



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

June 11, 2021

Peter O. Thomas. Ph.D.
Executive Director
Marine Mammal Commission
4340 East-West Highway
Suite 700
Bethesda, Maryland 20814

Dear Dr. Thomas:

Thank you for your letter of June 1, 2021, to Samuel D. Rauch, the Deputy Assistant Administrator of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), regarding the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (MMHSRP). I am responding on his behalf in my capacity as Acting Director of the NMFS Office of Protected Resources (OPR).

As you mentioned, the MMHSRP is in the process of finalizing its report summarizing the program review conducted over the past two years, which includes input from both the internal (NMFS staff and contractors) phase and the external (non-NMFS partners) phase. We greatly appreciate the participation of members of the Marine Mammal Commission (MMC) in both phases of the program review. NMFS staff who are members of the MMC Committee of Scientific Advisors were invited to provide comments during the internal phase (Dr. Jason Baker and Dr. Patricia Rosel). For the external phase, the entire Marine Mammal Stranding Network as well as other collaborators and partners were invited to provide feedback via a questionnaire, and 21 key partners were selected for in-depth interviews. Three of the 21 in-depth interviewees represented different aspects of the MMC, including a Commissioner (Dr. Frances Gulland), a member of the Committee of Scientific Advisors (Dr. Randall Wells), and one of the Commission staff (Dr. Samantha Simmons). We greatly appreciate the time they spent in providing valuable input to the program review. The feedback we received from both the internal and external phases have been incorporated into the draft program review summary report document, which is now undergoing Agency review. We expect the final report to be available this summer.

While our team was completing the MMHSRP program review, they began planning an integrated strategic plan and investment strategy to help guide and focus the work of the MMHSRP over the next five years. The MMHSRP team has already begun internal development of the strategic plan and we plan to reach out to you and your staff to engage the MMC in that effort this summer. My staff will work with yours to determine exact timing.

We greatly value the MMC's input received to date and the additional guidance and recommendations we will receive in the future. The MMHSRP staff and I are looking forward to



meeting with you and your staff in July or August to share the findings from the program review, discuss the feedback we received from MMC experts during the external phase of the review, and frame the next steps for the MMHSRP Strategic Plan.

Finally, I believe that the OPR and MMC would benefit from more frequent conversations to identify and work to resolve issues as they arise. I propose that we have regular check-in meetings going forward, and will ask my staff to work with yours on scheduling if you agree.

Sincerely,

Catherine Marzin
Acting Director
Office of Protected Resources
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

cc:

NMFS: Samuel Rauch, Shannon Bettridge, Trevor Spradlin, Sarah Wilkin, Teri Rowles,
Deborah Fauquier

MMC: Frances Gulland, Samantha Simmons, Tiffini Brookens