

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 24, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

During your upcoming summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, we encourage you and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to stress cooperation on two international fishing issues important to our state: securing an international fisheries agreement for the high seas of the Central Arctic Ocean and a multilateral agreement to better cooperate on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing on the high seas.

Senate Joint Resolution 17 (P.L. 110-243) called upon the United States to “negotiate an agreement or agreements for managing migratory, transboundary, and straddling fish stocks in the Arctic Ocean” and, until such an agreement comes into force, to “support international efforts to halt the expansion of commercial fishing activities in the high seas of the Arctic Ocean.” We are pleased your administration, through Secretary Clinton, took this message to the ministers of other Arctic nations at the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Nuuk, Greenland.

It is our firm belief that securing such an agreement should be a top priority for both the United States and Russia as we implement our respective Arctic policies. The waters north of the U.S. and Russian Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) are experiencing significant loss of multi-year sea ice. Much of this area is of fishable depth and the waters are now open for several months each year. Exploratory research is already being conducted by non-coastal states and exploratory fishing may not be far behind. We believe the time to secure such an international agreement is before non-coastal states begin exploratory fishing in the region.

Developments in the Arctic are similar to the situation which developed in the Bering Sea in the 1980s. An unregulated fishery for pollock developed in the international waters of the Bering Sea just outside the EEZs of the U.S. and Russia. Despite concerted action by both nations to constrain this fishery, it took several years of hard negotiation to reach an international agreement with the fishing nations. The result was severe overfishing, a complete shutdown of the fishery that continues to this day, and significant economic loss to both the United States and Russia.

The intent of P.L. 110-243 is to avoid a similar occurrence in the Arctic Ocean by securing an international agreement before fishing begins. If unregulated or speculative fisheries were to commence in the region before we have the necessary scientific information and governance structures in place, there could be significant consequences for the Arctic marine environment and the people who live there.

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Regarding IUU fishing, it is estimated between 11 and 26 million tons of seafood is harvested illegally around the globe every year, resulting in economic losses with a value of between \$10 and \$23 billion. This pirate fishing puts unsustainable pressure on fish stocks, marine mammals and habitats; ignores fair labor standards and distorts seafood markets. We appreciate your leadership in sending the United Nations Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing to the U.S. Senate for its consent.

While the Port States Measures agreement is a strong and important step toward addressing IUU fishing, the need for a further bilateral agreement with Russia arose after evidence of substantial poaching and trafficking of poached crab in the North Pacific Ocean and Bering Sea. Last year, special agents of the National Marine Fisheries Service working with colleagues in the Russian Border Guard seized 112 tons of such illegal king crab but our law enforcement investigators realized a formal agreement with Russia was needed to better track harvests and trafficking of product, and allow for information sharing between the two countries on suspected acts of and suspects involved in IUU fishing. The agreement would also allow for cooperative at-sea inspections between the U.S. Coast Guard and Russian Border Guard of U.S. and Russian flagged vessels engaged in IUU activity.

This bilateral agreement would complement the Agreement on Port States Measures and we ask you to take advantage of your upcoming meetings with President Putin to encourage him to work with you on both the Central Arctic fisheries and IUU initiatives. This summit provides an unprecedented opportunity for the United States to demonstrate leadership on these important matters and further cooperation between our two nations.

We congratulate you on the progress that has been made with Russia including cooperation between the United States Coast Guard and Russian Border Guards. We believe securing an international agreement on Central Arctic fisheries and bilateral agreement on IUU fishing enforcement are other opportunities to find common ground with Russia. The issues are timely and the need for action is urgent. We stand ready to work with you on these matters.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Mark Begich
United States Senator

CC: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton