30 July 2013

Mr. P. Michael Payne, Chief
Permits and Conservation Division
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

Re: Request to Amend Permit No. 17115
(James Lloyd-Smith, Ph.D.,
University of California, Los Angeles)

Dear Mr. Payne:

The Marine Mammal Commission (the MMC), in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit application with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (the MMPA). Dr. Lloyd-Smith is seeking to amend permit 17115 that authorized him to conduct research on California sea lions at Año Nuevo Island, California, during a four-year period.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit amendment, provided that the current permit conditions remain in effect.

RATIONALE

Permit 17115 authorizes Dr. Lloyd-Smith to harass, capture, handle, restrain, sedate, measure, mark/tag, and sample (i.e., vibrissae, blood, and urine) 80 California sea lions per year at Año Nuevo Island. Dr. Lloyd-Smith is authorized to conduct the specified activities on yearlings, juveniles, and subadults of either sex. In addition, stranded sea lions (up to 140 per year) are sampled under The Marine Mammal Center's (TMMC) stranding agreement. The purposes are to (1) investigate exposure to and shedding of leptospira in wild and stranded California sea lions and (2) understand the mechanisms underlying recurrent and deadly epizootics of leptospirosis in sea lions.

Dr. Lloyd-Smith is requesting six changes to his permit, including—

(1) extending the permit from four to five years;
(2) conducting the authorized activities on up to 80 California sea lions (i.e., yearlings, juveniles, and subadults of either sex) at San Nicolas Island during both spring (March–May) and fall (September–November) of each year, including capturing an additional 40 sea lions per year and releasing them without sampling (i.e., because those captured are the wrong sex needed to match the sex ratio of sea lions sampled at TMMC);

(3) conducting the authorized activities on up to 40 California sea lions (i.e., yearlings, juveniles, and subadults of either sex) per year in Monterey Bay during spring, including capturing an additional 10 sea lions per year and releasing them without sampling;

(4) disentangling up to 10 California sea lions at Año Nuevo Island, 20 at San Nicolas Island, and 10 in Monterey Bay each year, not including adult males—researchers would (a) capture and restrain each animal to remove any gear or debris, (b) measure and mark each animal with flipper tags, and (c) collect vibrissae samples; if the animal must be sedated to remove any gear or debris, researchers also would sample blood and urine at that time;

(5) increasing the numbers of animals that can be incidentally harassed from 5,000 California sea lions, 3,000 northern elephant seals, and 60 harbor seals to 14,000 California sea lions, 5,100 northern elephant seals, and 210 harbor seals per year; and

(6) increasing the number of intentional mortalities via euthanasia or unintentional mortalities from two sea lions per year not to exceed four sea lions during the four-year period to four sea lions per year not to exceed eight sea lions during the five-year period.

Dr. Lloyd-Smith has indicated that his Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee has reviewed and approved the proposed procedures. Therefore, the MMC recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit amendment, provided that the current permit conditions remain in effect.

The MMC believes that the activities for which it has recommended approval are consistent with the purposes and policies of the MMPA.

The MMC appreciates the opportunity to comment on this permit amendment application. Kindly contact me if you have any questions concerning the MMC's recommendation.

Sincerely,

Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.
Executive Director