

MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION  
4340 East-West Highway, Room 700  
Bethesda, MD 20814-4447

1 June 2009

James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.  
Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Balsiger:

Thank you for your letter of 16 April 2009 informing the Marine Mammal Commission that the Service will postpone its 2009 dolphin and ecosystem assessment research cruises in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean until 2010. This assessment effort began decades ago and has continued since 1998 under the International Dolphin Program Conservation Act, Public Law 105-42.

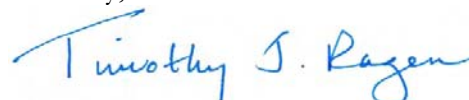
The Commission appreciates the budget pressures that have led to this postponement. Nonetheless, these cruises are needed to evaluate the effects of the yellowfin tuna purse-seine fishery on dolphins. Reported dolphin mortality from the fishery has been dramatically reduced, but chase and encirclement appear to have had additional adverse effects on the stocks (Archer et al. 2001).

Recent analyses by Service scientists indicate that abundance for the northeastern offshore spotted dolphin and the eastern spinner dolphin is now "somewhat higher" and "substantially higher," respectively (Gerrodette et al. 2008). This is welcome news. However, the western/southern offshore spotted dolphin stock may be declining. Importantly, all of these findings are preliminary and require substantiation, which can only be done by conducting the assessment cruises.

The assessments also are invaluable for describing the eastern tropical Pacific ecosystem. They cover the entire range of the affected species. They collect information on the physical, chemical, and ecological nature of the involved ecosystem. They provide important insights into large-scale oceanographic processes and the effects of those processes on food webs and the dynamics of the affected species. And they provide information needed to understand fishery effects on marine ecosystems. In short, these cruises provide one of the best examples in the world of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management. Therefore, continuation of these cruises should be given high priority, and every effort should be made to carry them out during 2010.

Thank you for keeping the Commission informed of your plans, and please let us know if we can help promote funding for these assessments.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

cc: Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D.

### Literature Cited

- Archer, F., T. Gerrodette, A. Dizon, K. Abella, and Š. Southern. 2001. Unobserved kill of nursing dolphin calves in a tuna purse-seine fishery. *Marine Mammal Science* 17:540–554.
- Gerrodette, T., G. Watters, W. Perryman, and L. Ballance. 2008. Estimates of 2006 Dolphin Abundance in the Eastern Tropical Pacific, with Revised Estimates from 1986–2003. NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-SWFSC-422.