



# MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

20 September 2011

Mr. Robert J. Barham, Secretary  
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries  
P.O. Box 98000  
2000 Quail Dr.  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70898

Dear Secretary Barham:

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. Mandy Tumlin of the Department's Fisheries Research Lab in Grand Isle participated in the Commission's meeting and described the state's response and assessment efforts. Louisiana has played, and undoubtedly will continue to play, a major role in the BP oil spill response, assessment, and restoration activities. The Commission commends your Department 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 Commission recognizes that your Department 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 Commission strongly encourages your Department 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 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 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 Commission believes that the Service and your Department should continue to work together whenever possible to accomplish their common objectives. If and when the Service reviews its Gulf stranding networks, the Commission encourages your Department to participate in that review. It should highlight opportunities to strengthen the stranding network in Louisiana through expanded partnerships with the Service as well as various regional organizations, the academic community, and non-governmental organizations. The Commission also encourages your Department to continue its strong partnership with the Service to address critical information gaps for bottlenose dolphins and other marine mammals in the Gulf, including impacts from oil and gas development, fisheries, coastal development, and other human activities.

Mr. Robert Barham  
20 September 2011  
Page 2

Please contact me if there is anything the Commission can do to assist your Department.  
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 initial 'T'.

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph. D.  
Executive Director

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