



CENTRAL COUNCIL
Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
Office of the President • Edward K. Thomas Building
9097 Glacier Highway • Juneau, Alaska 99801

Executive Council of the Central Council
TLINGIT & HAIDA INDIAN TRIBES OF ALASKA

Resolution EC 23-104

Title: Support of an Immediate Closure of the Destructive Trawl Industry in Alaska

WHEREAS, the Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit & Haida) is a federally recognized tribe with more than 37,000 citizens; and

WHEREAS, under Article X of the Tlingit & Haida Constitution, the Executive Council is the governing body of Tlingit & Haida when the Tribal Assembly is not in session; and

WHEREAS, the Tribal Assembly is not in session; and

WHEREAS, the *chaatl* (Tlingit) or *xagw* (Haida) (Pacific halibut, *Hippoglossus stenolepis*), *t'a* (Tlingit) or *taa'an* (Haida) (king salmon, *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and *ishkeen* (Tlingit) or *skil* (Haida) (black cod, *Anoplopoma fimbria*) fisheries are of critical importance to the Indigenous people throughout all of coastal Alaska, which is shown through the diet, artwork, dances, and other expressions of culture throughout coastal tribes in Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the tribal citizens of Tlingit & Haida hold these finfish in high regard as traditional foods to sustain themselves, their families, and those around them, and this is shown by the high rate of subsistence and personal use permits that are issued to tribal citizens on an annual basis; and

WHEREAS, according to data collected by state and federal agencies as well as universities for decades, the abundance of these finfish has been declining, resulting in localized fisheries closures, which has particularly affected Chinook (king) salmon fisheries in subsistence areas throughout Alaska including the Yukon, Kuskokwim, Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers; and

WHEREAS, the walleye pollock mid-water trawl fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea has been well documented to be a large factor contributing to the population declines of many finfish species in Alaskan waters through the discard of what is known as bycatch; and

WHEREAS, Tlingit & Haida recognizes that, as required by North Pacific Fisheries Management Council regulation, bycatch of non-targeted finfish species is tossed over the side of factory trawlers dead or dying, completely wasting these critical, traditional foods, which is blatant disrespect to the fish and the values that the Indigenous people of this land have held for as long as they have existed; and

WHEREAS, on account of the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea having such high rates of bycatch, coupled with the observed impacts of climate change, pollution, habitat degradation, and changes to predator-prey dynamics, many finfish populations are likely to continue to decline until there is a total collapse of large-scale fisheries in Alaska; and

WHEREAS, on account of the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea, from 1991 to 2022, over 6 million chum salmon and 1 million Chinook salmon were killed as bycatch; and

WHEREAS, on account of the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea, Western Alaska Chinook salmon runs from 2020 to 2022 were some of the lowest observed over the last 40 years; and

WHEREAS, on account of the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea, subsistence fishing for Chinook salmon was completely closed on the Yukon River in 2021 and has not reopened since; and

WHEREAS, on account of the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea, Kuskokwim River subsistence harvesters have gathered less than half of the Chinook salmon that the State of Alaska considers adequate to meet subsistence needs for the last eight years; and

WHEREAS, subsistence harvests are fundamental to the culture and Indigenous identity of communities across the region and have been so for more than ten thousand years; and

WHEREAS, on account of the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea, as Bering Sea halibut stocks declined, halibut bycatch in the trawl fisheries became the largest source of halibut removals in the State of Alaska; and

WHEREAS, on account of the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea, herring bycatch in the Bering Sea increased dramatically; and

WHEREAS, on account of the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea, at least nine killer whales were killed as bycatch in the Bering Sea trawl fishery; and

WHEREAS, the National Marine Fisheries Service has violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by adopting the 2023-2024 harvest specifications for the groundfish fisheries in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Island region without considering dramatically changed ocean conditions as part of its NEPA process; and

WHEREAS, the National Marine Fisheries Service has not conducted a full Environmental Impact Statement evaluating alternatives linked with the management decisions in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Island region since 1981; and

WHEREAS, the National Marine Fisheries Service has approved a harvest specification that allows industrial trawlers to catch millions of metric tons of groundfish based on outdated and inadequate analysis that ignores today's increasingly concerning ocean conditions and significant and cumulative impacts to Alaska Native communities and the public;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Executive Council of the Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska hereby demands immediate action by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council to establish a closure of the trawler pollock fishery to reduce halibut, king salmon, and black cod bycatch in the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea to ensure that all other finfish fisheries can be sustainable for generations to come; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that Tlingit & Haida shall encourage all other entities to work towards an immediate closure of the walleye pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea.

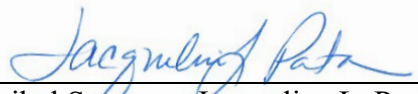
ADOPTED this 14th day of December 2023, by the Executive Council of the Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, by a vote of 6 yeas, 0 nays, 0 abstentions and 0 absences.

CERTIFY



President Richard J. Peterson

ATTEST



Tribal Secretary Jacqueline L. Pata