



Alaska State Legislature

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Official Business

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House Endorses Sound Science Resolution HJR 10 Supports Studies of Sea Lion-Pollock Interaction

(JUNEAU) -- The House passed a resolution today encouraging federal fisheries managers to rely on sound science in making decisions balancing Steller sea lion protection and commercial groundfish management in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska.

The House Resources Committee, chaired by Rep. Drew Scalzi (R-Homer), introduced House Joint Resolution 10 in response to conflicts over efforts by federal fisheries managers last year to protect declining populations of Steller sea lions by curtailing fishing of pollock and other groundfish.

In response to an environmental lawsuit, the National Marine Fisheries Service had proposed such cutbacks, defending the decision with a biological opinion based on unproven assumptions about how several environmental, biological and other factors, in addition to fishing, might be affecting sea lions.

“The scientists could not determine 100 percent cause and effect between any one component of these issues, and as a result assumptions were drawn that many factors may have contributed to the decline of the Stellar - but these were assumptions,” Scalzi said. “The evidence from the National Marine Fisheries Service was based on assumptions. Not facts, but assumptions.”

Groundfishing is an \$800 million industry in Alaska, and the potential damage to the state in terms of lost taxes, defaulted fishing loans, and unemployment in small fishing communities makes it imperative that reductions, if any, are firmly grounded in defensible science, Scalzi said.

Scalzi said his resolution also endorses U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens’s work in providing \$40 million to fund an independent scientific review, proposed by the fisheries service, of the science underlying any proposed closure.

The resolution moves next to the Senate for consideration.

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