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**Date:** Friday, February 23, 2024 at 12:08

**To:** Cisco Werner - NOAA Federal <cisco.werner@noaa.gov>, Robert Foy - NOAA Federal <robert.foy@noaa.gov>

**Cc:** Zachary Penney - NOAA Federal <zachary.penney@noaa.gov>, Jon Kurland - NOAA Federal <jon.kurland@noaa.gov>, Samuel Rauch - NOAA Federal <samuel.rauch@noaa.gov>, Becky Lizama - NOAA Federal <becky.lizama@noaa.gov>

**Subject:** NOAA Fisheries Decision - Northern Bering Sea Effects of Trawling Study (NETS) Research Project

Dear Tribal Leaders and Partners,

Many of you have been in touch to ask questions or express concerns about the Northern Bering Sea Effects of Trawling Study (NETS) research project. To provide more space for continued dialogue, NOAA Fisheries has decided not to move forward with the NETS research project this year. We value our responsibilities to and partnerships with Alaska Native communities and want to ensure NOAA is creating space for respectful dialogue and trust building.

We are eager to further engage with you on that prospective project, and more broadly, to discuss the research plans NOAA has to improve understanding of the impacts of climate change, fishing practices, and other activities on our ocean ecosystems. We very much appreciate that the Tribal Government of St. Paul requested a consultation and hope that there is still interest from St. Paul and other tribes in moving forward with further engagement and/or consultation so that we can have an open dialogue and respond to the questions and concerns raised about this and other research in the northern Bering Sea.

As you are already well aware, the North Pacific is changing rapidly due to the impacts of climate change, and the NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) continues to expand communications and partnerships with you to facilitate better understanding and information sharing to inform management and conservation decisions. We want to ensure that the science we carry out fulfills NOAA's mission and is responsive to the needs of Alaskan Natives and tribes, and respectful of existing indigenous knowledge. We acknowledge that no one depends more on the diverse and healthy natural resources of the North Pacific than Alaska Native communities.

The NOAA Team including NOAA's Senior Advisor on Fisheries and Tribal Affairs Dr. Zach Penney, and NOAA Senior Tribal Liaison, Becky Lizama will work with NOAA Fisheries at the AFSC, the Alaska Regional Office (AKRO), and Tribal leaders on best practices for future consultations and other engagements. We will also seek input from Tribal leaders on updates to NOAA Fisheries' Alaska Region's consultation protocol and our Equity and Environmental Justice Plan, both expected to be completed in 2024.

On behalf of Dr. Cisco Werner, Dr. Bob Foy, and myself, we want to assure you that sustained engagement with Alaska Native communities remains a priority for NOAA Fisheries at the AFSC and AKRO. We recognize that to build trust and establish authentic relationships will take time. This is an investment we are prepared to make. We will reach out to you in the coming weeks to set up discussions about NOAA's science agenda and explore opportunities for collaboration in the northern Bering Sea. If you have ideas or questions in the meantime, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

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