



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

*National Marine Fisheries Service*

*P.O. Box 21668*

*Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

June 16, 2004

Lee Stephan  
Native Village of Eklutna  
26339 Eklutna Village Road  
Chugiak, Alaska 99567

Dear Mr. Stephan:

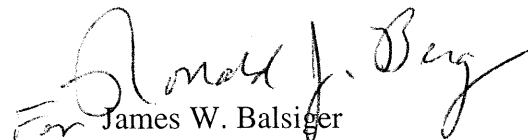
Thank you for your letter providing comments to the Harvest Management Plan (Plan) for Cook Inlet (CI) beluga whales. We reviewed these comments, and attempted to incorporate your concerns into our final Plan. Our responses to your comments are presented below. As you are aware, this Plan was submitted to Administrative Law Judge Parlen McKenna (ALJ).

In your letter you requested that NMFS consider offering 2 percent harvest of the 'net recruitment rate of belugas'. NMFS's did not adopt your proposed 2 percent harvest rate, based on net annual recruitment. Such a proposal would allocate half of the stock's annual assumed growth to hunting, and significantly delay recovery. In the Plan, NMFS identified harvest levels that recognize the importance of subsistence to Alaska Natives, while allowing for the recovery of the CI beluga whales.

You also requested that NMFS change the language referring to "Alaska Native organizations" to "with one or more participating Alaska Native Tribes, through their respective tribal governments." Section 119 of the MMPA allows the Federal government to cooperatively manage marine mammals with Alaska Native organizations; this definition includes, but is not limited to, tribes.

Thank you for your comments on this harvest management plan. Please direct any questions to Kaja Brix at (907) 586-7235.

Sincerely,

  
James W. Balsiger  
Administrator, Alaska Region

