these important resources for subsistence and commercial purposes; and

WHEREAS, the drastic increase and high density of reintroduced sea otters has, in some areas, so depleted shellfish stocks that subsistence, personal use, and sport fishing is almost non-existent, and commercial fishing is closed due to unsustainably low abundance; and

WHEREAS, monies derived from the harvest of Alaska's sustainably managed aquatic resources form a major component of the economies of Alaska's coastal communities and thereby make them particularly sensitive to situations negatively impacting yields from those resources; and

WHEREAS, the loss of commercial harvests have resulted in negative economic impacts to fishermen, processors and seafood dependent communities which have experienced a loss in employment wages and associated economic activities; and

WHEREAS, Southeast Alaska's indigenous inhabitants have hunted sea otters since time immemorial; and

WHEREAS, Section 101 of the MMPA provides for exemptions for Alaska Natives for the harvest of a marine mammal as long as the taking is for subsistence purposes and not accomplished in a wasteful manner; and

WHEREAS, Alaska Natives under the MMPA are denied the customary and traditional ability to sell intact sea otter pelts; and

WHEREAS, Section 101 of the MMPA allows for the use of marine mammal pelts in the creation of authentic native articles of handicraft and clothing and provides that Alaska Natives may sell these value added fur products; and

WHEREAS, Alaska is a model for the management of harvestable resources for sustained yield and sustainable use; and

WHEREAS, implementation of a sustainable harvest management regime would maintain sea otter populations at a level suitable for continued ecological balance and expand economic opportunity; and

WHEREAS, Section 119 of the MMPA allows the Secretary of the Department of Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with Alaska Native organizations for the conservation of marine mammals, the development of marine mammal co-management structures with Federal and State agencies and the creation of local management plans for the harvest of marine mammals for subsistence use and providing protection to important subsistence shellfish resources creating an ecological balance.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Petersburg Borough Assembly urges the appropriate Federal agencies to work with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and the Alaska Native and non-Native leaders in the Southeast region, to establish strategies and plans for an ecological balance of shellfish resources and the reintroduced sea otter population of Southeast Alaska; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Petersburg Borough Assembly urges state and federal agencies, in developing the management plan, to actively consider means of expanding and enhancing small business and broader economic opportunities for residents of Southeast Alaska; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Petersburg Borough Assembly urges the United States Congress to amend the MMPA to expand the scope of allowable uses for sea otters taken for subsistence purposes; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that when an Alaska Native organization or the Alaska Department of Fish and Game certifies to the United States Secretary of the Interior, in writing, that a marine mammal poses a threat to Alaska Native subsistence resources and that the marine mammal may withstand higher levels of taking without becoming unsustainable, and the Alaska Native organization or the Department provides a management plan for the study and taking of the marine mammal designed to protect other fishery resources used for subsistence

purposes, the Petersburg Borough Assembly urges the Secretary to issue a scientific permit to the Alaska Native organization or the department to carry out the management plan; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Petersburg Borough Assembly urges that the scientific permit issued by the United States Secretary of the Interior:

1. Authorize an Alaska Native organization or the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to take as many marine mammals as is necessary to protect other subsistence fisheries resources;

2. Grant the Alaska Native organization or the Department the authority to administer the management plan, including the plan's amendment or modification, as circumstances, including changes in the sustainability of the marine mammal or other fisheries resources, may dictate; and

3. Permit the Department to delegate all or part of the agency's management authority to an Alaska Native organization.

Passed and Approved by the Petersburg Borough Assembly on March 5, 2018.

Mark Jensen, Mayor

ATTEST:

Debra K. Thompson, Borough Clerk