

**Bristol Bay Native Association
Bering Sea Fishermen's Association
Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation
Alaska Independent Fishermen's Marketing Association
Bristol Bay Driftnetter's Association
Bristol Bay Reserve**

December 7, 2006

Governor Sarah Palin
PO Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Governor Palin,

Our organizations would like to set the record straight and underscore the value of Alaska's invaluable fisheries. The positions our organizations share accurately reflect the views of the 128 Alaskan communities and of the thousands of resident subsistence and commercial fishermen who depend on the rich fisheries resources of Bristol Bay for survival.

We have not taken our position against off-shore development in the North Aleutian Basin arbitrarily, nor was it done without thoughtful consideration. We have measured the potential benefits and risks and have found them to be weighed against us. We also considered the oil and gas industry's inept oil spill detection and response capabilities as they were clearly demonstrated by the Exxon Valdez disaster and, more recently, by BP's neglect of the trans-Alaska pipeline at Prudhoe Bay. We greatly fear such disasters in the North Aleutian Basin, which would destroy our commercial and subsistence fishing way of life and our economy. A lease sale was previously held in this area in 1988. It took a lot of hard work and an act of Congress to protect it with a Congressional moratorium that revoked all leases that were sold. Our concerns and the need to protect our fisheries and our way of life have not changed since 1988.

The North Aleutian Basin was highlighted by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) as an extremely productive fishing area for the federal fisheries under their management in the Bering Sea. There are world-class marine resources and sea life at the very point in which it is preliminarily planned to place four offshore oil and gas platforms. The North Aleutian Basin supports some of the North Pacific's richest fisheries resources. The world's largest sockeye salmon run migrates through the basin. King crab, pollock and cod fisheries have had long and productive histories in the area. The area also features schools of herring that sustain fish stocks throughout the Bering Sea as well as a primary halibut nursing ground.

The economics of the fisheries that depend on the North Aleutian Basin have sustained an annual average wholesale value of about \$450 million dollars; we estimate the retail value to be nearly \$2 billion annually. The snapshot of oil and gas development for this area does not compare to the longevity of these fisheries or to the future value. The Bristol Bay salmon fishery alone maintained an average annual catch value of \$105 million from 1980-2003. This represents a 20-40% total value of Alaska's salmon fisheries. Jobs in Bristol Bay that depend on fisheries and wildlife provide an annual payroll of about \$175 million. The economic benefits and impacts of Alaska's fishing industry extend far beyond the region in which they are located as the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission reports 41% of the Bristol Bay Drift and Set Gillnet permit holders to be residents of states other than Alaska.

Even though the North Aleutian Basin does not directly overlap with the Bristol Bay salmon fisheries it provides significant habitat for salmon. Salmon smolt outmigrate through the area and adult salmon migrate through the area on their way to spawn in Bristol Bay Rivers. Juvenile salmon also feed and grow to maturity within and surrounding the area. Clearly, leasing in the North Aleutian Basin poses serious risks to salmon. Even a small spill or contamination event could damage the ability to market Bristol Bay salmon and could harm new efforts to increase their value.

The following is a short list of fisheries-catch information for federal areas 509, 516, and 512. These federal areas overlap the North Aleutian Basin. (Percentages reported by the NPFMC).

- 21% of Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery
- 40% of Bering Sea Pacific cod trawl fishery
- 55% of Bering Sea flathead sole trawl fishery
- 28% of Bering Sea cod pot fishery

The North Aleutian Basin falls within the halibut nursery, closed to halibut fishing by the International Pacific Halibut Commission since 1967. The area also falls within designated Essential Fish Habitat for red king crab.

Bristol Bay's renewable resource abundance and marketing potential stand in contrast to the potential negative risks of oil and gas development, which include the impacts of seismic testing, the disposal of contaminated drilling mud, and both major and minor petroleum spills. Potential risks are increased by the severe and hazardous weather conditions that exist in the region for a great part of the year.

We rely on exceptional and irreplaceable resources for survival and we are not willing to risk them. We appreciate your consideration of our comments and concerns.

Respectfully,



H. Robin Samuelson
President and Chief Executive Officer
Bristol Bay Economic Development Corporation



Ralph Andersen
Chief Executive Officer
Bristol Bay Native Association



Wam B. Johnson
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Bristol Bay Driftnetters Association



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