



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Silver Spring, MD 20910

DEC 20 2007

Ms. Elizabeth A. Mathews
Alaska Scientific Review Group Chair
University of Alaska Southeast
Natural Sciences Department
11120 Glacier Highway
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Ms. Mathews:

Thank you for your letter to Dr. William Hogarth, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, transmitting recommendations from the January 2007 meeting of the Alaska Scientific Review Group (SRG). Your letter was forwarded to my office for response because the Office of Protected Resources is the office within NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) responsible for implementation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

In response to the SRG's request, the Division of Permits, Conservation, and Education has compiled reports of serious injuries and mortalities of marine mammals resulting from marine mammal research and forwarded this summary to authors of the Alaska marine mammal stock assessment reports. Complete information on research-related mortalities will be included in the 2008 draft Alaska reports.

NMFS is evaluating options to address the taking of marine mammals incidental to fisheries-related research. Once a mechanism has been implemented to collect the pertinent information, the information would be made available for inclusion in stock assessment reports.

NMFS has taken steps to identify sources of fishing gear involved in strandings and entanglements. Gear removed from live or dead animals is forwarded to national gear repositories. As useful information is synthesized from gear identification, it will be made available to stranding and entanglement networks. Ultimately, NMFS hopes to be able to identify sources of such gear and work to minimize future adverse effects to marine mammals and other species.

Although each of these activities is important, progress on them and other projects will be constrained by many competing priorities for our available resources. I appreciate your interest in and review of information related to marine mammals in Alaska and look forward to your continued support in the conservation of our living marine resources.

Sincerely,

James H. Lecky
Director
Office of Protected Resources