



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

12 August 2010

Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D.
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
14th and Constitution Avenue, NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Lubchenco:

The Marine Mammal Commission was copied on a 14 July 2010 letter to you from Vera Metcalf of the Eskimo Walrus Commission. To be clear, Ms. Metcalf serves as the Marine Mammal Commission's Special Advisor on Native Affairs. I am writing to you now, not because the Commission supports Ms. Metcalf per se, but because the Commission appreciates the concerns conveyed in her letter.

The subject of the Metcalf letter was a trawl survey in the northern Bering Sea and the need for adequate consultation with Alaska Natives to ensure that their concerns have been heard and their interests taken into account. Alaska Natives are especially concerned about the possibility of negative ecological effects resulting from the survey and the activities (e.g., commercial trawl fishing) that may follow within the Saint Lawrence Island Habitat Conservation Area. The continuation of an intact marine ecosystem in that area is particularly important to their subsistence-based culture.

The Marine Mammal Commission supports consultation with aboriginal groups about the possible impact of commercial activities on natural resources that may be depended on for traditional and cultural reasons. Doing so is consistent with Executive Order 13175 (65 Fed. Reg. 67249) entitled "Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments" and with the Department of Commerce's own "American Indian and Alaska Native Policy of the U.S. Department of Commerce." The Marine Mammal Commission supports such consultation, in part, to fulfill its seventh duty as listed in the Marine Mammal Protection Act; that is, the Commission is to "recommend to the Secretary [of Commerce or the Interior], other appropriate Federal officials, and Congress such additional measures as it deems necessary or desirable to further the policies of this Act, including provisions for the protection of the Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts whose livelihood may be adversely affected by actions taken pursuant to this Act."

Consultation with aboriginal groups, especially in the Arctic, has never been more important. For the past decade, virtually everyone observing the physical and biological effects of climate change has recognized that they pose great threats, both now and into the future, to Alaska Native cultures. As temperatures rise, ice recedes, and vast areas of the Arctic become much more accessible to human activities of many different kinds (including some that previously could not have been contemplated because of the harsh environment), Alaska Natives will be faced with many situations that threaten their subsistence and other traditions. The irony, of course, is that their contribution to climate change is miniscule, yet they will suffer disproportionately large consequences. The time has never been better to establish a strong precedent by carrying out meaningful consultations with the Alaska Native community with a view toward undertaking

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proactive responses as appropriate and practical. Moreover, because of their familiarity with the ecosystem, Alaska Natives may raise questions that might be helpful to your survey objectives.

The purpose of this letter is to encourage you to consider seriously the Eskimo Walrus Commission's request for an administrative review of the trawl survey and the adequacy of the consultations undertaken beforehand, if any, including any changes made to the planned research as a consequence. The Commission would be pleased to participate in such a review and provide any support that it can. Alaska Natives face tremendous challenges related to climate change and research is needed to understand its likely effects, but not at the expense of exacerbating the problems. Collectively, we have the ability to develop a consultation process that will balance needs and concerns in these difficult times. Please let us know how the Commission can help.

Sincerely,



Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director

CC: James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.
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