



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

National Marine Fisheries Service

P.O. Box 21668

Juneau, Alaska 99802-1668

March 9, 2006

Dear Yakutat Set Gillnet Permit Holder:

In partial fulfillment of requirements of the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Alaska Marine Mammal Observer Program (AMMOP) plans to implement a two-year study monitoring the level and nature of interactions between the Yakutat set gillnet fishery and marine mammals. The MMPA requires NMFS to measure and report on the impact of commercial fisheries on marine mammal stocks in the annual marine mammal Stock Assessment Reports. Additionally, NMFS is required by the MMPA to publish an annual List of Fisheries in which commercial fisheries are categorized according to their relative impact on marine mammal stocks. The purpose of this Yakutat study is to obtain the data to meet these requirements pursuant to and to otherwise manage marine mammal stocks impacted by fisheries.

The initial phase of the study will be a logistics survey of fishery operations during the 2006 fishing season to assist in the development of a sampling design for data collection. This phase will be of minimal impact to the fishermen and will involve two to five AMMOP staff and contracted personnel sporadically over the season. NMFS intends to hold public meetings with interested Yakutat set net permit holders prior to and throughout the development and implementation phases of the study to explain the goals and needs of the program and to solicit input from permit holders for information that will help ensure collection of high quality data, while minimizing the impact of the study on fishing operations.

Data collection in the fishery is scheduled for the 2007 and 2008 fishing seasons, and will be conducted by up to 16 contracted observers. Observers will monitor fishing operations from independent skiffs and will not be aboard fishing skiffs. The observer provider company, Saltwater, Inc, has been granted the contract task order for this study, and Saltwater's Kathy Robinson will be the program manager throughout the study. Kathy and Saltwater have a long and successful history in providing observer services in Alaska fisheries. They currently provide observers in the Alaska groundfish and crab fisheries and conducted the AMMOP study in Prince William Sound and South Unimak in the early 1990s. We are happy to be working with them once again in this program.

Enclosed with this letter is further information about the AMMOP, the type of information collected by observers, and background on the annual List of Fisheries and fishery categorization. The first public meeting regarding this study is expected to be held in Yakutat in the spring of 2006. Notice of the meeting, including the time and place, will be mailed to you at this address. The AMMOP would like to work closely and cooperatively with permit holders in an ongoing, open dialogue to ensure the success of the study for the benefit of fishermen and the resources we share. For further



information, please feel free to call Bridget Mansfield, AMMOP coordinator, at (907) 586-7642.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert D. Mecum", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert D. Mecum
Acting Administrator, Alaska Region

Enclosures