



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

7 November 2014

Ms. Angela Somma
National Marine Fisheries Service
Office of Protected Resources
1325 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Ms. Somma:

The Marine Mammal Commission (Commission) has reviewed the National Marine Fisheries Service request for information on southern right whales and sperm whales for use in 5-year reviews of their status under the Endangered Species Act (79 Fed. Reg. 53171). The announcement requested information on these two whale species that has become available since their last 5-year reviews in 2007 and 2009, respectively.

With respect to southern right whales, the Commission supported the work of the Southern Right Whale Health Monitoring Network (SRWHMN) to investigate the die-off of southern right whale calves at Península Valdés, Argentina from 2008 to 2012, and participated in International Whaling Commission (IWC) sponsored meetings on the die-off that considered, *inter alia*, the information collected by the SRWHMN. The Commission also participated in the 2012 IWC assessment of southern right whales. The relevant reports are listed below.

International Whaling Commission. 2011. Report of the Southern Right Whale Die-off Workshop, *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management* 12 (Supplement): 367–398.

International Whaling Commission. 2013. Report of the IWC Workshop on the Assessment of Southern Right Whales, *Journal of Cetacean Research and Management* 14 (Supplement):439–462.

Rowntree, V.J., M.M. Uhart, M. Sironi, A. Chirife, M. Di Martino, L. La Sala, L. Musmeci, N. Mohamed, J. Andrejuk, D. McAloose, J.E. Sala, A. Carribero, H. Rally, M. Franco, F.R. Adler, R.L. Brownell Jr., J. Seger, T. Rowles. 2013. Unexplained recurring high mortality of southern right whale *Eubalaena australis* calves at Península Valdés, Argentina. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 493: 275–289.

Thomas, P.O., M. Uhart, D. McAloose, M. Sironi, V. J. Rowntree, R. L. Brownell Jr., F. M. D. Gulland, M. J. Moore, C. Marón, C. Wilson. 2013. Workshop on the Southern right whale die-off at Peninsula Valdes, Argentina. Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission. SC/65a/BRG15, IWC, Cambridge.

With respect to sperm whales, the Commission is supporting the work of Dr. Phil Morin, Southwest Fisheries Science Center, for a project entitled “Advancing population genomics of cetaceans: a pilot study of methods to increase genetic power for species with low genetic diversity and small sample sizes, with specific application to sperm whale populations in the North Pacific.” We suggest you consult with Dr. Morin on this work. In addition, the Commission is aware of an

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important paper that is in review at this time; the lead author, Dr. Hal Whitehead, has given permission to share the manuscript with NMFS on the understanding that it will not be distributed outside of the review team or cited without the author's permission. We will provide this to you under separate cover.

Whitehead, H. and S. Gero. Positive observed rates of increase do not reflect a healthy population: conflicting rates of increase in the sperm whale population of the eastern Caribbean. *Endangered Species Research*. In Review.

If you have difficulty finding any of these reports we will be glad to assist. If you have questions about them or any further work the authors may have done on either of the two species, we encourage you to contact the authors or their organizations directly.

I hope this information is helpful. We look forward to the results of this review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rebecca J. Lent". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.
Executive Director