



# MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

24 July 2012

Mr. P. Michael Payne, Chief  
Permits and Conservation Division  
Office of Protected Resources  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
1315 East-West Highway  
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3225

Re: Request for Amendment, Permit No. 14097  
(Southwest Fisheries Science Center)

Dear Mr. Payne:

The Marine Mammal Commission, in consultation with its Committee of Scientific Advisors on Marine Mammals, has reviewed the above-referenced permit application with regard to the goals, policies, and requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Permit 14097 authorizes the Southwest Fisheries Science Center to conduct research on cetaceans, pinnipeds, and sea turtles in the U.S. territorial and international waters of the Pacific, Southern, Arctic, and Indian Oceans. The current permit expires on 30 June 2015. The Center is requesting to add procedures and surveys to the current permit.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit amendment, provided that the current permit conditions remain in effect.

## **RATIONALE**

With regard to marine mammals, the purpose of the Center's research is to monitor, characterize, and/or assess abundance and distribution, stock structure, movement patterns, foraging and breeding ecology, haul-out behavior, life history parameters, and demography. Authorized activities include harassing, counting, observing, photographing, sampling, conducting photogrammetry on, and/or instrumenting numerous marine mammal species. The Center is authorized to conduct the specified activities on individuals of various age classes and either sex.

The Center is requesting to (1) add dart tagging of Arnoux's beaked whales and (2) add ten additional aerial surveys for pinnipeds and include vessel and ground surveys for Steller sea lions. Researchers propose to instrument Arnoux's beaked whales with dart tags to obtain information on their diving habits and movements. Researchers tagging killer whales in McMurdo Sound and the Antarctic Peninsula area occasionally observe Arnoux's beaked whales and have an opportunity to tag them. Under the amendment, they would instrument eight adult and two juvenile whales each year with dart tags using a crossbow, adjustable-pressure modified air gun, black powder gun, or pole. Tags would be attached to the dorsal fin or dorsal surface of the whales, following the procedures currently authorized in permit 14097. Researchers would instrument an individual whale

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with only one dart tag at a given time, but they could tag that same individual one additional time each year if the first tag fails. Researchers would not tag calves estimated to be less than one year of age but could tag females with those calves, although doing so is not the preferred option because the accompanying calf might dislodge the tag.

The Center also is proposing to add 10 additional aerial surveys each year for pinnipeds in the Pacific Ocean, which would increase the Level B harassment takes accordingly (see take table). The Navy has indicated an interest in funding those surveys to provide additional life history, distribution, and habitat use data. In addition, the Center has requested to add ground and vessel surveys for Steller sea lions as have been authorized for all other pinniped species. Those additional types of surveys would occur when aerial flights cannot be conducted safely. Survey methods are the same as currently authorized by permit 14097.

The Marine Mammal Commission believes that the amendment request is reasonable and recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit amendment, provided that the current permit conditions remain in effect.

The Commission believes that the activities for which it has recommended approval are consistent with the purposes and policies of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Please contact me if you have any questions concerning the Commission's recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Timothy J. Ragen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.  
Executive Director