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Good Afternoon Madam Chair and members of the Council:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on protecting essential groundfish habitat in the Bering Sea. Speaking on behalf of Greenpeace, an organization with nearly three million members, I would like to register my full support for the proposal submitted by Oceana.

Not more than 15 years ago, as the former pastor of the Orthodox Church on St. Paul Island, I stood on the beaches of St. Paul Island and counted almost 200 large fishing boats, all geared up and ready for the opilio crab fishery to begin in mid January. That fishery lasted well into May before the quota was caught and all went home safely to their families. Now, 15 years later, that fishery may last no more than two weeks at the most. It was a time of great promise for our people of the Pribilof Islands. Municipal budgets, Village Corporation and Tribal Government budgets were prepared with the knowledge that revenues from this fishery would help to keep our communities healthy, economically and socially. Now we all know what happened to those budgets and to that once promising fishery and unfortunately to the health of local economies, not to mention to our social concerns. I know this from personal experience: I was the pastor!

Today, 15 years later, the communities of the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska have what some say is best fishery management in the entire country. And yet, we are looking right in the face of more declines in fish stocks, crab stocks, marine mammal stocks, marine bird populations, and finally, village numbers. Yes, Madam Chair, people are moving out of our villages in numbers never before seen, and certainly not predicted. Our people need to work and have food to eat.

Our oldest son came ashore last summer while I was working on St. Paul Island from a fishing trip and simply said: "Dad. I thought I was going to

die.” This after spending 11 hours on the overturned hull of his 28 foot long liner, one which was perhaps carrying too much gear and attempting to travel further away from the safety of the Island to find halibut. Thankfully I was there to comfort and hold him. How many close encounters of death are we going to afford our young people to experience before we, the managers and responsible “grown-ups” say, no more? How many more families are going to keep vigil day in and day out for their young men and women to come home after traveling as much as 100 miles off the safety of the beaches of our Islands to find fish to harvest?

We must do a better job of protecting the seafloor, the goose that lays the golden egg. Despite all we know about impacts to sensitive habitat, bottom trawlers are allowed to continue to drag up, overturn, crush, and bury the very features that provide marine life a place to live, breed, and grow. To make matters worse, the midwater pollock trawlers are in on the destruction as well, coming into contact with the bottom more than forty percent of the time. Every inch of the ocean floor being destroyed by this archaic fishing practice takes years to recover. A skipper of one of these large 400-foot factory ships told me: “Father”, he said, “I know the damage I am doing to the ocean and its ecosystem by what I do. But you know what? It’s legal.” My heart sank at this thought. Our people indeed are watching the ends come to our communities. We all know the litany of the destructive nature of these fisheries:

1. Localized depletion and negative impacts on our villages, not to mention the ecosystem as a whole.
2. Tons and tons of by-catch, without any idea of what the impacts to these “non-target” species are! The pollock fleet alone is now taking over 700,000 salmon a year.
3. As though the by-catch was not harmful enough to our villages and our children, the sparse numbers of the variety of foods such as sea-lion, fur seal and a few birds we serve at our dinner tables are quickly dwindling. Although difficult to find the “real” reasons for these declines, it is clear that not enough attention is being placed on the impacts of fishing on the rest of the food web.
4. It seems that no amount of “best scientific practices” can tell us what these trawl fisheries are doing to the ecosystem. Unfortunately we do not have any areas within the “trawl foot print” of the Bering Sea/Gulf of Alaska to help us measure a healthy ecosystem; everywhere that CAN be fished IS being fished. We need, now more than ever, marine reserves

that will allow us some chance to understand if the waters and all its resources can rebound to their once healthy conditions. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has been and is proposing such a practice. Along with their recommendations to establish these experimental control areas, we also must, and sorely need, to have no trawl zones of any kind around our Island ecosystems. Our people and these resources need a fighting chance to survive.

I thank you all again for this opportunity to speak and will be happy, if time allows, to answer any questions.