UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Marine Fisheries Service
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

June 26, 2003

Colonel Timothy J. Gallagher
District Engineer, Alaska District
Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 898
Anchorage, AK 99506-0898

RE: Frederick Sound 75
2-2003-0124

Attn: Randal P. Vigil

Dear Colonel Gallagher:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed the permit application by Point Sophia Development Company to construct a gangway and floating dock, attached to an existing timber dock, and supported by five steel pilings, at Port Frederick, near Hoonah, Alaska. The applicant also requests authorization to construct a 220 foot marine wastewater outfall. The purpose of the project is to develop the area as a cruise ship destination.

Frederick Sound and nearby Icy Strait, Point Adolphus and Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve (GBNPP) are biologically significant areas containing numerous marine resources, including feeding concentrations of endangered humpback whales. Pile driving causes underwater noise that could disturb, disorient and displace humpback whales or their prey. Humpback whales feeding in southeast Alaska must store up enough energy reserves to successfully complete migration to breeding and birthing waters in Hawaii without eating. Humpback whales in the area of Port Frederick may be subjected to additional stress due to high levels of vessel traffic and marine mammal viewing activity in the general area of Icy Strait and GBNPP.

We consulted with local marine resource experts regarding appropriate time windows. Humpback whales are common in the vicinity of the project in summer, fall, and spring. This is an extended residency from other areas of southeast Alaska, possibly due to the presence of schooling herring (Chris Gabrielle, GBNPP, pers. comm.). Winter is the season with the least number of humpback whales present.

Richardson et al. (1995) estimated that pile driving may generate noise in the range of 130-135 decibels for up to several

kilometers. Humpback whales have been observed to react to noises above 115-129 decibels within 200 meters of a sound source (Zoidis, pers. comm.). Consequently, we recommend that the permit include the following stipulation:

> "Pile driving is authorized only if no humpback whales are present within 200 meters of the sound source. A qualified observer must scan the area for the presence of humpback whales. If whales are sighted within 200 meters of the sound source, or are observed to be disturbed by the activity, pile driving must cease until the whales leave the immediate area. A report of monitoring results should be supplied to NMFS following completion of pile driving operations. "

Several other projects in southeast Alaska have successfully implemented the humpback whale observer monitoring program described in the recommendation. Copies of reports for two of these projects are enclosed for informational purposes, but should not be construed as NMFS' endorsements of the contractors involved.

If you have any questions regarding our comments, please contact Linda Shaw of my staff at (907) 586-7510.

Sincerely,

For James W. Balsiger
Administrator, Alaska Region

cc: Port Sophia Development Company, applicant
ADEC, AADGC, ADNR, USFWS, Juneau
Lori Gravel, NMFS Administrative Record

Enclosures:

Whale observation reports for:

Ketchikan Transfer Facility
Taiya Inlet 24

Literature Cited

Richardson, W.J., C.R. Greene, C.I. Malme, and D.H. Thomson. 1995. Marine Mammals and Noise. San Diego, CA, Academeic Press. 576 pp.