



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

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

April 9, 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR: Captain David MacFarland
Director, Office of Coast Survey

FROM: *Fov* James W. Balsiger *James W. Balsiger*
Administrator, Alaska Region

SUBJECT: Coastal Habitat Collaboration

In May 2002, our offices collaborated to begin noting the existence of valuable eelgrass habitats on nautical charts. NOAA Oceans and Coast's hydrographic survey vessels are providing a valuable service to this effort during their survey missions, especially in the remote Alaska coastline areas. The survey sheets note the presence of eelgrass to facilitate eventual documentation on nautical charts. This program was instigated through the cooperation of Matt Eagleton of NOAA Fisheries, LCDR Doug Baird, and LCDR Don Haines of NOAA Oceans and Coast/Office of Coast Survey. We would like to thank Coast Survey and the personnel involved in establishing this cooperation. Again, we do not intend the field surveys to undertake dedicated efforts to map eelgrass, but rather for survey personnel to note on the survey sheets when eelgrass beds are present in their survey areas.

Eelgrass serves a vital role for the marine biological community. It provides habitats for many commercial fish species, serves as an indicator for water quality, and enhances shoreline stabilization. NOAA Fisheries Alaska Region is responsible for managing commercial marine fisheries and conducting environmental reviews to evaluate the effects of various development activities in and around marine habitats. Limited information is available on the distribution and abundance of marine nearshore and estuarine aquatic vegetation. Documenting the presence of eelgrass on nautical charts will enhance our ability to evaluate the effects of development and our knowledge of habitats used by commercial nearshore fisheries.

We are interested in continuing to collaborate with your office and field operations. First, we want to continue our eelgrass recognition training for survey vessels, either during port stopovers or during nearshore investigations. We will schedule and coordinate this training through the marine center liaisons and the ships. NOAA Fisheries also remains interested in convening an expert panel to review documentation collected from reliable sources that note the existence and distribution of eelgrass beds in the nearshore and estuarine habitats of Alaska. This panel would certify the location of eelgrass beds and recommend to the Office of Coast Survey specific eelgrass habitats to be documented on nautical charts. We will keep you posted on this effort.



We look forward to continuing our working relationship to highlight eelgrass as an important marine resource. For further coordination on this matter, please contact LT Mark Boland or Matt Eagleton at (907) 271-5006.