

# Atlantic Scientific Review Group

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15 March 2017

**Robert D. Kenney**  
Chair  
University of Rhode Island,  
Graduate School of  
Oceanography

James W. Kurth, Acting Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1849 C Street, NW, Room 3331  
Washington, DC 20240

**Christopher W. Clark**  
Cornell University

Dear Director Kurth,

**James R. Gilbert**  
University of Maine

**John Lawson**  
Department of Fisheries and  
Oceans Canada

I am writing on behalf of the Atlantic Scientific Review Group (ASRG), an independent body established under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, as amended in 1994, for purposes of advising the Secretaries of Interior and Commerce regarding marine mammal stock assessments and issues related to science and the conservation of marine mammals under U.S. jurisdiction, including manatees [16 U.S.C. 1386 117(d)].

**Trent McDonald**  
West, Inc.

**Michael J. Moore**  
Woods Hole Oceanographic  
Institution

The ASRG held its annual meeting during 7–8 February 2017 at the University of Rhode Island’s Narragansett Bay Campus. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was notable by its absence from the meeting; the meeting was intentionally designed to allow participation via conference call and webinar. We were in receipt of a 24 January 2017 letter from Jim Valade, the Florida Manatee Recovery Coordinator, FWS Jacksonville, providing very brief updates on the status of: (1) the final rule on reclassifying the West Indian manatee under the ESA (expected “sometime this year”); (2) the Florida Manatee Stock Assessment Report (SAR) (perhaps in time for the 2018 ASRG meeting, but promised for January 2017 at the January 2016 ASRG meeting in Seattle), and (3) the updated Manatee Core Biological Model (CBM) (anticipated in 2017, but at the 2016 ASRG meeting we were told it was expected in summer 2016).

**Douglas P. Nowacek**  
Duke University

**James A. Powell**  
Sea to Shore Alliance

**Andrew J. Read**  
Duke University

**Erin L. Summers**  
Maine Department of Marine  
Resources

**Randall S. Wells**  
Chicago Zoological Society

Manatee conservation has been of considerable concern to the ASRG for a number of years, and we have made consistent recommendations over the years encouraging FWS to meet their statutory responsibilities under the MMPA and ESA in a more timely manner. We have commented on the down-listing proposal and repeatedly encouraged the Service to update the Florida and Puerto Rico manatee SARs on a more consistent and frequent schedule. The MMPA [16 U.S.C. 1386 Section 117 (c)(1)(A, B)] states that “the Secretary shall review stock assessments in accordance with this subsection—at least annually for stocks which are specified as strategic

**Sharon B. Young**  
Humane Society of the  
United States

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*Established under the Marine  
Mammal Protection Act to  
provide scientific advice to the  
National Marine Fisheries  
Service and U.S. Fish and  
Wildlife Service*

stocks; at least annually for stocks for which significant new information is available; and at least once every 3 years for all other stocks.” Both manatee stocks meet the first criterion, as ESA-listed species are automatically considered strategic, and the Florida stock also consistently meets the second (e.g., see the three pages summarizing mortalities, rescues, and synoptic counts attached to the January 2017 Valade letter). Nevertheless, after the initial assessments in 1995, the SARs for both manatee stocks have been updated only twice, for 2009 and 2014 (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/sars/species.htm>).

Consequently, we request full participation by FWS in future ASRG meetings. We expect our 2018 meeting to be at Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, Florida (exact timing TBA), so travel for Florida-based FWS staff should not be an issue. We **recommend** completion of the updated CBM and updated SARs for both manatee stocks as soon as possible. Finally, we also **recommend** that the Service posts this letter and its reply on its web page, just as NMFS does with our recommendation letters (see the Office of Protected Resources SRG page—<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/sars/group.htm>). Given that the OPR Stock Assessment page (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/sars/species.htm>) appears to be the only web location where all of the SARs for stocks under FWS jurisdiction are collected on the same site, it might also make sense to post the letters and replies on the OPR SRG page (i.e., with the meeting minutes, letters to NMFS, and replies thereto).

Thank you for your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,



Robert D. Kenney, Ph.D.  
Chair, Atlantic Scientific Review Group

**CC:**

Cynthia Dohner  
Region 4 Director  
Atlanta

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