



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

*National Marine Fisheries Service*

*P.O. Box 21668*

*Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668*

March 25, 2003

David Benton, Chairman  
North Pacific Fishery Management Council  
605 W 4<sup>th</sup> Street  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-2252

Dear Mr. Benton:

Since the last Council meeting, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) staff have completed additional tasks related to Alternative 5b for the Essential Fish Habitat Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). In particular, staff have completed preliminary work on applying the methodology from Alternative 5b for the Aleutian Islands to the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska to determine whether that approach merits evaluation as an additional alternative. We undertook this work in response to the request from Oceana that NMFS and the Council evaluate this option. NMFS staff will present their work, including the enclosed figures and tables, during the April Council meeting.

The staff work associated with this task was necessary regardless of whether the EIS ultimately includes a 5b-type alternative for the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska. If the Council and NMFS decide to add such an alternative, these work products will help the Council select specific open and closed areas. If the Council and NMFS decide not to pursue such an alternative, the EIS will need to discuss why it was considered yet not carried forward, and these work products will help to document many of the relevant considerations. We look forward to discussing through the Council process the pros and cons of adding another alternative.

Sincerely,

James W. Balsiger  
Administrator, Alaska Region

Enclosures

