Continuing to encourage conservation, enhancement and optimum utilization of our renewable fishery resources.

Encouraging the development of sensible standards for seafood production to assure the most wholesome and healthful products possible.

Fostering a better public understanding of the importance of the seafood industry and its value to the state, regional, and national economies.

Providing regular and consistent communication with government agencies, legislative bodies, the judiciary system and the news media in the pursuit of industry interests while coordinating efforts with other seafood related organizations.

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PSPA, the voice of Alaska's seafood processors since 1914

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When the third quarterly pollock fishery in the Gulf of Alaska opened August 20, more than half the fleet stayed tied to the dock. Out of the 41 vessels that make up the Kodiak pollock fleet, 15 vessels stayed at the dock. Of the 52 vessels in the Sandpoint area, 35 stayed at the dock. The tie-up was not due to price, but to safety considerations.

The vessels that remained at the dock had been displaced from their fishing areas near shore by Ninth Circuit Judge Thomas E. Zilly who, on July 19, issued an interim injunction effective August 8 which prohibited trawling within 20 nautical miles (NM) of the shore. The ban on bottom fishing could reduce the tax base for local communities by as much as 60 to 70 percent.

The economic base of coastal communities depend heavily on fish. Revenues from fishing funds schools, hospitals, roads, and local merchants.

The area closed to trawling is currently at least 50,000 square miles of near-shore ocean from St. Elias to Attu, a distance of 2,000 miles. The distance from the Canadian border to Key West, Florida is 1,800 miles.

The Gulf of Alaska trawl fleet is mainly composed of vessels less than 60 to 100 feet in length — vessels designed to fish near shore. To venture 20 NM out is exceedingly dangerous. The vessels that did try to fish the third pollock season found little pollock outside the 20 NM barrier and actually spent more money looking for pollock than the value of the small amounts of pollock they were able to find.

It is the 30-year decline of Steller sea lions in the Central and Western Gulf and Bering Sea/Aleutians that has brought the ugly realities of the ESA to the Alaska fishing industry. Between 1976 and 2000, the Western Area Steller sea lion population has declined from 120,000 animals to 25,000 animals.

According to National Marine Fish...
from 1976 to 1988. By 1988 there were only 40,000 animals remaining. Since views the picture nor that allowed un-

could be said that the situation for sea

der the ESA.

1988 the rate of decline has slowed. It

In the early days of Steller sea lion

research, blood samples indicated 

"nutritional stress" which was translated

by marine mammal biologists as 

meaning sea lions were not able to find

enough food. Industry has offered 

its opinion that rather than not enough 

food to sustain the number of Steller 

sea lions seen in 1996 or that the million 

pups born in areas of sea 

lion decline are leaving their rookery 

fatter than the pups born in Southeast 

Alaska and Bering Sea while pollock 

and Pacific cod increased dramatically. 

That failure, in the face of continued 

debacle in the Steller sea lion 

population, left the door open for the 
current lawsuit filed by Greenpeace, 

American Oceans Campaign and Sierra 

Club.

Updating the SEIS is a long process 

which the agency is trying to do in a few 

months. Judge Zilly has turned down 

the biological opinions submitted so 

far. The judge has made it clear that he 

wants a document that explains how all 

the Alaskan fisheries fit together in the 

areas of Steller sea lion decline – a 

request which science may not be able 

to fulfill due to lack of knowledge. 

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its opinion that rather than not enough 

food it was more likely that some dietary 
elements may have disappeared during 

the 1975 regime shift during which crab 

and shrimp vanished in the Gulf of 

Alaska and Bering Sea while pollock 

and Pacific cod increased dramatically. 

Currently pups leave the rookeries 
fat and healthy. In fact, according to 

NMFS, the pups born in areas of sea 

lion decline are leaving their rookery 

fatter than the pups born in Southeast 

Alaska where sea lions are increasing.

There are several hypotheses that 
could explain the sea lion declines, 

including the possibility that pollock have 

overrun the ecosystem or that the 

decline of fatty fish during the regime 

shift caused nutritional stress, or that 

the decline of the ocean productivity is 

low enough that there is not enough 

food to sustain the number of Steller 

sea lions seen in 1996 or that the million 

metric tons (MT) of arrowtooth founder 

being taken from the water each year is 

90% pollock is out competing sea lions. 

However, the ESA does not simply wait 

for nature. The ESA requires action 

and the only action which can be taken 

is managing people since nature is 

unmanageable. Right or wrong, the only hypo-

theses available in an ESA action is one 

that fingers human actions. The Pro-

tected Resources Division hypothesis 

is that fishing is competing with sea 

lions and depriving them of food. Based 

on the food competition theory, migra-

tion measures closing areas to fishing 

could make sense until it is pointed out 

that the fish taken by the industry repre-

sent 10-20% of the biomass, leaving 

80-90% of the fish for sea lions, but the 

untested conjecture that fishing com-

petes with sea lions is NMFS position. 

Judge Zilly is tasked with the role of 

approving management measures 

which will, with certainty, reverse the 

decline of Steller sea lions as required 

by the ESA. Unfortunately there are no 
clear, certain answers. Frustrated with 

NMFS inability to deliver an adequate 

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