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For Immediate Release

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Alaska Seafood Cooperative Files Suit Against National Marine Fisheries Service

“The agency has not made a sufficient science-based case for closing fisheries that support our members, remote Alaska communities and seafood consumers”

Seattle, Washington - Late Tuesday, the Alaska Seafood Cooperative and the Alaska Groundfish Cooperative filed suit against the National Marine Fisheries Service (“NMFS”) to block implementation of new measures that could effectively shut down several major fisheries in federal waters off the coast of Alaska, ostensibly to protect Steller sea lions. This action comes on the heels of statements by the State of Alaska earlier this week that NMFS has “...acted in an arbitrary fashion by failing to draw rational connections between the available information and its conclusions, by ignoring overall species population trends toward the recovery of the Steller sea lions, and by relying on some scientific studies, but ignoring others.”

“Since 1999 our industry has supported reasonable and effective measures to protect sea lions and worked with the agency to conduct scientific studies to learn more about how fishing affects local abundance of sea lion prey species in the Aleutian Islands. We are pleased that there seems to be a consistent increase in the sea lion population across the western district population segment (“WDPS”) overall and remain concerned that sea lions numbers in the western Aleutians have not followed the overall trend,” explains John Gauvin, Fisheries Science Director for the cooperative. “But in this instance the agency has not demonstrated that the Atka mackerel and Pacific cod fisheries are resulting in jeopardy for the Steller sea lions, nor are they significantly impacting sea lion habitat.”

“The agency’s Biological Opinion fails to take a rigorous and balanced look at the weight of scientific evidence, is quick to dismiss all the evidence that the continued SSL decline in a small area in the Aleutian Islands is not related to fishing, and in the end takes a short cut to conclude that they cannot prove it’s not related to fishing so they must close fisheries under their interpretation of the requirements of the Endangered Species Act.” says Gauvin.

The agency’s proposed closures have been widely criticized, not just by industry and the State of Alaska but also by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (“NPFMC”) and several independent scientists. This past August, the NPFMC proposed alternative measures that were rejected by the agency.

“Even NMFS admits that these closures will cause significant economic damage to several Alaska communities and the companies that fish in these waters. Economic losses are estimated to be between \$44 million and \$61 million annually, in a region where there are no other economic opportunities,” says Bill Orr, President of the Alaska Seafood Cooperative. “These actions are not based on the rigorous application of fisheries science that our region has become well-known and respected for. It leaves us with little choice except to challenge this action.”

Based in Seattle, Washington the Alaska Seafood Cooperative represents catcher processors that primarily fish in the federal waters off the coast of Alaska. Several of their fisheries have recently been certified as “sustainable fisheries” by the Marine Stewardship Council. For more information about the cooperative go to:

<http://www.alaskaseafoodcooperative.org/>

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