

PACIFIC SCIENTIFIC REVIEW GROUP

A Regional Advisory Group to the National Marine Fisheries Service

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February 26, 2009

Dr. James Balsiger
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Marine Fisheries Service
1335 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Dear Dr. Balsiger,

We would like to provide you with the minutes and recommendations from the most recent meeting of the Pacific Scientific Review Group held 19-21 November 2008. The SRG commends the NMFS for making good progress on the research recommendations previously made by the SRG. However, the lack of funding and the decrease in available shiptime continues to plague NMFS, to the point that now its marine mammal programs are going backwards, and are not even able to maintain current research and obtain data needed for management of marine mammal stocks under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. The SRG notes that the cetacean survey of the Hawaiian Islands has been postponed, meaning that there will be no usable population estimates for Hawaiian stocks, and no PBR estimates by which to manage these populations. Similarly, surveys of harbor seal populations in Washington and Oregon can no longer be used under the PBR guidelines and new estimates will be required. The endangered Southern Resident Killer Whale population continues to decline, yet no ESA Recovery Team has been established. The monk seal program has had to cut back on its long-term monitoring of the abundance of this declining endangered species. A Take Reduction Team has been required to deal with the take of false killer whales in the Hawaii-based longline fisheries for several years, but has not been formed due to lack of funds.

We realize the constraints NMFS must operate under, but we believe that a more-flexible approach to some of these mandates could be helpful. For example, an additional TRT to focus on fishery mortality on false killer whale stocks (focusing on the pelagic deep-set longline fishery, but including the shallow-set fishery and inshore fisheries) could be convened if it meets biennially in rotation with the California driftnet TRT. In years when one TRT is not scheduled to meet, it could discuss important issues via virtual conferencing or email.

Once again, the SRG compliments your NMFS staff for their excellent presentations, outstanding research, and support of the SRG.

Sincerely,



Michael Scott
Chairman, Pacific Scientific Review Group

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