

Alaska State Legislature



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Senate Passes Stevens' Sea Lion Resolution **HJR 26 Calls for Federal Researchers to Bring Work to Alaska**

(JUNEAU) – The Senate today unanimously passed a resolution calling on federal fisheries managers investigating the decline of Steller sea lions to base their research efforts in Alaska, not Seattle.

Sponsored by Rep. Gary Stevens (R-Kodiak), House Joint Resolution 26 calls on the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to relocate a Steller sea lion research team to Western Alaska, near the Northern Pacific fishing grounds that are the focus of its studies.

“The sea lions have gone into great decline, so the National Marine Fisheries Service has established a sea lion research team,” said Stevens, whose Kodiak district is home to the nation’s richest commercial fisheries. “This resolution simply asks that the researchers be based in Alaska where the sea lions are, rather than Seattle, where they are not.”

The decline of the sea lion populations in Alaska waters had prompted NMFS managers last year to first recommend halting all commercial fishing in certain areas frequented by the depleted marine mammals. After a firestorm of protest from fishermen and scientists questioning the scientific basis for the proposed closure, the managers relented.

Instead, NMFS agreed to conduct an independent study of the relationship between fishing and the sea lions, which will be funded with \$40 million in federal funds secured by U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, Alaska’s senior senator and a strong advocate for the interests of the state’s world-class fishing industry.

Basing the research effort in Alaska will not only be more likely to yield better, more defensible results, but would also allow the federal agency to stretch its budget dollars further by saving the transportation, logistical and other associated costs of performing research at great distance from its base of operations, Stevens said.

HJR 26 moves next to the governor.

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