



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

*National Marine Fisheries Service*

*P.O. Box 21668*

*Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

August 18, 2006

Ms. Stephanie Madsen, Chair  
North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
605 West 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 306  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Stephanie,

We wish to inform you of the revised schedule for the development of the fishery management plan level biological opinion (BiOp) for the Alaska groundfish fisheries. We have made significant progress in writing the BiOp and will be providing portions of the draft document to the Council for its review at the October 2006 meeting. These portions will include a description of the action, status of the Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species, and a nearly completed description of the baseline conditions of the current environment.

We expect to have the entire draft BiOp completed and submitted to the Council by December 1, 2006. This schedule would allow opportunity for Council review and comment at its February 2007 meeting. The subsequent development and analysis of any Council proposed alternatives to the Steller sea lion protection measures could progress during the summer of 2007. Final Council action on any changes to the Steller sea lion protection measures may be possible in late 2007 or early 2008, depending on the nature of the environmental analysis required and pending review under the ESA. Pending Secretarial approval, implementation of any changes could occur by late 2008.

We appreciate the dedication and cooperation of the Council in maintaining priority attention to new information concerning the status of Steller sea lions. We look forward to working with you as the Council considers potential refinements to the Steller sea lion protection measures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert D. Mecum".

Robert D. Mecum  
Acting Administrator, Alaska Region



Ssalveson: 8-16-06, 8-18-06

Mnbrown: 8-16-06, 8/17/06

Scapron: 8-16-06

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