



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

October 20, 2010

The Honorable Lloyd
Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
P.O. Box 25526
Juneau, Alaska 99802-5526

Dear Commissioner Lloyd:

In 2011 the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) plans to continue monitoring interactions between marine mammals and Alaska state-managed fisheries through implementation of the Alaska Marine Mammal Observer Program (AMMOP) under the requirements and authority of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) of 1972 (as amended in 1994). The goal of the AMMOP is to collect data to assess the level and nature of marine mammal interactions with near-shore, state-managed commercial fisheries that meet certain criteria under the MMPA. The Southeast Alaska salmon drift gillnet fishery, managed by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), meets these criteria based on past humpback whale serious injury and mortalities that occurred as a result of interactions with this fishery. Monitoring of marine mammal interactions with this fishery will commence with the 2012 fishing season, with industry outreach and logistics scoping in occurring 2011.

Fisheries are categorized annually based on levels of marine mammal serious injury or mortality (SI/M) that result from fishing operations. Category I fisheries have the highest levels of SI/M and Category III have the lowest SI/M levels (for a more in-depth explanation see the enclosed information pamphlet). Category I and II fisheries are subject to monitoring under MMPA requirements. Seven Category II state-managed fisheries have previously been observed by the AMMOP, including: the Prince William Sound drift and set salmon gillnet fisheries (1990-91), the Alaska Peninsula salmon drift gillnet fishery (1991), the Cook Inlet salmon set and drift gillnet fisheries (1999-2000), the Kodiak salmon set gillnet fishery in 2002 and 2005), and the Yakutat salmon set gillnet fishery (2007-08). The Cook Inlet and Prince William Sound salmon gillnet fisheries were re-categorized to Category III as a result of AMMOP monitoring revealing low levels of marine mammal SI/M. There are currently no Category I fisheries in Alaska. Reports containing results from previous AMMOP monitoring studies may be found at: <http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/protectedresources/observers/mmop.htm>

In the past, individual fisheries have been monitored for two fishing seasons to develop reliable SI/M estimates. The large number of permit holders and geographic scope of the Southeast Alaska salmon drift gillnet fishery together with the high cost of this program requires that the AMMOP monitor this fishery in one or two ADF&G Management Areas per season for two



seasons each until all ADF&G Management Areas in which this fishery operates have been observed. It is our intent to begin coverage in the ADF&G Management Areas 6 & 8 for this fishery. As noted, industry outreach and logistics scoping will begin in 2011, with actual data collection in those areas occurring in 2012 and 2013.

NMFS has contracted with Saltwater, Inc (SWI) of Anchorage to hire and deploy observers to the field for data collection. SWI has over 20 years of ongoing experience in deploying observers throughout Alaska state and federal fisheries, including for the AMMOP in the Yakutat salmon set gillnet fishery in 2007-2008 with excellent results. Kathy Robinson will be the project manager for SWI in this new study, as she was during the AMMOP Yakutat study. Ms. Robinson has a good working relationship with NMFS and ADFG fishery managers and fishermen throughout Alaska.

Program operations will be based on random, stratified sample selection. Because of the small size of many drift gillnet boats in the fleet, observers will not be placed directly on board fishing vessels. Rather, observers will collect data from nearby, independent work vessels. Complete logistics for vessel selection and observer deployment for data collection will be finalized during the 2011 scoping work.

AMMOP staff have worked closely with ADF&G area fishery biologists in previously observed fisheries to better understand the operating details of those fisheries. Such cooperative efforts have proved valuable in establishing sampling design to minimize impact on the fishermen, making in-season program adjustments to accurately reflect fishing effort, fostering communications with fishery permit holders and fishing associations, and addressing industry concerns. We look forward to continued successful efforts with ADF&G in the Southeast Alaska salmon drift gillnet fishery.

Any questions regarding AMMOP objectives and operation may be directed to Bridget Mansfield at (907) 586-7642.

Sincerely,


for James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.
Administrator, Alaska Region

Attachment