



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Office of International Affairs and Seafood Inspection
1315 East West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
Phone: 301-427-8350

Dear Reviewer:

In accordance with provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), I enclose for your review the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Issuing Annual Catch Limits to the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission for a Subsistence Hunt on Bowhead Whales for the Years 2019 and Beyond*.

This DEIS was prepared pursuant to NEPA to assess the environmental impacts associated with NOAA's issuance of annual catch limits for a bowhead whale subsistence hunt by the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission (AEWC). The International Whaling Commission will conduct its next meeting in September 2018 in Florianopolis, Brazil, and based on the management advice of the IWC Scientific Committee, is likely to adopt a catch limit for 2019 through 2024 or 2025 at the same or similar levels as the current catch limits. The purpose of this action is twofold: to manage the conservation and sustainable subsistence utilization of the Western Arctic stock of bowhead whales (as required under the ICRW, the WCA, the MMPA, and other applicable laws) and to fulfill the Federal Government's trust responsibility to recognize the cultural and subsistence needs of Alaska Natives.

Additional copies of the DEIS may be obtained from the Responsible Program Manager identified below. The document will also be made accessible electronically through the NMFS Alaska Region's website: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/whales-bowhead>.

A 60-day public comment period is being provided upon release of this DEIS. Submit your comments on this DEIS by including "NOAA-NMFS-2017-0098" by either of the following methods in your comments:

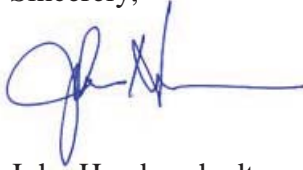
- Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2017-0098>. Click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.
- Mail: John Henderschedt, Attn: Carolyn Doherty, Office of International Affairs and Seafood Inspection, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

NMFS may not consider comments if they are sent by any other method, to any other address or individual, or received after the comment period ends at 11:59 p.m. eastern time on the date of comment period closure. All comments received are a part of the public record and will generally be posted to www.regulations.gov without change. For posted comments, all personal identifying information (e.g., name, address, etc.), confidential business information, or otherwise sensitive information submitted voluntarily by the sender is publicly accessible. NMFS will accept anonymous comments (enter "N/A" in the required fields if you wish to remain anonymous).



Attachments to electronic comments will be accepted in Microsoft Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or Adobe portable document file (PDF) formats only.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John Henderschedt', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

John Henderschedt
Director, Office of International Affairs and
Seafood Inspection

Enclosure