



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

21 January 2011

James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.
Regional Administrator
National Marine Fisheries Service
709 West 9th Street, Room 420A
P.O. Box 21668
Juneau, Alaska 99802-1868

Dear Dr. Balsiger:

The Marine Mammal Commission was copied on a 13 January 2011 letter from Dr. Tamara McGuire to you regarding the issue of scientific independence on the Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Recovery Team. The letter suggests that the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has instructed two of its participating scientists to convey only the state's positions and views on scientific matters before the team. If that is in fact the case, then such a requirement taints the team's scientific credibility, casts doubt upon its recommendations, and undermines the Service's efforts to recover this population. As Dr. McGuire's letter points out, the team's terms of reference explicitly prohibit such constraints, which also run counter to national policy for protecting the integrity of science.

The Marine Mammal Commission believes that the National Marine Fisheries Service must take this allegation seriously. The Commission requests that you (1) discuss this matter with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and (2) take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that the team's deliberations and recommendations are based on impartial and independent science. On all matters of science, the team's scientists must be able to speak freely as experts without fear of repercussion.

The Commission requests that you inform it of the results of your discussion and any steps to be taken to safeguard the impartiality and independence of the recovery team's scientific efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Timothy J. Ragen".

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Cc: Ms. Cora Campbell
Douglas P. DeMaster, Ph.D.
Mr. James H. Lecky
Tamara McGuire, Ph.D.