

MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION
4340 EAST-WEST HIGHWAY, ROOM 905
BETHESDA, MD 20814

27 November 2007

Mr. Kyle Baker
Southeast Regional Office
National Marine Fisheries Service
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear Mr. Baker:

Thank you for the opportunity to review the draft five-year status review for the Caribbean monk seal (*Monachus tropicalis*). We appreciate the Service's efforts to review and update listings of species under the Endangered Species Act. Among other things, such attention is necessary for assigning marine mammal recovery priorities.

Attached are comments prepared by David Laist in consultation with the Marine Mammal Commission and its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals. In the Commission's opinion, the review of available literature on this species is thorough and well done. It could benefit from additional editing and, in case it might be helpful, David will forward an electronic version with suggested changes. Unfortunately, the review's conclusion that the species is extinct appears justified based on all the existing information. The Marine Mammal Commission therefore recommends, with regret, that the National Marine Fisheries Service proceed with steps to remove the Caribbean monk seal from the Endangered Species Act's List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife on grounds that the species is now extinct.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to review this document. If you have any questions on our comments or recommendation, please contact me or David Laist.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Enclosure

Cc with enclosure: Mr. Chris Uyeda

Marine Mammal Commission Comments on the
1 November 2007 Draft Endangered Species Act Five-Year Review for the
Caribbean Monk Seal (*Monachus tropicalis*)

Section 1.3.3, Associated Rulemaking: This section states that there is no associated rulemaking related to this review. However, the Service's regulations at 50 C.F.R. §§ 424.10 and 424.11 require that a rule be promulgated to remove a species from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife even if it is being delisted because it is believed to be extinct. This section should be revised accordingly.

Section 1.3.4, Review History, First Paragraph: This paragraph references a report prepared for the Marine Mammal Commission by Woods and Hermanson (1987). The fifth sentence states that "although there were no confirmations of potential accounts of seal sightings obtained from the survey, there was some evidence that isolated animals may remain in some remote regions." Because the cited report did document "potential" accounts of seal sightings, this sentence would be more accurate if it were revised to read as follows:

Although two reports of seal sightings were obtained during the survey, no tangible evidence was provided to confirm whether those sightings involved Caribbean monk seals or another species.

Also, the sixth sentence of this paragraph reporting results of a survey by Boyd and Stanfield (1998) should note the geographic scope of that survey (i.e., they interviewed fishermen in Haiti and Jamaica).

Section 2.3.1, Taxonomic Classification and Phylogeny, Second Paragraph: This section should note that the type specimen for Caribbean monk seals was described by Gray in 1849 from a specimen taken in Jamaica. The following reference should be cited as the source of this information:

Gray, J. E. 1849. On the variation in the teeth of the crested seal *Cystophora cristata*, and on a new species of the genus from the West Indies. Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London 17:91–93 as cited in Adam 2004.

The paragraph also states that all three species of monk seals are "highly sensitive" to human disturbance. We believe this statement should be changed to "can be" highly sensitive, as the existing evidence suggests that under certain circumstances at least some monk seals are not particularly sensitive to at least limited disturbance.

Section 2.3.2, Biology, First Paragraph: This paragraph states that the only known photographs of Caribbean monk seals in the wild appear in Adam and Garcia (2003). It would be helpful to clarify that those photographs were taken in 1900 in the Triangle Keys off the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, during a scientific survey and were reproduced recently by Adam and Garcia (2003).

Section 2.3.3, Life History, Third Paragraph: The years, as well as the months, of the referenced observations of pregnant Caribbean monk seals should be provided (i.e., early December 1886 and June 1900). Additional information on the source of the latter report also should be cited (i.e. original unpublished field notes by E. L. Nelson as cited in Adams and Garcia, 2003).

Commission comments, continued

Section 2.3.4, Distribution, First Paragraph: It would be helpful to note that the species' northernmost record is from a fossil recovered near Charleston, South Carolina (Ray 1961, as cited in the review).

Section 2.4, Synthesis: Because the above-referenced 1900 report by E. L. Nelson of monk seals in the Triangle Keys off Mexico appears to be the last authoritative location where more than a few individuals were observed together, it would be helpful to add this record to the brief review of historical sighting and survey records in this section.

Also, this section states that sighting and survey data analyzed by Solow (1993) statistically demonstrate a high likelihood that the species is extinct. Additional information should be provided describing the data on which that analysis was based (e.g., on recent wildlife surveys in which no monk seals were seen, on historical sighting records, or some combination of such data).

At the end of this section, it would be useful to note that the retrospective record of no confirmed sightings since 1952 now suggests that the species may well have been extinct even before passage of the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act in the 1970s, thereby precluding any opportunity for provisions of those acts to promote the species' survival.

Section 3.3: This section lists reclassification and delisting priorities. The meaning of the ranking numbers is not obvious, and some written explanation would be helpful.