



NOAA FISHERIES

Alaska Fisheries Science Center

Protected Species Program Review Alaska Fisheries Science Center Summary and Response – March 2015

Introduction

On March 16-20, 2015, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) hosted a panel of experts to conduct a programmatic review of its protected species scientific research conducted pursuant to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), and Magnuson-Stevens Act and comparable international agreements.

This review was the third in a series of annual reviews of AFSC science, directed at different topics each year over a five-year cycle and designed to maximize the transparency and effectiveness of major science programs located at NOAA Fisheries' six science centers as well as those located in or coordinated through NOAA Fisheries' Office of Science and Technology.

For the 2015 review, an independent panel evaluated the marine mammal science information needs, priorities, and research activities that are relevant to the AFSC and the NOAA Fisheries Alaska Regional Office (AKR). This was not a review of any particular protected species stock assessment but rather a review of the overall research programs addressing species that are protected under the ESA, MMPA or both. For AFSC, the review focused on the following species and species groups: Steller sea lions, northern fur seals, ice-associated seals, harbor seals, large whales, Cook Inlet beluga, and other cetaceans. Within each species-focused section, the following themes were covered as required by the Terms of Reference agreed upon by the NOAA Fisheries Science Board: 1) research priorities, 2) objectives, 3) partners, 4) methods, 5) data quality, 6) strengths, 7) weaknesses, 8) mandates, 9) recommendations, 10) communication, and 11) access to data.

The independent panelists were selected as experts in the relevant topic areas; they were not associated with the AFSC. The panel was provided with presentations from AFSC staff covering the state of AFSC's protected species stock assessment and applied science programs. Panelists were also provided with background material for more in-depth information and had time to discuss the AFSC's marine mammal research program – and its utility – with AFSC management and staff and AKR management during the review. Comments and responses to questions from the public participants who attended the review were also considered by the panelists.

More information regarding the review of AFSC's marine mammal research programs may be found at: http://www.afsc.noaa.gov/program_reviews/2015/default.htm

The results from this year's review, along with those being conducted at each of the other five fishery science centers, will be used to prepare a national summary to highlight best practices and to inform decisions on opportunities for improving science programs across NOAA Fisheries. The full suite of these reports will be found at: <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/science-program-review/>

The AFSC leadership would like to thank the review panelists who devoted a significant amount of time to participate in this review. Their observations and recommendations provide valuable

