



UNITED FISHERMEN OF ALASKA

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United Fishermen of Alaska Calls for Fisheries Protections for North Aleutian Basin Oil and Gas Development

United Fishermen of Alaska, representing 37 Alaska commercial fishing organizations, today called for protections for ongoing sustainable fishing activities in the North Aleutian Basin, as the federal government considers moving forward with development of oil and gas leases in the area.

“The area under consideration represents over 40% of the commercial U.S. fisheries catch including the nation’s richest crab, pollock, cod, halibut, and salmon fisheries, with annual harvests worth more than a half a billion dollars in ex-vessel value. With additional value in the processing sector and the nutritional value of sustainable seafood from these pristine waters, the long term value to the region and the nation stands on a par with energy needs. Sustainable, wild capture seafood production is an integral part of our national food production, and as such it is essential to overall national security,” said UFA President Joe Childers.

The group’s comment letter (<http://www.ufa-fish.org/doc/UFA%20Comment%20EIS%20101608.pdf>) calls for fourteen points of protection and mitigation, including creation of Regional Citizens Advisory Councils to be funded by the approved leaseholders following lease sales, and not to wait for funding from production. UFA also called for establishment of an adequate fisheries disaster fund to provide compensation to the fishing industry and coastal communities in the event of disruption of fisheries; zero discharges from drilling installations; and inclusion of commercial fishing organizations in the planning process as stakeholders on a par with other cooperating municipal, state and federal agencies.

“From the Prince William Sound experience we have seen what can happen in a worst case scenario and we cannot trust in the intention or ability of other industries, or the federal government, to make fishing communities whole when things go wrong. We need to do all we can to set up protections and a process to protect the nation’s sustainable supply of seafood as we seek to address energy needs,” said UFA Executive Director Mark Vinsel.

The group also supported the fisheries protections called for in a draft memorandum of understanding between the borough governments on the north coast of the Alaska Peninsula, including protections that fishermen are not displaced or precluded from access to fishing areas, unless they are adequately compensated for the displacement; fishermen are not precluded from participating in designated fishing seasons, unless they are adequately compensated for the lost season(s); and fishermen will be compensated for damage to fishing equipment, vessels, gear and decreased harvest value from OCS operations in a timely manner.

The group’s comments were submitted in response to the Minerals Management Service call for comments scoping process for the EIS on the proposed North Aleutian Basin Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Lease Sale 214, published in the Federal Register on April 8, and August 13, 2008. The deadline for comments is October 17, 2008.

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