

# STATE OF ALASKA

SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR

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OFFICES OF THE COMMISSIONERS

July 31, 2007

Ms. Kaja Brix  
Assistant Regional Administrator  
Protected Resources Division  
Alaska Region  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
P. O. Box 21668  
Juneau, Alaska 99802

ATTN: Ellen Sebastian  
SUBJECT: Cook Inlet Beluga Whale PR

Dear Ms. Brix:

The State of Alaska provides the enclosed comments on the "*Proposed Endangered Status for the Cook Inlet Beluga Whale*," published April 20, 2007 (72 FR 76, 19854). The comments include information and analyses of factors that National Marine Fisheries Service (Service) did not consider in reaching its conclusion: "*the Cook Inlet beluga whale constitutes a distinct population segment (DPS) that is in danger of extinction throughout its range.*"

The state's comments provide information relevant to a listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), including current population status, biological and other information regarding threats to the species, and effectiveness of ongoing and planned conservation efforts. That information reveals that a slow recovery should have been expected and the population is now beginning to increase. Examples of significant economic impacts of designation of critical habitat are also provided. The state identifies areas within Cook Inlet that should be identified as an 'essential feature' and granted exclusion protection.

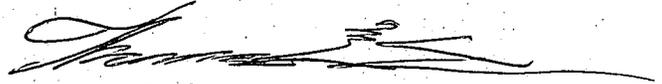
The state comments enclosed clearly demonstrate that the Cook Inlet stock of beluga is sufficiently recovering from unsustainable harvest during the early 1990s, and regulatory mechanisms are providing effective protection to assure conservation of the species. In the 2000 determination, the Service evaluated potential threats to beluga whales and determined that a listing was unwarranted. Based on our review of current information, nothing has changed to cause those threats to result in any different finding. The state urges a comprehensive conservation plan be coordinated with the state, finalized, and implemented, consistent with the Service's commitment in its 2000 determination.

Based on this information, the state urges the Service to find an ESA listing of the Cook Inlet stock of beluga whales is unwarranted at this time.

Sincerely,



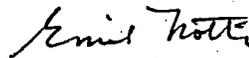
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Enclosures