119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. _____

To address data and research gaps to improve marine environmental data collection, particularly in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska, prioritize technology that supports research, bycatch reduction, and marine benthic habitat in Alaska fisheries, advance and streamline electronic monitoring and electronic reporting in United States fisheries, and establish a fund to provide financial assistance for fishermen purchasing gear and technology aimed at reducing bycatch and marine benthic habitat contact from trawl fishing gear.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. SULLIVAN (for himself and Ms. MURKOWSKI) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To address data and research gaps to improve marine environmental data collection, particularly in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska, prioritize technology that supports research, bycatch reduction, and marine benthic habitat in Alaska fisheries, advance and streamline electronic monitoring and electronic reporting in United States fisheries, and establish a fund to provide financial assistance for fishermen purchasing gear and technology aimed at reducing bycatch and marine benthic habitat contact from trawl fishing gear.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Bycatch Reduction and Research Act of 2025''.

SEC. 2. RESEARCH.

(a) RECONSTITUTION OF THE ALASKA SALMON RESEARCH TASK FORCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (referred to in this Act as the ''Administrator'') shall reconstitute the membership of the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force, as described in the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force Act (Public Law 117–328; 136 Stat. 5271).

(2) BYCATCH REDUCTION AND RESEARCH TASK FORCE.—The reconstituted membership described in paragraph (1) shall be referred to as the ''Bycatch Reduction and Research Task Force''.

(3) MEMBERS.—The Secretary of Commerce shall appoint an additional 2 representatives who are academic experts in groundfish ecology and invertebrate ecology to the Bycatch Reduction and Research Task Force.

(4) DUTIES.—The Bycatch Reduction and Research Task Force shall—

(A) review all research conducted and reports published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration under this section; and

(B) in consultation with the Administrator, provide priority recommendations for future work as described in subsection (d)(2)(B).

(5) INAPPLICABILITY OF FEDERAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ACT.—Chapter 10 of title 5, United States Code (commonly known as the ''Federal Advisory Committee Act''), shall not apply to the Bycatch Reduction and Research Task Force.

(b) SALMON LIFE HISTORY RESEARCH.—

(1) SALMON TAGGING.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall enter into public-private partnerships with State agencies, nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education (as defined in section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a))), Indian Tribes or Tribal organizations (as defined in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304)), and research insti-

tutions to research the marine life history of Alaska origin salmon species in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska.

(B) PARTNERSHIPS.—In entering into partnerships described in subparagraph (A), the Administrator—

(i) shall involve a diverse group of Alaska salmon experts, including Alaska Natives, fishing industry representatives, commercial fishermen, and individuals who possess personal knowledge of, and direct experience with, subsistence uses in Alaska; and

(ii) may include cooperative research efforts with privately owned commercial or charter fishing vessel owners.

(C) RESEARCH.—At a minimum, the research required under subparagraph (A) shall include satellite tagging or other intelligent tagging methodologies to better understand migration and distributions of Alaska origin salmon during their marine life history in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, or Gulf of Alaska.

(2) GENETIC SAMPLING GRANT PROGRAM.—The Administrator shall conduct a competitive grant pro-

gram to support improving the turnaround time of genetic analyses of biological samples collected at-sea or shoreside to provide real-time, or near-real-time, in-season genetic stock identification and age composition estimates of Alaska origin salmon caught incidentally in commercial fisheries conducted in the exclusive economic zone (as defined in section 3 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1802)).

(3) REPORTING.—Not later than 3 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall publish a report—

(A) on the findings of the salmon life history research conducted under paragraph (1) and the findings of the genetic analyses grant program conducted under paragraph (2) that details how the research and genetic analyses can better inform Alaska origin salmon stock status and distributions; and

(B) that includes potential uses of artificial intelligence or machine learning technology to perform predictive modeling to inform potential Alaska salmon bycatch avoidance areas.

(c) ECOSYSTEM ANALYSES.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall conduct—

(A) research, through studies and models that incorporate existing data, literature, and ongoing research, of how contact from non-pelagic trawl and pelagic trawl gear impact shallow shelves or other marine benthic habitats in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska;

(B) a review of existing data, literature, and ongoing research efforts on fluctuations in Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska marine ecosystems that may affect the survivability or energetic condition of commercially or culturally important wild marine and anadromous species, including examining—

(i) harmful algal blooms;

(ii) marine heatwaves;

(iii) in-river temperatures;

(iv) sea ice extent and thickness;

(v) ocean acidification;

(vi) diseases;

(vii) nutrient or prey availability;

(viii) density dependence;

(ix) shifting stock distributions;

(x) impacts from hatchery released species, with particular attention to foreign hatchery releases; and

(xi) predator-prey interactions; and

(C) new research, using the review of data, literature, and ongoing research efforts under subparagraph (B), to prioritize data collection that support conservation of commercially or culturally important wild marine and anadromous species.

(2) DIVERSE GROUP INVOLVEMENT.—In conducting research under paragraph (1), the Administrator shall—

(A) enter into public-private partnerships with relevant entities, such as State agencies, nonprofit organizations, institutions of higher education (as defined in section 101(a) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001(a)), and Indian Tribes or Tribal organizations (as defined in section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 5304)); and

(B) include a framework that involves a diverse group of experts in commercially or culturally important wild marine and anadromous

species, including Alaska Natives, fishing industry representatives, commercial fishermen, and individuals who possess personal knowledge of, and direct experience with, subsistence uses in Alaska.

(d) REPORTS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall publish interim annual reports and a final report (not later than 3 years after the date of enactment of this Act)—

(A) on findings and results of the research and review conducted under subsection (c)(1), and the status of milestones reached for all research initiatives under this section;

(B) on the results from the salmon tagging and genetic sampling research under subsection (b), including modeled Alaska origin salmon migration routes and potential applications to inform how best to minimize Alaska salmon bycatch; and

(C) that includes results from the ecosystem analyses under subsection (c).

(2) RECOMMENDATIONS; FINDINGS.—The reports described under paragraph (1) shall include—

(A) recommendations for applying the results from the ecosystem analyses review to model potential impacts on commercially or culturally important wild marine and anadromous species in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska to support informed management actions; and

(B) other findings and recommendations for future work under this section.

SEC. 3. FLUME TANK.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall enter into a public-private partnership to build a flume tank for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the fishing industry, and other researchers to test technology and improved fishing gear aimed at reducing bycatch and contact with Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska marine benthic habitats.

(b) FLUME TANK ASSISTANCE FUND.—The Administrator shall establish a Flume Tank Assistance Fund to provide grants or other financial assistance to support entities that wish to test their innovative technology, including approaches that support prototype development and associated devices, instruments, sensors, or fishing gear designs aimed at reducing bycatch in fisheries and Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska marine benthic

habitat contact from non-pelagic trawl and pelagic trawl gear, including workforce and training programs on such technology or gear.

SEC. 4. OBSERVER COVERAGE.

(a) ELECTRONIC MONITORING AND REPORTING.—The Administrator shall—

(1) create a timeline and process for reviewing and approving exempted fishing permits to support innovating fishing gear types and technology for reducing bycatch and reducing marine habitat disturbances, including streamlining exempted fishing permits for fishermen and owners and operators of commercial fishing vessels who purchase or modify fishing gear, equipment, or technology with financial assistance provided under the Bycatch Mitigation and Habitat Protection Assistance Fund, established under section 322 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, if approving such permits does not interfere with fishery conservation objectives;

(2) streamline the approval process for experimental or exempted fishing permits for electronic monitoring pilot projects, if approving such permits does not interfere with fishery conservation objectives;

(3) facilitate cooperative research programs and regional pilot frameworks;

(4) conduct a public stakeholder consultation process not less often than once every 3 years, which shall include public notice, listening sessions, and a written comment period of not less than 60 days, and solicit input from stakeholders, including service providers, regional management council technical teams, fishery industry participants, and data scientists, on—

(A) revisions to electronic monitoring and electronic reporting technical standards or operational guidance;

(B) improvements to cost-effectiveness or usability; and

(C) barriers to electronic monitoring adoption, particularly among small-scale fleets; and

(5) provide a data integration strategy that—

(A) incorporates electronic monitoring data directly into regional science center workflows and stock assessment models;

(B) aligns electronic monitoring data review and retention timelines and quality control protocols with those used in traditional observer data streams;

(C) reduces latency between data collection and management application; and

(D) supports the development of interoperable databases that facilitate real-time or near-real-time analysis and decision-making.

(b) TRANSPARENCY.—The Administrator shall require the regional offices of the National Marine Fisheries Service to publish, online and in layman's terms, up-to-date observer coverage category requirements for high-volume Federal fisheries specifying the Federal fishery under their jurisdiction, including prohibited species catch (bycatch) for each observer program category.

(c) REPORTING.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 3 years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall publish a report on how the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Regional Fishery Management Councils can improve and integrate the use of observer and electronic monitoring data to better inform spatio-temporal fishing activity and impacts to harvested and incidentally harvested populations, while ensuring the protection of proprietary information.

(2) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—The Administrator shall submit a report to Congress and publish the

report on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's website that includes the data integration strategy for increasing data review efficiency and uniformity described in subsection (a)(5).

(3) RECOMMENDATIONS.—The reports required under paragraphs (1) and (2) shall include recommendations—

(A) for the use of any technologies identified as effective for sharing real-time, or near-real-time, catch information to identify bycatch hotspots and bycatch avoidance areas; and

(B) to minimize commercially or culturally important wild marine and anadromous species in the Bering Sea, Aleutian Islands, and Gulf of Alaska origin salmon bycatch.

SEC. 5. BYCATCH REDUCTION AND MITIGATION.

(a) REAUTHORIZATION OF BYCATCH REDUCTION ENGINEERING PROGRAM.—Section 316 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1865) is amended by adding at the end the following:

''(e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry out this section $4,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2027 through 2031.''.

(b) BYCATCH MITIGATION AND HABITAT PROTECTION ASSISTANCE FUND.—Title III of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1851 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

"SEC. 322. BYCATCH MITIGATION AND HABITAT PROTECTION ASSISTANCE FUND.

''(a) IN GENERAL.—There is established in the general fund of the Treasury of the United States an account to be known as the 'Bycatch Mitigation and Habitat Protection Assistance Fund', which shall—

''(1) be administered by the Foundation; and

''(2) consist of donations of amounts accepted pursuant to subsection (c).

''(b) USE.—The Foundation shall use the amounts in the Fund to reduce or mitigate bycatch, and reduce marine benthic habitat contact from non-pelagic and pelagic trawl gear, including by providing financial assistance to fishermen and owners and operators of commercial fishing vessels to purchase or modify fishing gear, equipment, and technology, including innovative technology, prototypes, instruments, or sensors.

''(c) DONATIONS.—The Foundation may solicit and accept donations of amounts for deposit into the Fund.

''(d) CONSULTATION.—In administering the Fund, the Foundation shall consult with the Secretary, acting through the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, each Council, and each of the regional science centers of the National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure that, to the maximum extent practicable, amounts in the Fund are used in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

''(e) REPORT.—Not later than 3 years after the date of enactment of this section, and biennially thereafter, the Foundation shall publish and post online in a manner available to the public information regarding the use of the Fund during—

''(1) with respect to the first publication of information, the preceding 3 years; and

''(2) with respect to each subsequent publication of information, the preceding 2 years.

''(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

''(1) FOUNDATION.—The term 'Foundation' means the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

''(2) FUND.—The term 'Fund' means the Bycatch Mitigation and Habitat Protection Assistance Fund established under subsection (a).''.