KAWERAK RESOLUTION 2023-09

A RESOLUTION IN OPPOSITION TO THE NOAA ALASKA FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER BOTTOM TRAWL RESEARCH PROJECT “NETS”

WHEREAS, Kawerak, Inc. is a tribally authorized non-profit consortium whose mission is to assist, promote and provide programs and services to improve the social, economic, educational, and cultural well-being of Bering Strait region people; AND

WHEREAS, the tribes within the Kawerak region include: Brevig Mission, Council, Diomede, Elim, Gambell, Golovin, King Island, Koyuk, Mary’s Igloo, Nome, Savoonga, Shaktoolik, Shishmaref, Solomon, Stebbins, St. Michael, Teller, Unalakleet, Wales and White Mountain; AND

WHEREAS, Tribes recognize research activities as actions requiring prior consultation and coordination with federally recognized tribes that may be impacted by such research or its results; AND

WHEREAS, To date, there has been no tribal consultation on any proposed bottom trawl research with the Northern Bering Sea Research Area and boundaries of the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area, AND

WHEREAS, Tribes and Tribal organizations have not been collaborated with since the early stages of this project (including with regard to the decision whether or not to do the research, which is not co-productive); AND

WHEREAS, decades of research and hundreds of academic publications have irrefutably illustrated that bottom trawl fisheries are destructive to benthic habitat and species; AND

WHEREAS, marine animals that Kawerak region residents depend on as subsistence resources, and that are food for animals used for subsistence, are highly dependent on a healthy and undisturbed benthic habitat; AND

WHEREAS, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) has proposed to do bottom trawl research within the Northern Bering Sea Research Area and boundaries of the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area. This research involves using commercial bottom trawl gear on undisturbed tracts of sea floor to determine the effects of trawling on the benthos and benthic species; AND

WHEREAS, the nature of the controlled study means that the study area will be off limits to subsistence hunting, fishing and other activities within its boundary for multiple years; AND
WHEREAS, the Kawerak Board does not support expansion of commercial bottom trawl fisheries into the northern Bering Sea and believes this research will likely facilitate that expansion; AND

WHEREAS, the Kawerak Board is also concerned about the damaging effects of this proposed research trawl activity itself (in addition to commercial bottom trawling); AND

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Kawerak Board is opposed to bottom trawl research in the northern Bering Sea, supports a precautionary approach to protecting the northern Bering Sea – particularly in this time of rapid ecosystem change – and desires that the northern Bering Sea be designated permanently off limits for vessels using bottom trawl gear and other gear that is known to frequently hit the sea floor (such as ‘pelagic’ trawl gear); AND

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Kawerak Board requests that NOAA AFSC cancel their proposed “NETS” research project (Northern Bering Sea Effects of Trawling Study) in the northern Bering Sea. The Board also encourages NOAA, including AFSC, to rapidly make significant steps forward with regard to tribal consultation, engagement, and outreach, as well as co-production of knowledge.

CERTIFICATION
We, the undersigned 1st Vice Chair and Secretary of the Kawerak, Inc. Board of Directors, hereby certify that the foregoing resolution was adopted by majority vote of the Board during a duly called meeting on September 27th, 2023.

By: ___________________________  ___________________________
Kawerak 1st Vice Chair                Kawerak Board Secretary

KAWERAK, INC.
PO Box 948 • Nome Alaska 99762 • 907.443.5231 • www.kawerak.org
Advancing the capacity of our people and tribes for the benefit of the region.