We as members of the scientific research community would like to affirm our position on the following issues as part of the Marine Mammal Commission Advisory Committee process:

• The question of the potential impact of man-made sound on the marine environment fundamentally is a problem best addressed by basic and applied science. Therefore, the well-established procedures of the scientific process should be followed in the pursuit of answers to this question.

• In particular, we strongly support the process of open, peer-reviewed publication of research results.

• Science-based expert committees that have been assembled to address this issue were properly informed and in a good position to make recommendations for future research. For example, three National Research Council reports (1994, 2000, 2003) and the recent Ocean Policy Commission report review past research results and identify research gaps. Recommendations in all four reports are fully consistent and provide excellent guidance for future research.

Therefore, we have concerns about the ability of this Marine Mammal Commission Advisory Committee to make recommendations on the direction of future research, given that the committee's deliberations have not been solely scientifically focused and given its lack of scientific expertise in multiple critical areas. The Advisory Committee is better suited to discussing priorities for the different National Research Council science recommendations based upon the committee members' policy perspectives.

• Numerous safeguards, including permit procedures, ethical committee reviews, and peer proposal and publication reviews, are already in place that ensure honest and ethical conduct of scientific studies on this topic. For instance, permits under the Marine Mammal Protection Act require a 30-day publication in the Federal Register followed by review by the Marine Mammal Commission. All university research involving animals requires review by an Institutional Animal Care and Utilization Committee that is regulated and supervised by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture. In fact, it is worthwhile to consider streamlining some safeguards so that scientific studies can proceed to provide answers more rapidly, as suggested in the first NRC report (1994). We have concerns that in some situations, present procedures actually are creating impediments to conducting the research that needs to be done. One example is the critical need for controlled sound exposure studies on beaked whale species. Studies of this kind were the number one recommendation from the April, 2004 Beaked Whale Workshop sponsored by the Marine Mammal Commission.

• Diversity in sources of funding for research on the issue of the potential impact of man-made sound on the marine environment is very beneficial. Such diversity promotes the stability needed in a research program for long-term studies and the training of new scientists. At times, an agency with a problem is highly motivated and in the best position to fund research on that specific problem. In other cases, contributions from a variety of sources can be pooled to provide a healthy research program. One example of the latter case is the National Ocean Partnership Program (NOPP). The NOPP process provides a mechanism for various institutions and agencies, including federal, state, and local governments, industry, private individuals, and non-governmental organizations, to contribute funds for scientific research.

• Funding for scientific research on the potential impact of man-made sounds in the marine environment should be increased. This increase should come not only from those agencies and entities presently sponsoring research in this area and related areas, but also from institutions and groups that have not to date regularly or substantially contributed to the resources available for these scientific endeavors.

Scientific research depends upon grants and contracts with protection for the freedom to publish without requirements for prior review by sponsors or interested parties, and upon protection of the funding for ongoing grants and contracts that yield data perceived as contrary to the interests of the sponsoring agency. As long as these conditions are met, the well-established procedures of the scientific process including open peer-reviewed publication provide guarantees on the integrity, objectivity and independence of the research.