



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

NOV 26 2008

Michael Scott, Ph.D.
Chair, Pacific Scientific Review Group
Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission
c/o Scripps Institute of Oceanography
La Jolla, California 92037

Dear Dr. Scott:

Thank you for your letter to Dr. James Balsiger, Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, providing the minutes and recommendations from the January 2008 meeting of the Pacific Scientific Review Group. Your letter was forwarded to me because the Office of Protected Resources within NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is responsible for national programs under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

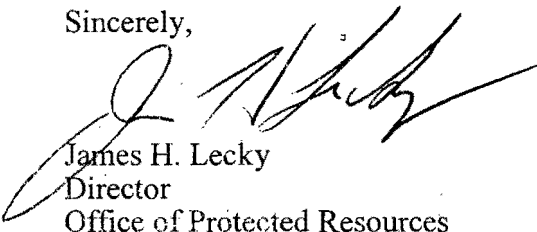
Although abundance estimates for many stocks of marine mammals are too old to be reliable for supporting management decisions, funding for the necessary surveys remains questionable. The temporary budget enacted for the first half of FY 2009 continues funding levels originally appropriated in FY 2007 and does not contain sufficient budget flexibility to increase ship time for surveys supporting Pacific, Alaska, or Atlantic marine mammal stock assessments.

Survey schedules in the Pacific Ocean are further complicated by limited service of one of NOAA's survey vessels (*David Starr Jordan*). The *Jordan's* limitations may delay the 2009 survey in the Eastern Tropical Pacific Ocean until 2010, which, in turn could affect vessel availability for a survey within the Hawaiian Exclusive Economic Zone in 2010 even if funding were increased in FY 2010. On a brighter note, the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center has recruited a cetacean biologist to fill the vacancy resulting from Dave Johnston's return to Duke University. Also, the Southwest Fisheries Science Center conducted surveys in waters off California, Oregon, and Washington in 2008 to update cetacean abundance estimates for this area.

No surveys for pinniped abundance are planned for Washington or Oregon in FY 2009. However, pinniped surveys may be conducted in California. I am hopeful the tagging studies at San Miguel Island will be able to continue in 2009. With budget limitations restricting large-scale surveys, NMFS understands that alternative research and monitoring methods, such as site-specific photo-identification, genetics, and tagging studies would provide important insights into local populations.

I appreciate your continued interest in marine mammal conservation and look forward to your future recommendations to improve the science supporting the conservation of marine mammals.

Sincerely,



James H. Lecky
Director
Office of Protected Resources



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