



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

**JUN - 8 2009**

Joseph DeAlteris, Ph.D.  
Chair, Atlantic Scientific Review Group  
Department of Fisheries  
University of Rhode Island  
Building 50, East Farm  
Kingston, Rhode Island 02881

Dear Dr. DeAlteris:

Thank you for your letter transmitting the minutes and recommendations from the January 2009 meeting of the Atlantic Scientific Review Group (Review Group).

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is aware that estimates of marine mammal abundance in the Gulf of Mexico and other waters under U.S. jurisdiction are limited and that additional observer programs are needed to estimate annual levels of mortality and serious injury of marine mammals incidental to commercial fishing operations. In summer 2009 the Southeast Fisheries Science Center is planning a survey to update marine mammal abundance estimates in offshore areas within the Gulf. The Northeast Fisheries Science Center will be conducting a survey in shelf-edge waters to test data collection hardware and software and to train marine mammal observers. In 2010, the Centers are planning a coordinated cetacean survey along the Atlantic coast.

These surveys will not satisfy all information needs for marine mammals in the Atlantic region but will be an important step forward. NMFS continues to seek additional funding for stock assessments through the budget formulation process; however, the President's budget request must address many competing needs in all agencies.

NMFS agrees that a new member with an understanding of marine mammal scientific issues in the Caribbean Sea would be a warranted addition to the Review Group. Please continue to work with Dr. Gordon Waring (508-495-2311), NMFS point of contact for the Review Group, to recruit such a new member.

I appreciate your interest in marine mammal research and conservation and look forward to your continued contributions as a member of the regional scientific review groups.

Sincerely,

  
James W. Balsiger, Ph.D.  
Acting Assistant Administrator  
for Fisheries

THE ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR  
FOR FISHERIES

