



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

20 September 2011

Mr. Nick Wiley
Executive Director
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600

Dear Mr. Wiley:

The Marine Mammal Commission held its 2011 annual meeting on 10-12 May in New Orleans, Louisiana. Most of the meeting focused on federal and state responses to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill and assessment of short- and long-term spill effects on marine mammals in the Gulf of Mexico. Dr. Leslie Ward-Geiger of the Florida Wildlife Research Institute participated in the Marine Mammal Commission's meeting and described the state's response and assessment efforts. Florida has played, and undoubtedly will continue to play, a significant role in the BP oil spill response, assessment, and restoration activities. The Marine Mammal Commission commends the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for its strong leadership in these areas.

Undoubtedly, responding to the spill and assessing the resulting damages has been a considerable challenge. Furthermore, that challenge has been confounded by the large number of dolphin strandings along the Gulf's northern coast. The Marine Mammal Commission recognizes that the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has devoted considerable staff, resources, and facilities to respond to these and other marine mammal stranding events and to the ongoing natural resource damage assessment for marine mammals. The Marine Mammal Commission strongly encourages the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to continue its leadership role on marine mammal stranding response and damage assessments. In addition to their conservation benefits, such efforts are important for maintaining the health of the Gulf ecosystem that, in turn, is vital to the state's tourism industry.

The Marine Mammal Commission has recommended that the National Marine Fisheries Service (1) review the Gulf's stranding networks to assess their capabilities and provide a basis for expanding them; (2) seek additional funding for its Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program, Prescott Grant Program, and Unusual Mortality Event Fund; and (3) secure adequate, stable funding for marine mammal stock assessments in the Gulf. The Marine Mammal Commission also is considering a nation-wide review of the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Program.

Given the limited resources available and the amount of work to be done, the Marine Mammal Commission believes that the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission should continue to work together whenever possible to accomplish their common objectives. If and when the National Marine Fisheries Service reviews its Gulf stranding networks, the Marine Mammal Commission encourages you to participate in that review. It should highlight opportunities for you to strengthen the stranding network in Florida through expanded partnerships with the National Marine Fisheries Service and Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as various regional organizations, the academic community, and non-governmental organizations. The Marine Mammal Commission also

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encourages the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to continue its strong partnership with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service to address critical information gaps for bottlenose dolphins, manatees, and other marine mammals in the Gulf, including impacts from oil and gas development, fisheries, coastal development, and other human activities.

Please contact me if there is anything the Marine Mammal Commission can do to assist the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Thank you again for your leadership on these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Timothy J. Ragen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "T" and "R".

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph. D.
Executive Director

cc: Jim Lecky, NMFS
Roy Crabtree, NMFS
Bonnie Ponwith, NMFS
Dan Ashe, Fish and Wildlife Service