

1-21-1895

Bering Sea Tribunal. Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to House resolution dated December 11, 1894, information relating to the Bering Sea Tribunal, convened at Paris in 1893.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>

 Part of the [Indian and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

H.R. Exec. Doc. No. 243. 53rd Cong., 3rd Sess. (1895)

This House Executive Document is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact darinfox@ou.edu.

BERING SEA TRIBUNAL.

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

TRANSMITTING,

Pursuant to House resolution dated December 11, 1894, information relating to the Bering Sea Tribunal, convened at Paris in 1893.

JANUARY 23, 1895.—Referred to the Committee on Ways and Means and ordered to be printed.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, D. C., January 21, 1895.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the following resolution, dated the 11th of December, 1894, of the House of Representatives:

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Treasury be requested to furnish the House with information—

1. As to whether the articles of the Bering Sea Tribunal, convened at Paris in eighteen hundred and ninety-three, for the regulation of the fur-seal industry of Alaska, have resulted during the last season in saving the fur-seal herds from that destruction which these articles were intended to prevent.

2. Whether the Secretary has authentic information of the probable number and sex of Alaskan fur seals killed in the last season by pelagic sealers; and, if so, what such information is; and in view of such facts, what, in the judgment of the Secretary, will be the practical result of these articles if carried out in good faith for the future.

3. What is the present condition of the fur-seal herds on the Pribilof Islands?

4. What has been the revenue derived by the Government from the fur-seal herds of Alaska during the past season, and also what has been the expenditure during the same period in executing the regulations of the Paris award?

In reply to the first inquiry, I have to state that the number of seals taken by pelagic sealers in the North Pacific Ocean for the season just expired and entered at United States and British Columbia ports, as contained in the accompanying table, compiled from official reports of collectors of customs in the United States and reports transmitted by the United States consul at Victoria, British Columbia, compiled by him from the official statements of the collector of customs at that port, aggregate 121,143. Of this number 55,686 were taken from the so-called Alaska seal herd in the North Pacific Ocean and in Bering Sea; 58,621 were taken off the coasts of Japan and Russia, leaving 6,836 undeter-

mined. Ninety-five vessels were employed, 60 belonging to Great Britain and 35 to the United States.

As appears in said table, the actual number of seals killed in 1894 exceeds the amount of skins entered, as above, by about 20,000, making the total catch about 142,000. This balance of 20,000 skins was probably shipped to London via Suez Canal from the Asiatic coast.

From these figures it becomes evident that during the present season there has been an unprecedented increase over preceding years in the number of seals killed by pelagic sealers, both in American and Asiatic waters. This increase has caused an alarming decrease in the number of seals on the islands, as hereinafter explained. A significant fact in this connection is the unprecedented number of dead pups found on the islands this season, which presumably died of starvation, their mothers being killed at sea. Our agent counted over 12,000 on the accessible portions of the rookeries alone. He estimates, upon said count, a total of nearly 20,000. It should be remembered that at the close of the season of 1893, when pelagic sealing was prohibited in Bering Sea, less than 1,000 were found on St. Paul Island—no count having been made on the Island of St. George.

The alarming increase in the number of seals killed by pelagic sealers and the further fact that in four or five weeks the vessels in Bering Sea, only about one-third of the total number, killed more seals than were taken in the four months sealing on the American side of the North Pacific, emphasize the conclusion expressed in my annual report to Congress that long before the expiration of the five years, when the regulations enacted by the Tribunal of Arbitration are to be submitted to the respective Governments for reexamination, the fur seal will have been practically exterminated.

My answer to the first inquiry is, therefore, that the operation of the articles of the Bering Sea Tribunal for the regulation of the fur-seal industry of Alaska has not resulted in saving the fur-seal herd from that destruction which those articles were intended to prevent.

As to the number and sex of Alaskan fur seals killed during the past season by pelagic sealers, I have to state that of the American catch of 26,095 seals, 3,099 were males, 15,976 females, and 7,020 pups and seals the sex of which was unknown. Each seal landed in the United States was carefully examined as to sex by experts appointed by the Department.

Of the catch of the British Columbia schooners of 95,048 seals, as reported by our consul, only those killed in Bering Sea—26,425—were classified as to sex. Of these, 11,723 were reported as males and 14,702 as females.

With reference to the present condition of the fur-seal herds on the Pribilof Islands, I have to report a dangerous decrease. Information on file in the Department indicates a falling off of at least one-half during the past four seasons. It thus appears that the condition of the Alaskan fur-seal herd is most critical. All facts point to its speedy extermination unless the present regulations, enacted in the award of the Paris Tribunal, are changed at an early date, so as to afford a greater measure of protection to the seal herd.

In reply to the inquiry concerning the revenue derived by the Government from the fur-seal herds during the past season, and the expenditures during the same period in executing the requirements of the Paris award, I have to state that 15,000 seals were taken on the Pribilof Islands in the year last past, and 1,031 remained on hand from last year. The amount to be paid by the lessees of the islands, according

to the provisions of their contract, on or before April 1 next, will be \$214,298.37, the items being as follows:

Rental.....	\$60,000.00
Tax of \$2 per skin on 16,031 skins.....	32,062.00
Bonus of \$7.625 per skin on 16,031 skins.....	122,236.37

As to expenses, I have to state that the honorable the Secretary of the Navy reports that the expenditure incident to the presence of the United States naval vessels in Bering Sea during the past year was \$158,188.25. The expenses attending the presence of the revenue steamers *Bear*, *Corwin*, and *Rush* aggregate \$40,116.24. The amounts named do not include the pay of officers or men, or the rations supplied to them. Of the \$1,500 appropriated to enable the Secretary of the Treasury to pay the necessary expenses of enforcing the provisions of section 4 of the act approved April 6, 1894, under which two experts were employed to examine and classify pelagic seal skins, the sum of \$250 has been expended. The salaries and expenses of the agents of the Seal Islands, whose duties would require them to be present on said islands without regard to the Bering Sea controversy, have not been included in preparing this answer to the resolution. The aggregate expenses would, therefore, seem to be \$198,554.49.

In this connection I have to state that suit has been instituted against the North American Commercial Company for the recovery, under the terms of its lease of the Seal Islands, of the sum of \$132,187.50, covering the season of 1893. The company named, under its lease, is required to pay the sum of \$60,000 per annum rental, \$2 tax on each seal taken, and, in addition, \$7.625 for each seal skin accepted. It is claimed by said company that, as it was denied the right to take the number of seals contemplated at the time the lease was executed, by reason of the operation of the *modus vivendi*, a reduction in the rental and in the item of \$7.625 per skin should be made. This claim, under advice of the Attorney-General, has not been admitted by the Treasury Department, and, as hereinbefore stated, suit has been instituted. I find that the following balances for the years specified are due from said company under its lease, notwithstanding the fact that my predecessors have accepted payments in less amounts than those mentioned in the contract hereinbefore referred to: 1890, \$47,403; 1891, \$133,628.64; and 1892, \$108,686.52.

Action by this Department on the above-mentioned unpaid amounts will be determined by the result of the suit pending for the amount due for the year 1893.

Respectfully, yours,

J. G. CARLISLE, *Secretary.*

Hon. CHARLES F. CRISP,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Summary of pelagic seal catches for 1893 and 1894, based on the official returns from ports of entry.

Year.	Nationality.	British Columbia and northwest coasts.	Bering Sea.	Japan coast.	Russian coast.	Locality undetermined.	Total.	Grand total.
1893...	American .. Canadian 28, 618	} Modus vivendi in operation. 29, 173 11, 955 8, 342 8, 342 69, 741	} * 78, 083
1894...	American .. Canadian ...	12, 398 11, 703		5, 160 26, 425	1, 500 49, 483	201 7, 437	6, 836	
	Total ..	24, 101	31, 585	50, 983	7, 638	6, 836		

* Notes concerning catch for 1893.—The United States consul at Victoria states (Consular Reports No. 161, p. 278) that American schooners in 1893 transhipped, at Yokohama and Hakodadi, between 17,000 and 18,000 skins. These skins, added to those which in all probability were transhipped by British Columbia vessels on the Asiatic coast, and including the estimated number retained in America for treatment, would swell the total catch to about 109,000. The accuracy of these figures is corroborated by the fact that the trade sales of London (all seal skins are sold there) account for the disposition of 109,669 skins in 1893.

† Notes concerning catch for 1894.—The catch of 6,836 noted in the column headed "Locality undetermined" were skins, 76 of which were landed at Astoria without statement as to place of capture; 641 were transhipped at Unnalaska, and the remaining 6,119 were transhipped from Yokohama. All were entered and recorded in American ports of entry and they are quite certainly a mixture of Northwest Coast and Japan skins. It has been ascertained from the sales of seal skins in London that about 125,000 skins were actually sold, and about 14,000 withheld for future sale in 1894. In addition thereto it is estimated that about 3,000 skins were retained in this country and elsewhere for treatment. It thus appears that about 142,000 is a figure much more closely representing the number of skins taken in 1894 than the official returns of 121,143. The balance, about 20,000 skins, was probably shipped to London, via Suez Canal, from the Asiatic coast.

Number of schooners reported as having taken skins.

Year.	American.	Canadian.	Total.
1893	28	* 56	84
1894	35	* 60	95

* Indian canoe catch counted as one (1) vessel. In destructive effects the canoe catch is about equal to three average schooner catches.

Number of schooners reported as having made catches in Bering Sea.

Year.	American.	Canadian.	Total.
1893	Modus vivendi in operation.		
1894	10	27	37