

Atlantic Scientific Review Group

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Atlantic Scientific Review Group

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Established under the Marine Mammal Protection Act to advise the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the status of marine mammal stocks off the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts.

Greg Sheehan, Principal Deputy Director
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Main Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington DC 20240-0001

Dear Mr. Sheehan:

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)].

The ASRG held its annual meeting on February 6-8, 2018, in Sarasota FL at Mote Marine Laboratory. At that meeting we had conversations with Jim Valade of your North Florida Ecological Field Services Office and Dr. Catherine Langtimm of the USGS Wetland and Aquatic Research Center in Gainesville regarding the status of manatees. During our discussions, it again became apparent that the USFWS is not availing itself of the expertise of the Atlantic Scientific Review Group.

We offer to help the USFWS review and finalize the revision to the Stock Assessment Reports (SARs) for the Florida and West Indian Manatee Stocks. We **strongly recommend** that these revised assessments of status include all human-caused mortality, not just mortality that is fisheries related, to determine whether human-caused take (mortality and serious injury) is above the Potential Biological Removal (PBR). We note that the FWS Pacific and Alaska Regions include all human-caused mortality in their SARs for stocks of Polar Bears, Sea Otters, and Walrus.

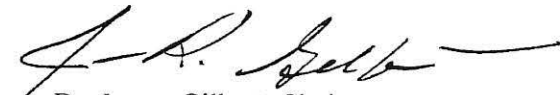
When other sources of human-caused mortality and serious injury are included in the manatee SARs, total mortality (take) exceeds PBR. Therefore, each of the manatee stocks is “strategic”. This designation requires additional efforts to reduce mortality and serious injury. We strongly request these basic tenets of the Marine Mammal Protection Act be followed when writing the SARs, and more importantly, when developing measures for reducing the number of injuries and deaths of manatees

We strongly encourage appointment of a recovery team to revise the Recovery Plan for Manatees. Since the third revision of the Recovery Plan was completed in 2001, there has been no update attempted. We would be pleased to participate in developing and reviewing the Recovery Plan.

We again request that this letter and your response be posted on your website for manatees.

We were pleased to welcome one new ASRG member, Geneviève Nesslage, and to welcome back returning members Sharon Young, Andrew Read, and Robert Kenney, to bring us back up to our full complement. All members were in attendance. The ASRG is also pleased to announce that Erin Summers was elected to be its new Chairperson. Please direct correspondence to her at the Department of Marine Resources, PO Box 8, West Boothbay Harbor, ME 04575.

With best regards,



Dr. James Gilbert, Chairperson
Atlantic Scientific Review Group

Cc:

Dr. Peter Thomas, Executive Director
Marine Mammal Commission

Mike Oetker, Acting Regional Director
Southeast Region USFWS

Aaron Valenta, Chief
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