



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910
THE DIRECTOR

JAN 29 2020

Mr. Simon Kinneen
Chairman
North Pacific Fishery Management Council
605 W. 4th Avenue, Suite 306
Anchorage, AK 99501

Dear Mr. ^{Simon} Kinneen:

Thank you for your letter emphasizing the importance to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council of NOAA's surveys and process studies in Alaska. I agree that monitoring and understanding environmental conditions in Alaska's large marine ecosystems are critical to maintaining well-managed commercial fisheries, the domestic seafood supply, and a sustainable subsistence culture. I also share your concerns about the environmental changes and unusual mortality events observed by scientists and community members in Alaska, and the unprecedented rate at which they are occurring.

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) strives to maintain a balanced research portfolio which, as you aptly noted, provides information needed for current management decisions and improves our understanding of complex population and ecosystem dynamics. In order to best achieve this, the Alaska Fisheries Science Center (AFSC) has implemented a research prioritization process. The rapidly changing marine environment and subsequent expansion of species distributions, has increased the complexity and geographic scope of our mission in Alaska. For example, in the past three years, due to the expansion of commercial species such as cod and pollock into the northern Bering Sea (and possibly the southern Chukchi Sea), and with valuable input from the Council, the AFSC added survey coverage and 276 person sea days to bottom trawl survey efforts of the 198,858 km² northern Bering Sea. It is not certain whether these additions will be sustainable.

Many scientific innovations are currently being explored within NMFS, as you learned at Dr. Cisco Werner's recent presentation. In Alaska, these include development of innovative acoustic data collection systems to supplement expensive ship-based sampling, high-resolution coupled bio-physical ocean models to inform stock assessments and management, increasing cooperative research partnerships with industry and subsistence based communities, and quantitative analyses of the effects of spatial coverage on survey uncertainty. However, we acknowledge these supplemental activities only partially provide the biological information collected during standard acoustic and bottom trawl surveys that is critical to inform fish stock assessments and reduce management uncertainty, and thus ship-based surveys remain a priority for the agency.

These are challenging times that require increased cooperation, coordination, and partnership. As you know, the Alaska Geographic Strategic Plan will soon be released. Our plan highlights the already positive relationship that exists between the Council, AFSC and the Alaska Regional

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Office, as well as ways we can work even more closely to address these issues and achieve our shared stewardship mission. I appreciate your interest and valuable feedback. We will continue to maintain strong communication with the Council about research planning and priorities.

Sincerely,



Chris Oliver
Assistant Administrator
for Fisheries