



# MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

27 July 2017

Mr. Jon Kurland  
Assistant Regional Administrator for Protected Resources  
Alaska Region, National Marine Fisheries Service  
Juneau, Alaska

ATTN: Ellen Sebastian

Dear Mr. Kurland:

The Marine Mammal Commission (the Commission) has reviewed the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) request for information (82 Fed. Reg. 29842) on the North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*; NPRW) for use in a 5-year review of the species' status under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended. The announcement requests information that has become available since the last NPRW status review, which was conducted in 2012.

The Commission is not aware of any evidence that might suggest the status of the NPRW has changed since 2012, and anticipates that NMFS's review will confirm the Endangered listing status of this species under the ESA. The NPRW continues to be at extreme risk of extinction, and the lack of key ecological and biological information, as identified in the recovery plan for this species, and limited resources for research, continue to present a serious impediment to understanding and addressing the threats to this species' survival.

The Commission would like to highlight the value of three projects recently conducted by NMFS, to which the Commission contributed substantial funding:

- Wright, D. *In Review*. Passive Acoustic Monitoring of the Critically Endangered Eastern North Pacific Right Whale (*Eubalaena japonica*). Submitted by the Marine Mammal Laboratory, Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Seattle, Washington, April 2017, to the Marine Mammal Commission, Bethesda, Maryland;
- Crance, JL, CL Berchok, and H Tabisola. March 2017. Sailable Summer 2016 Bering Sea Mission. Final Report. Submitted by the Marine Mammal Laboratory, AFSC/NMFS/NOAA, and PMEL/NOAA, Seattle, Washington, under grant IA # AKC-196, to the Marine Mammal Commission, Bethesda, Maryland; and
- Rone, BK, PJ Clapham, DW Weller, JL Crance, and AR Lang. October 2015. North Pacific Right Whale Visual and Acoustic Survey in the Northwestern Gulf of Alaska. Final Report. Submitted to Marine Mammal Commission, Bethesda, Maryland. Prepared by National Marine Mammal Laboratory, Seattle, Washington, and Southwest Fisheries Science Center, La Jolla, California.

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The Commission would also like to note the availability of unpublished acoustic data collected by the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) that could be analyzed for evidence of the presence of NPRWs in the Hawaiian Islands (contact: Erin Oleson, PIFSC). Prior to releasing our FY15 request for proposals on NPRWs, we conducted a literature review, which we have updated and included herein. Finally, the Commission is encouraged that in recognition of the current lack of key ecological and biological information, NMFS continues to integrate NPRW data collection into collaborative field efforts wherever its limited resources allow, such as with the ongoing International Whaling Commission multilateral POWER<sup>1</sup> cruise. The Commission is committed to finding avenues to support these efforts as resources allow.

I hope this information will be helpful. Please contact me if you have questions.

Sincerely,



Rebecca J. Lent, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> Pacific Ocean Whale and Ecosystem Research (POWER). The 8th international research cruise in the IWC-POWER series is the latest stage in a long-term program to determine the status of populations of the large whales found in North Pacific Waters, some of which have not been surveyed for several decades. This year's cruise will cover the eastern Bering Sea and aims to provide essential information, enabling scientists to understand whether conservation threats exist for particular species and locations and if so, what measures might address these threats and how could their effectiveness of be assessed. <https://iwc.int/power-cruise>

**Recent publications:**

- Crance, JL, CL Berchok, and JL Keating. *In press*. Gunshot call production by the North Pacific right whale, *Eubalaena japonica*, in the southeastern Bering Sea. *Endangered Species Research*. <http://www.int-res.com/prepress/n00848.html>.
- Crance, JL, and CL Berchok. 2016. Stereotyped, repetitive gunshot call patterns produced by the North Pacific right whale, *Eubalaena japonica*. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 140(4):3295-3296.
- Ford, KB, JF Pilkington, et al. 2016. Recent observations of critically endangered North Pacific right whales (*Eubalaena japonica*) off the west coast of Canada. *Marine Biodiversity Records* 9:50.
- Ivashchenko YV, and PJ Clapham. 2012. Soviet catches of right whales *Eubalaena japonica* and bowhead whales *Balaena mysticetus* in the North Pacific Ocean and Okhotsk Sea. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 18: 201-217.
- Ivashchenko YV, PJ Clapham, and RL Brownell, Jr. 2013. Soviet catches of whales in the North Pacific: revised totals. *Journal of Cetacean Research Management* 13(1):59-71.
- Kennedy, AS, DR Salden, and PJ Clapham. 2012. First high-to low-latitude match of an eastern North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*). *Marine Mammal Science* 28(4):E539-E544.
- LeDuc, RG, BL Taylor, et al. 2012. Genetic analysis of right whales in the eastern North Pacific confirms severe extirpation risk. *Endangered Species Research* 18:163-167.
- Matsuoka, K, T Hakamada, and T Miyashita. Recent sightings of the North Pacific Right (*Eubalaena japonica*) whales in the western North Pacific based on JARPN and JARPN II surveys (1994 to 2013). SC/65b/BRG11.
- Ovsyanikova, E, I Fedutin, et al. 2015. Opportunistic sightings of the endangered North Pacific right whales (*Eubalaena japonica*) in Russian waters in 2003-2014. *Marine Mammal Science* 31(4):1559-1567.
- Rone, BK, CL Berchok, et al. 2012. Using air-deployed passive sonobuoys to detect and locate critically endangered North Pacific right whales. *Marine Mammal Science* 28:E528-538.
- Širović, A, SC Johnson, et al. 2015. North Pacific right whales (*Eubalaena japonica*) recorded in the northeastern Pacific Ocean in 2013. *Marine Mammal Science* 31(2):800-807.
- Thode, A, J Bonnel, et al. 2017. Using nonlinear time warping to estimate North Pacific Right Whale calling depths in the Bering Sea. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 141(5):3059.
- Wright, DL 2015. Simultaneous identification of four mysticete species in the Bering Sea using passive acoustic monitoring increases confidence in acoustic identification of the critically endangered North Pacific right whale (*Eubalaena japonica*). Final Report for the International Fund for Animal Welfare. Alaska Fisheries Science Center Marine Mammal Laboratory, NOAA. 63 pp.