

**THE NATIONAL CONGRESS OF
AMERICAN INDIANS**

RESOLUTION #SPO-01-010

Title: Support of Ensuring the “Reasonable Opportunity” for the Customary and Traditional Herring Egg (“Subsistence”) Fishery in Sitka Sound

WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, the Sitka Tribe of Alaska, a member of NCAI, is a federally recognized tribal government responsible for maintaining the health, safety, welfare and cultural preservation for over 3,000 tribal citizens in Sitka, Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the harvest and the importance of herring and herring eggs from Sitka Sound by the Tlingit people for food, traditional trade/barter, and ceremony is well documented in Tlingit oral history, stories, artwork, song and post-contact Western written accounts attesting to our lengthy and respectful history with the herring that some compare to the Native American people of the Plains and the buffalo; and

WHEREAS, in 2001 tribal harvesters reported difficulties filling their family’s, local elders’ and/or the needs of family and friends in other communities - despite “diligent effort” - including the report by the Tribe’s Traditional Food Program that herring egg harvest fell from approximately 8 tons in 2000 to 3 tons of herring eggs in 2001; and

WHEREAS, subsequently the Tribal Council established a Herring Committee which has met at least four times a month since April 24, 2001, to determine the nature and extent of difficulties reported by herring egg harvesters in 2001; and

WHEREAS, the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game directed the commercial sac roe fleet to harvest its entire quota of 10,600 tons of herring from an approximately 4-mile area about 6 miles from our community in the heart of our traditional herring eggs on hemlock branches/kelp traditional fishery; and

WHEREAS, the Tribe's Herring Committee determined that tribal harvesters' unfilled herring eggs needs were the result of 12,005 tons (including quota over-harvest) of herring being removed by the commercial fishery before the herring could lay eggs for reproduction and deposition on our branches and the kelp; and

WHEREAS, the State of Alaska Board of Fish accepted the Sitka Tribe's proposal to address the issue and members of the Sitka Tribal council and Sitkan herring egg harvesters will be working with the Board to ensure that the "reasonable opportunity" to harvest herring eggs is ensured in the future at the Board's January 7-14, 2002 meeting in Anchorage, Alaska.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the NCAI does hereby acknowledge the importance of herring to the Tlingit people and recognizes the exhaustive work of the Sitka Tribe, its Herring Committee and other involved federally recognized tribal governments and Alaskan tribal entities to protect the Tlingit peoples' inherent right to harvest herring and herring eggs for physical & spiritual sustenance, traditional trade & barter and for sharing with friends & family; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the NCAI respectfully request that the State of Alaska Board of Fish uphold the responsibility of the State of Alaska to ensure that Sitka Sound traditional ("subsistence") herring egg harvesters are provided a "reasonable opportunity" to harvest herring eggs from the areas that they have relied upon for these foods since time immemorial.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted at the 58th Annual Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Spokane Convention Center, in Spokane, Washington on November 25-30, 2001 with a quorum present.

Tex Hall, President

ATTEST:

Colleen Cawston, Recording Secretary

Adopted by the General Assembly during the 58th Annual Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Spokane Convention Center, in Spokane, Washington on November 25-30, 2001.