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JUNEAU

August 1, 2007

Dr. William Hogarth
Assistant Administrator for Fisheries
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association
1315 East West Highway, 9th Floor
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Hogarth:

I am writing to express my extreme concern regarding the April 20, 2007, proposed rule responding to a petition to list the Cook Inlet stock of beluga whales under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). On June 22, 2000, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published a final rule that evaluated the factors in previous petitions and determined a listing was not warranted. Nothing has changed since 2000 to warrant a listing under ESA today.

NMFS predicted that the population would be very slow to recover because of its low reproductive rate, and developed co-management agreements with Alaska Native organizations to provide for subsistence and to conserve whales, including suspending hunting some years to encourage recovery of the population.

NMFS's recent Status Assessment evaluated factors such as habitat, prey, predation, disease, pollution, and noise and found nothing has changed that would cause further decline. The activities that NMFS and the state can regulate, such as hunting, oil and gas development, construction, and vessel traffic, are already being closely examined, regulated, and are not causing a decline. In fact, recent beluga surveys indicate that the population is beginning to increase as predicted.

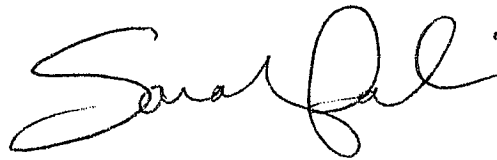
In 2000, NMFS committed to cooperate with the state and others to adopt a conservation plan that would seek funding for research and monitoring factors that influence the population. I urge NMFS to join the November 2006 request by the mayors of the city of Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and the Kenai Peninsula to combine efforts to pursue funding for 3-5 years in order to fully study these whales. An ESA listing would divert the NMFS limited resources by requiring

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every federal decision that permits, funds, or conducts any activity in the entire Cook Inlet watershed to undergo consultation reviews that do nothing to benefit the Cook Inlet beluga whales or our understanding of them.

I urge you to again find that a listing under ESA is unwarranted

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Palin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S" and a distinct "P" at the end.

Sarah Palin
Governor