An open letter to the Unalaska community regarding COVID-19.

Dear Unalaska Community:

Along with the rest of the nation and the world, the seafood industry of Unalaska has been coping with the fast-paced turn of events in the face of the national health pandemic created by the exponential spread of the coronavirus. Like you, we are very concerned about what the coronavirus pandemic means to our families, neighbors, and livelihoods in Unalaska and other Alaskan coastal communities, and the Alaska seafood system overall, both in the short and long term.

Key to our focus is the health and safety of all of our partner communities, including Unalaska; locations where many of our employees and their families work and also live. The safety of the residents of Unalaska is of the utmost concern.

Seafood processing and fishing vessel companies are submitting plans to the State of Alaska in accordance with Health Mandates 10 and 12.

As our individual member companies develop response plans, their goal is to keep healthy people healthy. This means implementing screening protocols for incoming employees, detection and quarantine protocols to identify and contain any suspected case of COVID-19, new cleaning, disinfecting, and sanitation standards, and best practice for distancing standards. Trade associations are also advocating for access to FDA approved rapid point of care testing for remote Alaskan fishing communities to assist with early and accurate detection.

Our member companies also have been participating in a seafood industry workgroup for several weeks that was formed in response to the COVID-19 outbreak called the Alaska Fishing Industry

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2 For Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, that trade association is developing an umbrella response plan for their membership in addition to some member companies developing their own plan.
Safety & Health Committee (AFISH Committee). This committee includes a broad coalition of industry participants, health practitioners, and community leaders. Subcommittees and task force groups are organized across multiple functional topics and between participating regions and locations.

There are well over 150 participants in the AFISH Committee, including leadership from the Iliuliuk Family and Health Services clinic in Unalaska, all working diligently to gather and share best practices in response to COVID-19 and to develop guidance protocols for both vessels and onshore processors. Collaboration is also occurring with medical risk management companies that specialize in commercial maritime and remote worksites.

Most urgently, member companies and trade associations are working to help ensure that the Unalaska health care system is equipped to meet the needs of the community. In the coming weeks and months, we will continue to closely monitor the situation, share information, improve our plans, and continue to advocate for the needs of Unalaska.

We recognize the considerable stress and pressure that the current situation has placed upon the community. There is a great deal of uncertainty. What we do know is we are dedicated to doing our part to keep Unalaska and Alaska safe. It is an ongoing effort to update protocols and develop plans to address this new threat, and we take it very seriously. We are committed to working with each other, community leaders in all of the locations in which we operate, and the State of Alaska to get through this together.

Signed:

Chris Barrows, President
Pacific Seafood Processors Association

Brent Paine, Executive Director
United Catcher Boats

Chad See, Executive Director
Freezer Longline Coalition

Stephanie Madsen, Executive Director
At-sea Processors Association

Chris Woodley, Executive Director
Groundfish Forum

Jamie Goen, Executive Director
Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers

3 The purpose of the Alaska Fishing Industry Safety & Health Committee is to bring together our fishing and fish processing companies, our communities, our medical advisors, and our public health partners for the common goal of protecting the health and welfare of our communities, our fishers, and our seafood workers from emerging infectious disease threats and safety concerns.