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June 1, 2012

Senator Mark Begich
111 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Use of Seal Bombs and new ATF Requirements

Dear Senator Begich:

The Alaska Trollers Association (ATA) requests your assistance, to secure an exemption to new rules that would require commercial fishermen and suppliers to obtain special permits to handle seal bombs. These devices are important, as they provide the singular most effective and legal non-lethal means to deter sea lions from vessels and catch.

ATA represents hook and line salmon fishermen who fish Southeast Alaska in waters spanning Dixon Entrance on the south to Cape Suckling on the north. The troll fishery occurs nearly year round. Many of our members also fish for halibut and cod, primarily in Southeast and the Gulf of Alaska.

It is extremely important to obtain an exemption for the commercial fishing community and its support sector, to allow receipt, storage, and employment of Explosive Pest Control Devices (EPCDs) - or seal bombs. ATA worked with the agencies and other industry groups in the early years of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) listings, to secure this provision. Since that time, the sea lion population in Southeast Alaska has steadily increased and their impact on the fisheries has grown. Sea lions are well-known to be smart, aggressive, and

voracious. Individual fishermen lose thousands of dollars each year to these animals.

If an exemption is not provided, it is quite likely that fishermen will be prohibited from using seal bombs this season without the requisite permits and approved storage containers. Most fishermen aren't even aware of the new rules. The process apparently includes sending pictures and getting finger-printed.

Even if fishermen secure permits and approval, the normal places we purchase seal bombs might not be able to store and sell the devices without punitive permitting and storage requirements. We hear that many of the outlets where fishermen typically buy seal bombs do not currently have the 'ATF approved' storage facilities that are now required. This is especially true in small communities, where seal bombs have been sold for many years, with few, if any, incidents. Without suppliers, it won't matter what kind of permit a fishermen can get. And without the option of using seal bombs, many of our businesses will suffer.

Fishermen simply must have some legal and effective means of non-lethal deterrence available to them, particularly in light of ESA and MMPA listings. We ask that you and Alaska's congressional delegation attempt to secure a blanket exemption from these regulations for commercial fishermen, and also find a reasonable accommodation for suppliers.

Thanks in advance for any help on this matter. Please contact me if I can help in any way.

Best regards,

Dale Kelley
Executive Director