



MARINE MAMMAL COMMISSION

9 April 2012

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

Re: Permit Application No. 17178
(Virginia Institute of Marine Science)

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. The Virginia Institute of Marine Science is requesting authorization to import samples from four phocid species for purposes of scientific research. The samples were collected in Antarctica and would be imported from Sweden. The permit would be valid for five years. Dr. Rebecca Dickhut of the Institute originally submitted an application for the proposed activities under permit 15646 in 2011, which the Commission commented on in its 3 June 2011 letter (enclosure). Unfortunately, Dr. Dickhut passed away in November 2011, and the project and associated funding have been passed on to her colleagues. The current permit (No. 17178) would be issued to the Institute, rather than an individual, and Dr. Elizabeth Canuel will be the responsible party.

RECOMMENDATION

The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit, as requested.

RATIONALE

The Institute proposes to import seal samples collected in Antarctica to analyze them for persistent organic contaminants, mercury, and stable isotopes. The purpose of the proposed research is to use chemical concentrations to assess the dietary preferences and feeding ecology of Antarctic marine mammals. The Institute proposes to import archived fur, blood, and blubber from the Swedish Museum of Natural History. Those samples were collected in 1987–1988, 2008–2009, and 2010–2011 from 300 crabeater seals, 200 Weddell seals, 50 Ross seals, and 25 leopard seals.

In the revised application, the Institute stated that the samples were collected legally by Swedish scientists under the authority of the Swedish Polar Research Secretariat, which is in accordance with Swedish law. It also provided a copy of the most recent Swedish collection permit. In addition, the Institute is no longer requesting to import samples from killer whales as was requested under permit 15646. None of the remaining phocid species are listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. For that

Mr. P. Michael Payne
9 April 2012
Page 2

reason, the Commission's recommendations from June 2011 are no longer relevant. The Marine Mammal Commission recommends that the National Marine Fisheries Service issue the permit, as requested.

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 beginning.

Timothy J. Ragen, Ph.D.
Executive Director